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Volume 36 *Americans in Tuscany: Charity, Compassion and Belonging*

Catherine Trundle

AMERICANS IN TUSCANY



Charity, Compassion and Belonging

Catherine Trundle



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INTRODUCTION



When the French brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt visited Florence in the mid-nineteenth century they observed that it was '*une ville toute anglaise*' (an all-English city) (de Goncourt 1894: 73). Florence's reputation as a city that attracts English-speaking travellers and migrants has long been acknowledged. For centuries English and American visitors have noted its captivating allure. In *Pictures from Italy*, Charles Dickens ([1846] 1946: 513) described Florence's aesthetic impact on visitors thus: 'how much beauty of another kind is here ... See where it lies before us in a sun-lighted valley ... shut in by swelling hills; its domes, and towers, and palaces, rising from the rich country in a glittering heap, and shining in the sun like gold!' The American writer Henry James proclaimed the city's historical artistic treasures as the greatest preoccupation for English-speaking travellers and the noblest of influences that the city offered its guests.

as we wander hither and thither in quest of sacred canvas and immortal bronze and stone we still feel the genius of the place hang about. Two industrious English ladies, the Misses Horner, have lately published a couple of volumes of 'Walks' ... and their work is a long enumeration of great artistic deeds. These things remain for the most part in sound preservation, and, as the weeks go by and you spend a constant portion of your days among them the sense of one of the happiest periods of human Taste ... settles upon your spirit. It was not long; it lasted, in its splendour, for less than a century; but it has stored away in the palaces and churches of Florence a heritage of beauty that these three enjoying centuries since haven't yet exhausted. This forms a clear intellectual atmosphere into which you may turn aside from the modern world and fill your lungs as with the breath of a forgotten creed. (James [1909] 2010: 380–81)

For many visitors to Florence today, these romantic imaginings of the city's architectural beauty, enriching artefacts and picturesque Tuscan surroundings still promise a space in which one may 'turn aside from the

modern world'. But for English-speaking migrants who move permanently to modern-day Florence and Tuscany, how does the quest for *la bella vita* (the good life) transform into reality? Are these romantic promises for a new life an illusion, or can they be fulfilled? As a city filled not only with impressive artworks and architecture, but also bustling with diverse groups of people, what types of relationships do modern-day Anglo-Americans foster with Florence's inhabitants as they build the new lives that they desire?

Informed by fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork between September 2006 and December 2007, this book focuses on American migrant organizations in Florence that draw members from across the Tuscan region. My ethnography centres on two of the largest such expatriate organizations: an American church and an American women's charity club. More specifically, I examine their charitable and philanthropic works, the main activity that many members of these organizations engage in together. Throughout the diverse ethnographic lenses of this book, I explore how becoming a charitable migrant acts as a central means through which participants navigate a sense of place, craft a space for collective action, negotiate moral personhood, come to understand their own agency and class position, and grow to know the social and historical dimensions of their adopted city.

Most volunteers in both groups were American women who, while sojourning or studying in Florence, met and married Italian men. There to stay, the romantic visions that had brought them to Tuscany quickly faded. Confronted with a sense of social outsiderhood, unfamiliar family relations, and new cultural terrain, many women struggled to build local lives, even after decades of residence. In this context, they dedicated significant resources to establishing and maintaining their 'Anglo-American community'. This was a label used by many volunteers, and I have adopted it throughout the book. This label denotes two features of this migrant community: the majority of members in these groups were born in the United States of America, while a minority of members originated from other English-speaking nations such as Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

This book argues that the Anglo-American migrant's desired sense of emplacement was crafted through collective attempts to resolve paradoxical action. Charity provided a potent means for volunteers to experience the frictions of social inclusion and exclusion. Through charity, Anglo-American women attempted to bridge difference, offer hospitality and build community, processes that simultaneously highlighted and constituted forms of social difference and division. These paradoxical effects induced reflective self-examination crucial for Anglo-American charity volunteers to navigate a sense of social belonging. Such reflective practices enabled volunteers to realize the nature and boundaries of their groups, and to feel actively engaged with life in Florence.

This book draws a connection between charity and migration through the notion of 'friction'. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2005: 4) defines friction as 'the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference'. The paradoxical effects of friction are properties writ large in both charity and migration. Migration, and particularly affluent migration, is often the search for an improved life that promises freedom and the enactment of a new and ideal self. Yet migrants must always confront liminality and marginalization, the reduction and limitations of the self, even those who have agency through the economic realm (see Oliver 2007b; Benson 2011). Correspondingly, charity often contains a desire for communion across boundaries, which, by its unequal nature, creates social distinctions and divisions. Both migration and charity are utopian endeavours that contain within them moments of their own negation.

The paradoxes of both charity, and migration, more broadly and in the small acts that I analyse, create spaces for reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the processes of turning conscious attention to one's own interior thoughts and motivations, as well as one's actions, transforming the self into an object for consideration. Friction induces reflexivity because it disturbs the 'everyday attitude that claims we can naively trust our senses' (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982: 4). Anglo-American migrant reflexivity revealed moments when certainty and intuition gave way to doubt, the volunteers pausing for contemplation, as they attempted to find resolution between dreams and realities, ideals and actions, and contrasting desires.

For Anglo-American women trying to find a place within Tuscany, the frictional practices of charity did not engender coherent experiences, or simple relations of power. As I show throughout the following chapters, through charity practices the volunteers found both empowerment and restriction, both affirmation and subjective denial. I thus write against analyses of philanthropy that read Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* ([1924] 1990) as an assertion that the gift debases the recipient, proclaiming this to be the fundamental relational feature of charity. Rather, like Jacques Derrida (1992) and Erica Bornstein (2009), I show that what is so productive and troubling about the charity gift is the space that its tensions and contradictions create for action.

Reflexivity functions as a type of grip between things. Tsing (2005: 6) makes it clear that friction does not just slow things down, but keeps things moving. Anglo-American charity practices provided volunteers with an uneasy traction on migrant life necessary to reflexively constitute their community over time. Throughout this book I explore how, for example, the volunteers' personal life-narratives describe connection to Tuscany by enunciating social and cultural difference. An ethos of charitable hospitality and a desire to reach out created practices of exclusion. Compassion had

to contend with rationalism, cynicism and a focus on procedure. Likewise, the volunteer groups' democratic consensus-building processes oscillated between inclusive deliberation and exclusive decision. These frictions refused easy enactment and resolution. By resisting solutions, reflexive knowledge and frictional practices offered volunteers an iterative space through which to develop a work ethic, test solidarity, and risk schism. As Alexandra Bakalaki (2008: 91) argues, 'the philanthropic rhetoric is powerful not despite the fact that it provides a perspective from which the ambiguities of altruistic giving become visible and intelligible, but because of it. In other words it renders struggling with these ambiguities meaningful, necessary and, ultimately, heroic.'

Reflexive friction often results in reflective objectification. Charity practices create 'enduring artefacts' (Davies 2008: 3) such as newsletters, balance sheets, donated raffle prizes, piles of used clothing, photos on notice boards or certificates. These objects indexed charity volunteers' varied relations, affirming that they were visibly positioned within the materiality and exchanges of local life. For migrants, such reflections are vital in confirming that a new life has been, or is actively being, built up. Yet such a process of objectification is also basic to the creation of selfhood. As Lisette Josephides (2008: 25) argues, 'if our relationship to others is built on the process of externalization, in which the self is experienced indirectly as another, it follows that the reflection by which we know our own self involves self-externalization, rather than self-introspection. In order to become self-conscious, individuals must become objects to themselves.'

Methodological Reflections

While carrying out the fieldwork in Tuscany I lived in central Florence. In my first weeks I became a member of the American Charity Group (ACG) and a regular parishioner at the American Church,¹ the two largest Anglo-American groups in Florence at this time. I began attending Sunday Mass, volunteering at the weekly church food bank, helping in the American Church's small English library, and attending the ACG's monthly meetings. From this initial engagement I was soon invited to participate in a range of other volunteering and philanthropic activities.

Volunteering is a unique object of study with regard to its use as a 'point of entry' into a research field site. Volunteering can offer immediate ethnographic engagement, as it often does not require specialist skills. Enthusiasm was the only prerequisite, participants often told me. In many contexts, the volunteer's labour is by nature voluntary, which often translates into inconsistent or limited commitments to projects. In such circumstances,

the willing, reliable and consistently active volunteer can become a precious resource to be cultivated and encouraged (Elisha 2011: 34). After only one month I had an almost full weekly schedule of participant observation activities.

Yet volunteering as an object of study also creates tensions in the ethnographer's role. As a willing and always available volunteer, the researcher may find that participation easily overshadows observation. After six months of fieldwork, I had accepted the role as co-organizer of the American Church annual fair, and began to question whether my presence was shaping too strongly the data I was attempting to collect. These groups valued above all participants who were proactive, took initiative and had opinions, and I had to tread a fine line between expressing such values in my actions in order to participate, and pulling back from them in order to observe my participants' expressions of them. The case studies that I have chosen to explore in this book are ones where I feel I struck the balance of being actively engaged without leading action. Organizing and leading charity work was, however, ethnographically insightful. As a young woman I could be bossed about and instructed by the older volunteers on how things 'should' occur. People made the rules of the game explicit to me when I was in charge of enforcing them.

Being so actively involved in charity also created ethical dilemmas for me. How implicated was I in the forms of inequality and authority that charity finds itself producing or tangled within? The feeling of unease that this question generated never left me throughout my fieldwork. I attempted to address it by raising my concerns with volunteers in the reflective moments that occurred during and after charity events, and by being honest about my affective responses to the work in which we were all involved. I also came to appreciate that inequality and authority were not the only results of the volunteers' charity work. I also witnessed recipients expressing sincere appreciation for much-needed support, moments of deeply felt compassion, and the volunteers' dedicated and persistent efforts to deal with the complexities of their actions. I realized that the ethics of philanthropic action are not easily addressed by those who perform charity or by those who ethnographically study such attempts at 'doing good'.

My young age (twenty-seven/twenty-eight during fieldwork) and my newcomer status were both of benefit to me at times. I was one of the few people invited by the three long-term organizers of the American Church's second-hand charity shop to volunteer at their monthly markets. Another active volunteer, in her fifties, told me it had taken her over a year of quietly helping to keep the coffee service table clean before she was formally invited to volunteer. The three women who organized the second-hand shop made it clear to me, as did the church food-bank organizer, that they did not like people 'interfering' with how they ran their events. My youth meant that

they felt less threatened by my participation, and would instruct me about my tasks with mock strictness. Because of my age, therefore, my research participants regularly assumed the role of teacher and mentor (cf. Oliver 2007b: 16), taking me under their wings to impart the art of effective volunteering. However my youth and newcomer status also occasionally limited my research. I was not invited, for example, to some social events which appeared to be reserved for long-term volunteers of retirement-age. When conversations turned to grandchildren, menopause or aging, my presence would often elicit embarrassed laughs and comments suggestive of the generational distance that was perceived to exist between us.

I was, furthermore, not married to an Italian. That I was married already meant that there was no possibility I would do as many volunteers do on temporary visits to Italy: meet, fall in love with and marry an Italian man. Some kept me at a distance, admitting in the final stages of my research that they found it emotionally difficult getting to know people who would disappear after a short time. That a substantial number of members of the American Charity Group and the American Church had come to Italy for only six months to a year – as students, long-term tourists, or wives whose husbands were on short work contracts – meant that Anglo-American groups had a portion of their membership in constant flux. Such Anglo-Americans were welcomed in, as I discuss in Chapter 3, but some of the long-term volunteers kept them at arm's length socially and emotionally.

Despite this, through active daily involvement, I assumed the clear and engaged role of an Anglo-American volunteer in Florentine life. When I tried, many times, to talk with the recipients of Anglo-American charity, they anticipated that I was an agent of these groups, auditing the uses of donated services and goods. Building trust with recipients was a delicate and fraught process, and was successful in only a handful of moments. This made me realize that, methodologically, my research was largely participant-led. The boundaries that I encountered in attempting to expand the field of research were in part informed by the circumscribed networks within which my participants moved, the limitations of the socio-economic position that they occupied, and the constraints placed on me by being 'one of them'. It also exposed the limited, fragile relationality that charity engenders between givers and recipients.

At the American Church I worried that my atheism would be met with suspicion and preclude me from meaningful inclusion within the church's charity practices. The nature of the American Church's congregation and its role in the Anglo-American community were, however, dynamic. As a focal point for a diverse group of sojourning women, students, and long-term migrants, the American Church not only welcomed Christians of other denominations, but any migrant who wished to be part of an

English-speaking community, irrespective of belief. The relatively progressive and liberal congregation and church leadership did not espouse biblical literalism, evangelical conversion, or doctrinal fundamentalism. Volunteers and parishioners saw Christian ideals as emerging out of everyday acts of hospitality, charity and friendship, and operating often as private motivational forces for moral personhood. While Christian principles underpinned many volunteers' actions, which, as I discuss throughout the book, are revealed in reflective conversations and interviews, participants did not overtly espouse such principles during volunteering through prayer, doctrinal debate or proselytization in ways that would mark such events as exclusively Christian. In these spaces I found a way to be emplaced without a sense of outsider voyeurism or phoney performance, as I contemplated, questioned, and attempted to realize the volunteers' core principles of hospitality, generosity and compassion.

Beyond participant observation, I interviewed thirty-two interlocutors.² Through interviews conducted in participants' own homes I gathered the core volunteers' personal life histories and private reflections.³ I also provided a short questionnaire for interviewees and a wider group of volunteers in order to ascertain basic demographic data. The quantitative results of the questionnaire data provided basic information for my qualitative research focus: the shared daily practices of charity volunteering. The interview narratives were valuable in revealing the private experiences of marital relationships, child rearing, extended family relations, and friendships – stories that contextualized, affirmed and at times contradicted the publicly circulating narratives of Anglo-American women's lives. As already mentioned (Note 1), I use pseudonyms throughout the book to protect participants' identities.

Migration

Italy is a nation shaped by both emigration and immigration. From the late nineteenth century to the 1960s Italy experienced mass emigration, as mainly poorer southern Italians sought the promises of a better life offered by settler societies such as the United States. In the 1970s, however, this trend reversed and Italy increasingly became the destination of many new migrant groups from Africa, Eastern Europe, South America and Asia (King and Andall 1999). Largely unregulated in the first decade, the Italian state then attempted to implement the first comprehensive legislation governing and regularizing immigration between 1986 and 1991 (Danese 2001: 392). While many migrants faced discrimination and hostility from some Italians who feared rapid social transformation (Campani 1993; Daly 1999; Mai 2002; King and Mai 2009), the Italian economy, with its significant

informal, unregulated economy, quickly came to rely upon the cheap, unprotected and illegal labour force that immigration provided (Campani 1993: 514; Romaniszyn 2000). Correspondingly, an ageing population and increased female employment rates created a market for domestic service work, which remains only partially regulated and which Cape Verdean and Filipina women were amongst the first groups to fill (Andall 2000; Pojmann 2011). Furthermore, with geographic borders near Eastern Europe and a southern coastline close to North Africa, Italy has today become a gateway country for *clandestini* (undocumented migrants) seeking entry into the European Community (Vicarelli 1994; Danese 2001: 73). With shifting and enduring inequalities between Italy and its southern and eastern neighbours, these trends continue to make Italy and Florence a significant destination for immigration today, and continue to ensure the precarious social, economic and legal position of many migrants in Italy.

The migrants of this study, however, do not fit so neatly into this prevalent narrative of contemporary Italian migration. They represent instead a privileged and affluent migrant group who follow in the footsteps of aristocratic Grand Tourists, forebears who for centuries arrived in Florence seeking education, high culture, class capital, and freedom from social constraints (this trend will be traced in depth in the following chapter). As a country with a global reputation for the good life – sunshine, beautiful countryside, delicious cuisine, luxury goods, alluring historical and artistic artefacts – Italy has long attracted affluent migrant groups from a range of countries. These groups, however, remain understudied by scholars of Italian migration.⁴ This book helps to address this imbalance, offering insights into their dynamics of mobility, integration, marginalization and migrant group formation in Italy. In conducting the first ethnographic study of Anglo-American migrants to Tuscany,⁵ I ask how migration to Italy is experienced when migrants arrive with financial resources, white skin, higher education, a sense of opportunity and entitlement, and experiences and expectations of global mobility.

The larger, more publicly controversial trend in Italy of its '*extracomunitari*' (migrants from developing nations beyond Western Europe) is, however, an important context for this study. The majority of the recipients of Anglo-American charity works were undocumented, socially marginalized and economically precarious '*extracomunitari*', such as Nigerians, Roma ('Roms'), Albanians and Peruvians. Through the medium of charity, Anglo-American women came in contact with these groups and formed perspectives and opinions of Italy's migration issues. By placing their own experiences in contrast with those from radically different backgrounds, Anglo-American women came to understand, enact and debate their own migration and socio-economic position. This study, then, explores how migrant privilege is contrastively drawn in environments of migrant diversity and social inequality.

I take inspiration from recent studies of 'lifestyle migrants', which offer nuanced ethnographic data and analyses of affluent migration trends (e.g. O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2007a and 2007b; Benson and O'Reilly 2009b; Hoey 2009; Pickering 2010; Benson 2011).⁶ Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly define lifestyle migration as the quest for 'the good life' through migration patterns that seek to pursue leisure, self-realization and mobility. These migrants are governed by reflexive lifestyle choices that are underpinned by financial resources. They express what Anthony Giddens (1991) defines as the ongoing 'life project' of the modern individual, who must seek fulfilment, express an 'authentic' self, and justify choices within a coherent narrative of the self. Yet lifestyle migration is inherently frictional and it challenges this project; 'reality bites once they have settled into life in the destination. The reality of the "simple life" is revealed to be somewhat out of keeping with positions of relative privilege, their embodied knowledge, or habitus, and their prior conceptions of the good life' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009b: 8). As Caroline Oliver demonstrates in her study of British retirement migrants in Spain, 'life in Spain required considerable self management to negotiate the dilemmas inherent in retirees' aspirations' (Oliver 2007b: 162). These scholars illustrate the continuing reflexive projects that migrants must perform as they attempt to reconcile their dreams and motivations for migration, and the possibilities and limitations of their enactment. This process is often dynamic and unfolding, and rarely completed. For example, Jacqueline Waldren's (1996) exploration of the micro-political relationships between 'insider' locals and 'outsider' migrants in Mallorca shows how the categories and perceptions of insiders and outsiders were unstable, the boundaries shifting over decades, but never in a linear direction (see also Lave 2003). Equally, for Anglo-American women in Florence, their sense of place and belonging in Florence was contextually defined by themselves and by others, depending on the roles they performed as guest or host, cultural expert or novice, Italianized settler or Americanized foreigner, and socially connected or socially excluded migrant. Rather than see the resolution of these conflicting ideals and roles in the pursuit of coherent self narratives as the primary goal of lifestyle migrant practices (following Giddens), I argue that it is the unresolvability of these daily frictions that creates space for migrants to find niches for themselves in their adopted homes.

Situating Migrant Flows

With an attention to emplaced and quotidian migrant practices, therefore, the city of Florence is an important site for analysis. The diverse flows of people into the city have historically been a continual feature of its social

fabric. First settled between the tenth and eighth centuries BCE, it became a Roman colony in 59 BCE. In the following two thousand years, Florence, like many parts of Italy, was ruled by a wide range of local and distant powers, including the Lombards, the Holy Roman Empire, the Medici family, the Austrian Habsburg–Lorraine Empire, and Napoleon (Vannucci 1986). Florence has been at the heart of Italy's economic developments. During the fourteenth century it became the centre of a Europe-wide banking sector and was one of the wealthiest cities in Europe. It was renowned for its wool, silk, textile and other artisanal trades from which the first industrial revolution in Italy occurred (Vathi 2012: 55). As the city prospered, it drew in large flows of migrants from near and far seeking economic opportunities.

During this period and into the fifteenth century, Florence became one of the most important European centres of renaissance art and humanist thought, thanks partly to the artistic patronage of wealthy families and the Church (Vannucci 1986: 74–96; Duggan 1994: 51, 55–59). The city attracted, supported, and was home to many of Italy's great painters, architects, sculptors and thinkers of this age, such as Michelangelo, da Vinci, Donatello, Brunelleschi and Botticelli. Florence was pivotal to the birth of a unified Italian nation in the 1860s. The local dialect, made prestigious by famous writers such as Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, became Italy's national language. In 1865 Florence was chosen as the temporary capital of Italy. Throughout these historical transformations, Florence remained a seductive and appealing destination for outsiders.

Today Florence is still home to many newcomers. In 2006 Florence had an official population of approximately 366,000 (Comune di Firenze 2007). At this time 9.5 per cent of residents were migrants. This figure had increased by about 0.6 per cent each year since 2000. Of Anglo-American immigrants in Florence, Americans and Britons were the two largest groups.⁷ In 2006, a total of 1,696 Americans were registered with *permesso di soggiorno* (permits to stay).⁸ Of these, two-thirds were women, and 40.7 per cent gained *permessi* for study reasons. Furthermore, there were 639 Americans with residence visas,⁹ of which 63.4 per cent were women (Comune di Firenze 2007). There were also 834 Britons with permission to stay in 2005, of which two-thirds were women (Comune di Firenze 2006). U.S. citizens were the seventh most populous migrant group in Florence in 2006.¹⁰ Estimating the total number of Britons and Americans in Florence is difficult however. These official statistics do not include the large number of migrants who do not acquire either a permit to stay or residency status, travelling back and forth between their home and host countries or even living as undocumented migrants. Nor does it capture the thousands of sojourning students and travellers who settle temporarily in Florence for a number of months.

Russell King and Guy Patterson (1998: 167) estimated that in 1992 there were around four thousand British nationals in Tuscany, of which half were of retirement age. Caritas, an international charity that, as part of its work in Italy, collects migration statistics, reported that in 2003 that there were just over forty-eight thousand U.S. citizens in Italy with residence permits, compared to just over twenty-five thousand Britons (Caritas 2004).¹¹

Anglo-American migrants in Florence today find its international milieu a source of economic opportunity. Around the time of my research, Italy was receiving approximately forty million international tourists a year (Lew, Hall and Dallen 2008: 103), with Florence receiving seven million. American and British tourists were the first and third largest visitor groups respectively to Florence (Provincia di Firenze 2008). Anglo-American migrants can thus often find jobs in tourism-related industries, such as leather and jewellery shops, hotels and tour companies. With a thriving Anglo-American expatriate community and international commercial sector, English-speaking institutions and businesses also offer opportunities. These include the British Institute,¹² the American and British consulates, the European University Institute (EUI) and more than thirty-eight American university campuses. General Electric also has its biggest European plant in Florence, and many of its managers are American.

Anglo-American migrants are not the only group to build an economic niche within the city's international milieu. Many African migrants line the popular tourist avenues with cardboard makeshift stalls, hawking counterfeit handbags and wallets, and prints of renaissance artworks. The city's street kiosks that sell leather goods regularly employ East European migrants, and the luxury fashion and bag workshops in Prato, just outside Florence, employ many Chinese labourers at low rates (Kynge 2007: 84). Like the rest of Italy, in the privacy of domestic spaces migrant women labour to care for children, the elderly and the disabled (Campani 1991; Orsini-Jones and Gattullo 2000: 127). Across Italy these poorer migrants are often employed in *lavoro nero* or *lavoro irregolare* (work in the unregulated economy). Anglo-American migrants are, therefore, part of a multi-layered and diverse set of transnational flows to Florence.

These different flows outlined above are distinguishable by the markers of class, marginality and privilege. While wealthy tourists peruse cheap imitation-designer products displayed on temporary street stalls, or expensive shoes in Florence's luxury boutiques, *clandestini* Nigerian street sellers are ready to sling their wares over their shoulders and run at the slightest sign of a police raid, and undocumented Chinese labourers work long hours in factories far from the tourist gaze (Tungate 2009: 28). When an American migrant arrives, she likely travels by plane and stays in a hotel converted from an aristocratic *palazzo* (grand residence), while an undocumented migrant

might be trafficked into Italy by ship or boat, or brought into another part of the European Union hidden in a truck, and will slowly, precariously work his way to Florence. The disjuncture between these possible migrant lifeworlds confronted Anglo-American women in Florence in a plethora of small ways every day. Nowhere was it more confronting and conducive of reflection, however, than when volunteers attempted to perform charity for 'needy' migrant recipients, coming face-to-face with diverse migrant experiences and their own responses to them.

Charity

The sphere of charity has remained a peripheral focus within studies of affluent migration, despite its prevalence in a range of ethnographic contexts, suggesting scholars have not taken seriously these practices as domains through which actors make migration meaningful.¹³ In foregrounding charity, I detail the range of motivations that compel migrant women to become engaged in charity work, the complex processes of performing charity that transform original motivations and ideals, and ask how charity can be understood as a form of migrant 'engagement' with the host society and a claim to citizenship.¹⁴

Charity has a long lineage in Florence and Italy. In the medieval and early modern period, charitable works performed by Catholic lay fraternities, ruling families and religious orders were the main means of meeting social need and provisioning welfare for the vulnerable (Menning 1993; Gavitt 1997; Terpstra 2005). Many modes of European charity in this period were first devised and practised in Florence (Passerini 1853: v).¹⁵ Yet despite an extensive and elaborate history of Christian *opere pie* (charity organizations), these activities were restricted from the end of the nineteenth century until the 1970s. Between 1861 and 1870 a newly unified Italy consolidated its political power over the Holy See, and sought to augment its authority to govern the population by provisioning welfare directly to its citizens in the place of religious charity groups (Borzaga 2004: 47). The first half of the twentieth century saw the gradual expansion of central state services, culminating in the 1960s and 1970s with significant investment in universal healthcare, education and welfare, and the increased regulation of the charity sector. Despite the growth of state welfarism, Catholic charities continued to fulfil crucial social functions, existing alongside the state system and often receiving contracts to fulfil state programmes. In the 1980s, facing a worsening economic environment, and rising unemployment and social welfare costs, the Italian state adopted an increasingly neoliberal ideological frame. It began implementing a decentralized model of governance that

aimed to strengthen the role of civic and religious organizations in meeting social needs in spaces that the state was fast vacating (Donati and Colozzi 2004). With the passing of new legislation in 1988 and 1991,¹⁶ an emerging *terzo settore* (third, non-profit sector) was actively encouraged and legally recognized, and since 1997 charities and donors have received favourable tax exemptions and benefits (Barbetta 1997). As Muehlebach (2013) details, paralleling three decades of neoliberal restructuring, the voluntary sector has expanded rapidly, and volunteering has come to represent a new mode of 'ethical citizenship' in Italy. In her study of volunteers in northern Italy she shows how volunteering enables an emergent form of collective life that has replaced the post-war Fordist social contract based on the right to work and welfare. Marginalised sections of society (such as the unemployed and the retired) are made productive again outside of paid labour relations. Social solidarity is reimagined as emerging out of voluntary, compassionate relations between volunteers and the sufferers to whom they tend. Parallels can be drawn with Anglo-American women in Florence who, as migrants, struggled to find permanent employment and complained about the difficulty of entering Florentine social worlds. The recent growth of charity and volunteering was thus an opportune means by which to navigate their desires for social engagement and inclusion in public life.

American charity groups in Florence straddled and mirrored the shifting and intertwined relationship between religious compassion and secular civic responsibilities in contemporary Italy. Since the 1970s, Catholic charities such as Caritas have dominated migrant services, providing extensive programmes for housing, language training, food and medical care (King and Andall 1999: 152). This is partly due to the state's slow response to recent migration trends and consequent weak social services infrastructure for immigrants, the power and resources of the Catholic Church within Italian society and its historically established hold over the third sector, a separate body of law that governs Catholic charities and renders them a semi-autonomous realm, and a tax return system that facilitates donations to religious charity groups (Barbetta 1997; Salamon and Anheier 1997: 20; Ventura 2006: 122). Yet recently non-Catholic religious groups and secular NGOs have become increasingly active in the provisioning of these services (Borzaga 2004: 60). In Florence, the local government and a host of NGO bodies offer a wide array of migrant services, including in the areas of housing, education, social welfare and psychological support, as well as through providing multi-lingual sources of information (Prefettura di Firenze 2007). In seeking to build and support services for migrant groups in Italy, the American Church and the American Charity Group reflected an increasingly plural 'compassion economy' (James 2012) that exceeded dominant Catholic configurations.

As Anglo-American groups, volunteers not only responded to local configurations and ideologies of charity, but also drew upon the values and habits into which they had been socialized in their countries of origin. The increasing role of civic volunteer institutions within Florence and Italy fitted comfortably with Anglo-American women's professed cultural belief systems, particularly for the majority of volunteers who were American. The United States has a long-standing and elaborate history of philanthropic giving. This is partially linked to the U.S. constitutional goal of limiting government power, which in excess is regarded as a threat to personal liberty and freedom. Following this logic, many Americans distrust their government and seek to constrain its role in their lives (Wright 2002: 8; see also Putnam 2000). In such a context, welfare is equated pejoratively with dependency, bureaucracy and disempowerment, and many Americans believe that local charity groups and private organizations are better placed at the coal face to meet local needs (Fraser and Gordon 1992: 46).¹⁷ Most Americans thus give charitably to address needs that 'they can directly see, feel and understand' (Wright 2002: 5).

An American tax structure supportive of charitable donations, and the positive value attached to wealth accumulation and display, has resulted in philanthropy becoming a key avenue in modern American society to demonstrate class status, community membership, social leadership, and moral standing (Wright 2002: 9). Historically, such philanthropic work has been a gendered domain. At one level it acted as an expansion of the domestic sphere in which unpaid female labour extended the virtues, care and compassion of the home into public life and towards needy and vulnerable others (McCarthy 1990: 3). At another level it functioned as a claim to citizenship, as wealthy American women 'turned to non-profit institutions and reform associations as their primary points of access to public roles. In the process they forged parallel power structures to those used by men ... [Women] used their charitable ... movements to recast the contours of the public sphere' (ibid.: 1). Socialized within such upper-class cultures of giving, American women in Florence saw themselves and their organizations as especially well placed to demonstrate compassion and leadership, and to gain visibility in public life and in the emergent philanthropic culture of Florentine society.

In this book I do not attempt to build typologies of charity, nor categorically demarcate the distinctions between philanthropy, charity, the third sector, NGOs or volunteering. This is in part because my participants were inconsistent and varied in their use of these concepts and terms. More broadly, Bakalaki (2008: 90) shows that 'concepts such as "philanthropy", "charity" or "altruism" are not coherent or stable over time, and the meanings, values and practices they refer to cannot be neatly classified into clear categories'.¹⁸ As I have argued elsewhere (Trundle 2012), the demarcations

that actors assert between the realms of charity, philanthropy, development and humanitarianism prove difficult to maintain if we examine the complex enactments of these ideals, which continually blur boundaries (see also Feldman 2010: 203). For Anglo-American women in Florence, philanthropy could refer to modes of elite fundraising and patronage, while at other times they used the term to specify intimate modes of engaging with the needy. Charity could refer to an ethic of generosity or a bureaucratized system of aid. I take these various modes of engagement as one broader field underpinned by a utopian ethic of 'doing good', aimed at improvement, compassion and intervention, and which takes diverse forms in different contexts (cf. Redfield and Bornstein 2010).

This focuses attention towards the range of shared practices and paradoxical negotiations that occurred within Anglo-American groups surrounding 'giving' in the broadest sense.¹⁹ Rather than attempt to define what the charitable gift intrinsically is, I am interested in how my participants experienced a range of processes that they defined as 'charitable': welcoming new migrant volunteers, building an ethical decision-making process within their groups, developing reciprocal ties with local businesses, or creating a 'fair' charity food distribution system. Charity, in this wide sense, was for participants a type of paradoxical sociality that engendered solidarity, distinction, division, risk, hope, compassion and cynicism. It was reliant both on imagination (Hyde 1983) and the ad hoc and often confusing process of 'getting the work done'. It was as much spontaneously performed as it was calculated and pro forma. The effects of the volunteers' efforts were never singular or easily analysed, either by themselves or by an anthropologist.

In exploring this ethic of giving, I draw upon and contribute to anthropological theories of charity and philanthropy. A common theoretical starting point in this literature has been anthropological conceptions of gift giving that build upon Mauss's foundational book *The Gift* ([1924] 1990).²⁰ This literature has often focused on the question of the charitable gift's relationship to status and inequality (Blau 1964; Heilman 1975; Zelizer 1990; Bowie 1998; Caplan 1998; Mindry 2001). By reading Mauss's work as a theory that outlines the 'real' intentions behind the supposed disinterested gift (Parry 1985), such studies have explained a range of gift-giving practices through the lens of 'self-interest'. As Mark Osteen argues, 'economism ... is the land mine of gift theory' (Osteen 2002: 5). Western biases often inflect interpretations of both gift giving and charitable practices, where generosity is conceived of as an unattainable ideal, independence is venerated, and obligations to others are seen as dangerously entrapping (ibid.: 13). In mistrusting the impossible free gift, and defining it with reference to the giver's motives along the axis of self-interest/altruism, many theories of gift giving inadvertently end up focusing on prestige and hierarchy building (for

example, Malinowski 1926; Strathern 1971; Sahlins 1972; Weiner 1992; Yan 2002). Yet as Derrida (1992) shows, the gift is inherently paradoxical – it defies easy categorization, constantly slipping from the analytic boxes into which we place it. In this vein, Osteen argues that:

Gifts expose the truth that human behaviour and the stories with which we dramatize it are more flexible than the rational theories with which we attempt to account for it. The meanings of the gift, in short, expose the limitations of our categories. Hence, more adequate descriptions of its meanings will require that theorists become flexible enough to embrace and emulate the gift's own elasticity. (Osteen 2002: 16)

With reference to Mauss, charity is a strange type of gift: it often does not create social ties between givers and receivers, it can be conducted between strangers, it can have clear rules against reciprocity, and it can depend on impersonality (Silber 1998: 138; see also Laidlaw 2002b; Bornstein 2012). As such, charity is a productive topic through which to rethink anthropological ideas of the gift, offering fresh openings.

In this book I explore not just the relationship between givers and receivers of charity, but also those between charity givers who conceive of themselves as a 'moral community'.²¹ By focusing on the shifting and conflicting 'ethics of interaction' (Feldman 2007: 693) involved in charitable practices, the centrality of the charitable gift 'transaction' is displaced. Peter Redfield and Erica Bornstein (2010: 8) argue that the important insight offered by Mauss is that he links the gift to 'the larger moral field. Giving, he argues, has less to do with utility and the circulation of goods than with a type of social solidarity ... the act of giving mobilizes a distinct category of moral person.'

For Anglo-American women, charitable practices created ample spaces in which moral personhood and ethical action could be defined, built and tested. These practices created social ties and elided difference, while at the same time heightening social distinctions. And it was through the negotiation of these tensions that volunteers came to build a virtuous migrant community. Charity is thus, I argue, less easily explicated with regard to a scale of egoistic or selfless giving, as it is understood to create moral selfhood reflexively through paradoxical interaction with others (cf. Zigon 2007). This approach builds upon a Foucauldian approach (Foucault 1984 and 1988) that examines the ways in which actors craft their moral selves, an iterative practice that often requires introspection, testing, reflection and monitoring. Exploring charity work in relation to the questions of moral personhood and an ethics of self-care is an increasingly visible approach in both anthropology (see, for example, Feldman 2007; Bialecki 2008; Elisha 2011; Read 2011; Ticktin 2011; Bornstein 2012; and Scherz 2013) and

sociology (see, for example, Allahyari 2000; Bartkowski and Regis 2003). As Bakalaki (2008: 83) argues, '[p]hilanthropic discourses almost inevitably emphasise the transformative effects of altruistic giving on both donors and recipients. From this perspective philanthropy is experienced as a context within which subjects are constituted rather than as a field wherein already constituted agents pursue set goals.' This approach allows us to see the opportunities for 'moral ambition' (Elisha 2011) that actors craft within the quotidian work of charity.

Yet to focus on moral reflexivity does not displace attention to relations of power, materiality and the inequality of exchange within charity (see, for example, Read 2011; Ticktin 2011). Harri Englund (2010: 90) argues that '[f]or anthropologist[s] to have anything interesting to say about poverty and human suffering, they have to attend to the diverse ideological commitments that drive political and technological involvements with them'. As the following chapters show, the types of charitable communities that Anglo-American givers hoped to build together in order to alleviate poverty and suffering were partially based upon the legacies and aspirations of class, privilege and distinction. Yet to focus on this feature and to comprehend charity as a form of elite entrenchment would be to simplify participants' motivations for a charity ethic. In seeking to expose the filaments of power within charity, I examine how volunteers understood and rationalized the effects of their gifts, revealing how they themselves wrestled with the power implications of their actions. In other situations I explore the ways in which participants' ideologies, as well as the fragile pragmatics of giving, made the social and political consequences of their gifts invisible or elusive to them. Sometimes these consequences felt beyond their control. At other times the participants' practices and ideals created domains in which the questions of whether charity did or could achieve its utopian promise were either irrelevant or impossible to answer.

Throughout the chapters I also attend to how participants experienced the power of the gift. Power, in diverse scenarios, shifts back and forth within the charity exchange as an affectively charged force. For participants, daily doses of intimacy, disappointment, hope and a lack of agency were interchanging experiences that made the charity gift elusive, seductively promising and deeply frustrating. In creating meaning out of this process, by turning it into a form of affective labour and 'ethical citizenship' (Muehlebach 2013), participants tried to find a space for themselves in local life, which was situated and ultimately implicated in the social inequalities of contemporary Florence. By giving predominately to poor migrants, and defining their own sense of migrant belonging in contradistinction to such groups, charity laid bare the radically different dreams and realities that newcomers could find in *il bel paese* (the beautiful country).

Reflexivity

In order to explore the link between migrant belonging and charity, I focus on collective reflexive processes. By 'reflexivity' I am referring to a 'doubling back' process in four distinct but interrelated ways. First, I refer to 'subject awareness', a type of heightened consciousness of the self against the more subconscious routines of daily life. This process is often intersubjective as it involves understanding that the self is the focus of another. It involves both subjective and objective positionality, and engagement and detachment, as the self becomes an object 'for' the self. This process of self-externalization is of central interest to phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl (1960) and Paul Ricoeur (1992), as well as to social psychology. George H. Mead ([1934] 1962) refers to intersubjective reflexivity as being essential to social and cognitive development. Internalizing others' attitudes to the self, which he calls the 'generalised other', gives an individual 'a unity of self' (ibid.: 154). Reflexivity, he argues, is the way by which this process occurs.

It is by means of reflexiveness – the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself – that the whole process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other towards himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to the process, and to modify the resultant of the process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it. Reflexiveness, then, is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of the mind. (Mead [1934] 1962: 134)

While reflexivity is indeed fundamental to human cognitive and perceptual abilities, it is always culturally overlaid and elaborated (Adams 2003). Self-reflexivity has become a central project for the ideal 'Western' individual, who must uncover, master and actualize a unique inner self through 'lifestyles choices' and coherent self-narratives or 'reflexive biographies' (Giddens 1991). Actors can also achieve this self-reflexivity through psychological exploration of the 'unconscious' (Rose 1998). Nikolas Rose charts the rise of the 'psy disciplines' in the twentieth century, which offer actors the vocabularies and narratives necessary to reflexively construct and valorize a coherent self, one that is 'bounded, individualized, intentional, the locus of thought, action and belief, the origin of its own actions, the beneficiary of a unique biography' (ibid.: 3). According to Ulrich Beck (1994), these personal projects are linked to wider processes of 'reflexive modernization' in which certain modes of social organization associated with industrial modernity (gender, class, politics, race) are breaking down, creating increased individualization and the expectation that individuals must 'produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves' (Beck 1994: 13). Yet as Rosie

Read (2010: 560) demonstrates, these modes of reflexive personhood can just as easily reconfigure enduring inequalities in new guises, and a culturally calibrated emphasis on personal discovery and self-realization may in fact hide rather than reveal wider social inequalities. Reflexive practices are never simply neutral psychological processes, but are always constituted through culturally specific ideas of personhood and power relations that both obscure and uncover aspects of social life (Alexander 1996).

Secondly, and related to this first use, symbolic anthropology has utilized the concept of reflexivity to refer to rituals within which agents creatively rework cultural knowledge in ways that 'explore, negotiate, comment on, or transform culture itself' (Berger and del Negro 2002: 64; see also, for example, Geertz 1973; Turner 1982). Exploring this theme, Geertz argues that the Balinese cockfight was a reflexive performance of masculine cultural forms. 'Enacted and re-enacted, so far without end, the cockfight enables the Balinese, as read and reread, Macbeth enables us, to see a dimension of his own subjectivity' (Geertz 1973: 450). This conceptualization mirrors my first use of the term reflexivity, but shifts it from the realm of individual to collective practice.

This leads to my third use of reflexivity, to refer to the process of 'reflection'. By this I am referring to practices whereby the self or group becomes visible to itself and others through processes of reflection. Like my first meaning, reflexivity here denotes a type of externalization. However, here I am focusing less on the fundamental process of subject formation (how a subject becomes known to itself), and more on the process of public confirmation (how a subject attempts to become more visible). Throughout the book I will examine how Anglo-American migrants iteratively affirmed their presence and public visibility through such externalizations as public rituals, objects and exchanges.

These three processes inhere in the fourth: reflexivity as a methodological tool in anthropological research. Central to the postmodern turn (Marcus 1998: 181), reflexive anthropology attempted to move beyond knowledge production conceived of as a 'universal, objective and transcultural enterprise' (Scholte 1969: 432). Such attempts have been variously labelled interpretive, hermeneutic, intersubjective and, in particular, 'positional' (see Haraway 1988; Rosaldo 1989; Marcus 1998). Reflexivity breaks down the distinctions between the 'investigator and the object investigated' (Scholte 1969: 435) or the 'producer, process and product' (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982: 5). From this perspective, knowledge production is seen to be always situated in particular historic, political and cultural settings, as a 'view from somewhere' (Haraway 1988: 590). My main goal in this book is not to defend reflexivity as a methodological, epistemological or ethical tool for anthropologists.²² Instead, I trace the varied roles these forms of reflexivity

played in the lives of my participants, understanding it as a cultural method used to negotiate migrant lives. To conclude, I shall reflect such reflections back to anthropological method, showing the similar dilemmas, objects and effects that reflexivity creates for both migrant volunteers and anthropologists, and the insights that this study offers the disciple.

Organization of this Book

This book offers a series of detailed ethnographic sketches. In Chapter 1, I provide a potted history of Anglo-American travel, tourism and migration to Italy and Florence, beginning with the Grand Tour of the sixteenth century, and tracing the shifting trends through to contemporary retirement migration and transnational mobility. This history outlines the changing patterns of gender, class, distinction, mobility and imagination, out of which contemporary Anglo-American migration patterns have emerged, setting the stage for the chapters to follow. In this chapter I also provide brief historical backgrounds to the charity organizations of this study, namely the American Church and the American Charity Group.

Shifting from the macro contexts of history to the micro contexts of personal experience, Chapter 2 outlines the volunteers' life histories. These retrospective narratives recount migrant transitions from early adulthood to retirement, and dwell on the experiences of marriage, motherhood and the Italian family. Anglo-American women described struggling to feel socially accepted, connected or influential in their new migrant lives. In reflexively 'making sense' of their pasts in a narrative form relevant to the present, these narratives relied upon and reinforced a gendered notion of Anglo-American 'culture' in opposition to Italian 'traditions' and customs. Moreover, they justified Anglo-American migrant spaces in public life and served to reinforce the social influence and power of the core Anglo-American volunteers who were central to such groups.

In Chapter 3, I critically engage with theories of community (e.g. Cohen 1985; Amit 2002; Creed 2006a and 2006b). I explore how Anglo-American migrants constituted themselves as a community through the work entailed in creating, maintaining and challenging internal and external group boundaries. With an empirical focus on rituals of food, volunteers understood group membership as a process involving what I term 'incorporation work'. Anglo-American women who dwelt at the boundaries of their community – demonstrating their competency to exist outside it within an idealized Italian sociality – were its core members. Consequently, teaching newcomers the art of integration into Italian life was an important role for the 'old timers', and a source of status.

Chapter 4 examines the work of incorporation from another angle. Volunteers came to understand their own distinct Anglo-American cultural backgrounds through enactments of a particular ethic of engagement that valued hospitality, civic-mindedness, democratic interaction, and hard work. Acts of incorporation were here directed towards welcoming in outsiders. This ethic of engagement was a reflexive process that reified Anglo-American values, and made them visible and present within Italian society. At the same time, trying to perform this ethic exposed a range of internal divisions and hierarchies within Anglo-American charity groups – frictions that tested members' moral selfhood and their work ethic.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus of the book, from the domains of subjecthood, intersubjective ethics and community building, to the moral work and dilemmas of charity practice. I explore the ethic of engagement in charity work when it is contingent on an ad hoc, improvised and reactive flexibility. Such an ethic emerges out of the quotidian realities of unpredictable interaction, which occurs between givers and recipients of charity who have different goals and needs. Detailing the American Church's food bank, I show that compassion transformed into an ethic of 'disinterested equality' through the compromises and practical strategies devised by the volunteers in order to 'get the work done'. Exploring theories of bureaucratic impersonality and knowledge (Weber [1956] 1978; Blau 1964; Herzfeld 1993; Scott 1998), I argue that the contradictions and conflation of ideals and actions, and the means and ends, constituted an important moral terrain within which migrant and charitable selfhood could be reflexively monitored and enacted.

In Chapter 6, I examine the case study of an ACG fundraising and awareness-raising event for a local prison charity. I explore how volunteers experienced and performed accountability, compassion and empathy. In locating deserving charity recipients, volunteers relied upon three ritual stages. They first located deservedness and came to trust recipients' neediness through the rational, accountable systems of audit that govern accredited third sector groups in Italy. Next, volunteers safely experienced the spontaneous flourishing of empathic compassion through listening to affectively charged stories of victimhood, vulnerability and redemption. Finally they found the motivation to keep giving over time by reflecting on their inability to truly understand the lives of recipients, and by experiencing compassion without an empathic basis.

In Chapter 7, I ask how volunteers engaged with the ideal of compassion when trust could not be established between the givers and recipients of charity. I examine the American Church discretionary fund for the needy, the recipients of which were usually strangers who walked in off the street and afterwards were never seen again. I explore the historical emergence of deservedness tropes within charity, and ask how volunteers tried to use

these as tools to assess potential recipients' narratives of need in the face of almost no information. I also uncover assumptions of accountability, which underpinned the volunteers' desire to assess the veracity of such stories. In these instances, volunteers distrusted their emotions as an internal reflection of the external truth of neediness. By regularly monitoring their emotional responses to these suspect charity requests, volunteers considered how they as givers had developed affective reactions of hope, bitterness, disappointment, betrayal, cynicism and realism.

To conclude, I consider the rare moments when reflexivity gave way to 'flow' (Turner 1974). Here volunteers forged a sense of belonging and experienced a sense of success in their charity works in the absence of reflective practice. This achievement was the elusive goal of reflexive work. I then draw parallels between the reflexive practices of migrant charity volunteers and anthropologists in the field, showing that anthropological methods have also been based on paradoxical frictions. I argue that reflexivity is never neutral in its effects and does not necessarily produce better or clearer knowledge. Rather, as the case studies of this book show, forms of reflexivity are plural. They are cultural processes often tied up in relations of power, and they produce culturally specific forms of moral personhood and particular objects of knowledge. They are just as likely to render certain realities opaque or invisible, as they are to illuminate and expose previously obscured domains of action.

Part I

**FRAMING CHARITY AND
MIGRATION**



Chapter 1

A CIVILIZED JOURNEY



Contemporary Anglo-American migrants to Florence and Italy tread a well-worn path and walk in the footsteps of well-heeled forebears. In this chapter I detail the motivations, travel styles, and wider socio-political reasons for such migration patterns from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries. I begin when Grand Tours were the preserve of wealthy young Anglo-American men, and trace the democratization of travel during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries along class and gender lines. I then describe the rise of a settler population of artists and writers in Florence in the nineteenth century, and the effects of both world wars. I detail the emergence of retirement migration and holiday home ownership in Tuscany from the 1960s, which occurred alongside the development of rural Tuscan tourism, and contemporary migration trends to Tuscany. I then provide a brief history of the two institutions that are the focus of this book, the American Church and the American Charity Group, detailing the recent history of Anglo-American charity works in Florence. Throughout this chapter I demonstrate the historical depth and context of contemporary practices, foreshadowing the gender- and class-based forces that have transformed over time and continue to endure within recent Anglo-American charity practices and migrant experiences.

The Grand Tour: The Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a ‘Grand Tour’ of the Continent by English and American ‘gentlemen of noble blood’ was a popular and prestigious activity. The Grand Tour began to emerge as a social phenomenon after the Renaissance (Chaney 1998: 6).¹ By the seventeenth century a conventional itinerary had been established that involved crossing the English Channel for a sojourn in Paris of several months. It then proceeded

through Switzerland and involved an arduous crossing of the Alps into Italy, followed by stays in Turin, Milan, Florence, Venice and Rome. This itinerary had a predominantly urban focus, with long stays in the main cities.² A Tour usually took between one and five years to complete (Buzard 2002: 38).

Many aristocratic young men regarded the Grand Tour as a vital rite of passage, transforming them into more 'civilized' social actors and introducing them to a powerful international elite. As many scholars have argued, the primary role of the Grand Tour was educational; a traditional classical education usually involving study at Cambridge or Oxford was completed by a trip to the Continent. By 'exposing them to the treasured artefacts and ennobling society of the Continent' (Buzard 2002: 38) it was expected that young men would become more refined (Hale 1957: 56). Furthermore, many believed that a Grand Tour would prepare young men for the requisite leadership roles within their aristocratic families (Buzard 2002: 38) by providing them with the correct cultural capital and social connections.³

Francis Bacon wrote of the need to meet 'eminent persons in all kinds' (cited in Turner and Ash 1975: 33) during a Grand Tour. Grand Tourists would travel with letters of recommendation from well-regarded and powerful social actors, which would help them to enter 'high society' in Paris, Florence, Venice and Rome. This continental social stratum consisted of an international community of diplomats, religious leaders and members of royal courts who often conversed in French – regarded as the international language of its day – and engaged in endless audiences, parties and other social activities through which important strategic connections could be forged (Hamilton 1974: 63). Through his travels, therefore, the Grand Tourist became involved in a network of social activities that proved his status as 'rich, leisured and well-connected' (Hale 1957: 100).

The Tour also provided a young man with an opportunity to acquire art objects that would stand as recognizable material markers of his wealth, status and life experiences (Baker 1964: 137). Some Grand Tourists spent substantial periods of their travels collecting and viewing classical, Renaissance and contemporary art, developing the complex mode of aesthetic appreciation and taste necessary to partake in this exclusive social world. This emphasized the leisured nature of such travel and lifestyles, and involved an active 'distancing from necessity' (Bourdieu 1986: 5) that was a key marker of aristocratic status. Florence, as the Renaissance capital of Italy, was an important and popular leg on any Grand Tour.

While the Grand Tour could provide a young man with opportunities to advance his own or his family's status and fortune, it was also implicated within broader social and political transformations. James Buzard links the Grand Tourist's understanding of his journey with the expansive goals of the British Empire:

As their overseas empire expanded, well-off Britons drew parallels between their nation's current position and that of the ancient Roman Empire. They styled their age an 'Augustan' one and expected men of taste to admire and imitate Roman models ... Personal experience of the places made famous by the Latin texts which the traveller had read in school would seal the bond between ancient and modern empires. (Buzard 2002: 39–40)

In contrast to a focus on the past, for the American Grand Tourist, Italy's contemporary society was of immense moral interest. Paul Baker (1964: 50) describes how Americans in Italy inspected and visited hospitals, orphanages, prisons, poorhouses and mental asylums in order to compare these institutions to those in their own emerging nation. He argues that such experiences acted as a 'nationalising force whereby the traveller came to see the virtues of his own native institutions, while also witnessing models that might offer improvement back home' (ibid.: 43). The experiences and writings of American Grand Tourists provided a reflexive moral image of the American nation and what it could become. Through an experience of difference, 'the American was forced to define himself to himself' (ibid.: 203). Reference to a hierarchical Other helped to formulate the ideal of the egalitarian nature of American society.⁴ As such, Grand Tourism functioned as a moral project important to the formation of both Anglo-American individuals and nations.

The Nineteenth Century

When the Napoleonic Wars ended in the early nineteenth century, France and Italy were reopened and once again became popular destinations for American and British tourists. Many members of the aristocracy and emergent bourgeoisie complained that the Grand Tour – an important marker of their status – was being infiltrated by the middle classes. In 1817 Lord Byron wrote from Venice, 'I wished to have gone to Rome; but at present it is pestilent with English ... who go about gaping and wishing to be at once cheap and magnificent. A man is a fool who travels now in France and Italy' (cited in Hale 1957: 60).⁵ Continuing industrialization led to the widespread development of steamships and trains across Europe (Withey 1997: 63), and increased wealth in the middle stratum of society. The entrepreneur Thomas Cook ran his first package tours in the 1820s, allowing tourists to make shorter and cheaper trips to the Continent (Buzard 2002: 48). No longer the preserve of young men, women increasingly took advantage of the ability to travel accompanied by tour groups without risking their reputations (Withey 1997: 144–45). The steady downward mobility of the tourist experience meant that it could no longer function as an exclusive marker of distinction

for the upper classes. Comments such as Byron's represented a growing trend in the travel records of the upper classes to distance themselves from the new 'masses' (Buzard 2002: 50). They began to call themselves 'travellers', while the word 'tourist' took on a pejorative tinge.

Florence catered for this increased flow of English-speaking migrants with a vast array of apartments and rooms for rent, libraries supplied with English newspapers and books, and coffee houses renowned within Grand Tourist circles. Doney's tearoom in Florence, which stocked international newspapers and journals, was for many Americans 'like a second home' and was a place to meet other compatriots and make friends (Baker 1964: 100). Long-term tourists gradually became settlers during this era, and the English and American populations became established.

In the nineteenth century many American and British literary figures settled in Tuscany. Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth and Robert Browning and the Trollope family were all well-known residents of Tuscany. Prestigious social circles formed around these figures, and it became fashionable for emerging writers to travel to Italy and attempt to enter into such networks. Despite the obvious allure of the city's architectural beauty and artistic heritage, many migrants of this era were 'escaping' life in England. Percy Shelley and Walter Savage Landor were disgraced when expelled from Oxford – Landor for firing a gun at a fellow (Hamilton 1974: 99) – while Elizabeth Barrett Browning had eloped with Robert Browning to escape her overbearing father. This was a period when tuberculosis and 'consumption' affected all social classes, and many wealthy Anglo-Americans escaped to the warm and sunny weather of Tuscany to convalesce. Elizabeth Barrett Browning had 'weak lungs' from a young age – an undiagnosed illness that eventually took her life – and found that the Italian weather and frequent trips to the popular mineral springs at Bagno a Lucca in Tuscany aided her condition (ibid.: 138). Until the early twentieth century, famous literary figures continued to visit Florence and popularize the city in Anglo-American imaginations. Charles Dickens, D.H. Lawrence, Mark Twain⁶ and Henry James all wrote memoirs of their time in Italy and Florence,⁷ and E.M. Foster's *A Room with a View* ([1908] 2000) remains one of the best-known English novels set in Florence.

The Twentieth Century

By 1900, the British consul estimated that thirty-five thousand Britons were living in Tuscany (King, Warnes and Williams 2000: 51), with most residing in Florence. In a city with a population of around two hundred thousand, this was a sizable presence. The Anglo-American residents supported

five or six locally produced English language newspapers that, reading like restrained modern-day gossip columns, recorded the arrivals and departures of all Anglo-American travellers and migrants, and reported on their parties and receptions in great detail (Amfitheatrof 1980: 94). One vivid record of Florence in the 1920s and 1930s is found in the autobiography of Italian filmmaker, Franco Zeffirelli, who was raised for a portion of his Florentine childhood by a resident English woman.

The British colony consisted of ageless ladies who dressed as if nothing had changed since the turn of the century. I remember vividly their arrival at certain hours, particularly at teatime ... In spring and summer they caused a sensation with their white lace, cream and lilac colours, parasols and old fashioned hats, at their meeting place, Doney's tea-room ... while each of them had a different story, a life of sadness or happiness, or wealth or poverty, they had all ended up in Florence, where they could preserve an illusion of being or having been 'great ladies'. There was however nothing gentle or soft about them. They were excruciatingly snobbish. Although they adored Italy, they constantly made us aware we Italians were unworthy of our country and had, wherever possible, to be shown a better way of behaving. Persons would be upbraided for mistreating their animals and mothers scolded for failing to keep their children's noses wiped. We Florentines tolerated them because they were part of our city. But behind their backs we always called them the *scorpioni*. (Zeffirelli 1986: 17–18)

Zeffirelli's memories were of an Anglo-Florentine population on the wane. The numbers had decreased dramatically by the eve of the First World War (see also Waterfield 1961: 150), and a second exodus depleted this population further during the Second World War. In 1939 he recalled:

Fascist Italy was on the move and propaganda against England was building to a feverish pitch ... students were herded through the streets to protest against the 'pluto-judaeen-democracies' of the West. These mobs always ended up in the via Tornabuoni, where the British Consulate and the British Colony were located ... there was endless denunciations of the British, the French and the Americans. Oblivious to reality, the old British ladies still came out of Doney's and cheered our flags and emblems, waving their lace handkerchiefs as if blind to the nasty propaganda. One day they were pointed out by some demonstrators and were forced to join in the march. When they began to realize what it meant they tried to get away, seeking refuge wherever they could. The demonstrations then turned ugly, with jeering and the hauling of insults. Once a group of English ladies were trapped in a corner and the situation got out of control, lace dresses were torn, parasols seized ... suddenly the *scorpioni* had become *le nemiche*, the enemy. (Zeffirelli 1986: 23)

By the time that Italy joined the Axis in May 1939, 'overnight English and American residents found themselves enemy aliens' (Campbell 2009:

16). In June 1940, the British residents of Tuscany were given only days to leave. Zeffirelli recalled that ‘most of the old ladies had nowhere to go, no homes in England, no relatives to take them in. They did the only thing possible – nothing’ (Zeffirelli 1986: 24). Unlike the American women who, Zeffirelli noted, were wealthy, many British migrant women survived on relatively small incomes. ‘One day I went to via Tornabuoni and realized they were gone ... They had been rounded up and taken to the hill towns outside Florence, where schools and other buildings had been converted into prison camps’. According to Zeffirelli, at first the American women – who were ‘despised’ by the British women – provided food charity to them. When the United States entered the war, however, the American and English women were incarcerated together and so, as Zeffirelli recounts being told by one surviving English woman, ‘had four years to make each other thoroughly miserable’ (ibid.). Many Anglo-American villas were sold, bought by wealthy Italians. While some Anglo-American women died during the war, many survived internment, and upon release retreated to reclusive lives in Florence and Tuscany, or returned ‘to homelands which were no longer home’ (Campbell 2009: 18).

Despite fewer Anglo-American migrants and tourists from the 1920s to the 1940s, important foundations were laid during the 1920s and 1930s by the Italian Fascist government for the later boom in tourism, particularly in Tuscany. The Fascist regime attempted to reinterpret, re-symbolize and often physically restore key urban sites in Italy with reference to a newly venerated renaissance and medieval past. These political acts of memory were designed to strengthen a nationalist sense of racial superiority. In Florence, the Fascist government established new museums of the renaissance past. In Siena, they promoted and re-popularized the Palio horse race, while in the hill town of Arezzo they rebuilt or heavily restored the ‘classic’ medieval buildings. Such towns were then carefully promoted to Italians as new ‘heritage/tourist product[s]’ (Lasansky 2005: xli). Certain forms of architecture became important examples of Italy’s ‘glorious’ and ‘noble’ past, such as San Gimignano’s square, il Palazzo del Podestà, and Siena’s il Campo (ibid.: xlii).

As Medina Lasansky argues, ‘[t]he representation of these sites as icons of Italian culture were so well packaged in the 1920s and 1930s that it has remained successful today’ (ibid.: xlii). While the guide books and aesthetic fashions of the Grand Tour had earlier canonized these tourist sites, this period laid local infrastructural and discursive foundations for the boom in Tuscan tourism that was to occur at the end of the Second World War. All of the sites mentioned above, key to the Fascist’s historical project, became highly popular with Anglo-American tourists and migrants from the 1960s onwards. These tourists were, however, slow to return in the 1940s and 1950s. For many Anglo-Americans, the stain of Fascism and the threat of

communism remained spectres that overruled the allure of Italy for over a decade (Campbell 2009: 17).

Several trends began to encourage Anglo-American migrants and tourists to return to Tuscany in the 1950s. Under the previous *mezzadria* agricultural system, peasant share-croppers worked the land as tenants, living in large farmhouses (*case coloniche*) set picturesquely atop hills. As Jeff Pratt notes, '[t]he Mezzadria created a landscape that is especially attractive to a recent generation of visitors and settlers: a sharp division between town and country, a rural population resident in imposing stone farmhouses, a mixed and intensive pattern of land-use' (Pratt 1994: 1). After 1945, the *mezzadria* system collapsed due to agricultural reform. Migration to the cities meant many such houses were simply abandoned. In the Orcia valley of Tuscany, for example, half the population and three-quarters of the farmers had left by the end of the 1950s (*ibid.*). From the 1960s, immigration trends in Tuscany shifted from the city of Florence to the rural countryside, as mostly British migrants bought up *case coloniche* for small sums. Harold Acton noted that 'the ancient farms of Greve and Castellina have been converted to cosy cottages ... the émigrés have imported an atmosphere of weekend Surrey' (cited in King, Warnes and Williams 2000: 51).

The shift to the countryside was most notably in the Chianti region. The term 'Chiantishire' was coined in the 1960s and referred to 'a period of around ten to fifteen years during the 1960s and 1970s, of a powerful group of people – politicians, industrialists, financiers, aristocrats – who symbolized the ruling classes of Britain (and to some extent also, of the European and international economy) at the time' (King, Warnes and Williams 2000: 154–55). Raymond Flower, who was the first Briton to buy a farm in the Chianti area in the 1960s, was a good example of the upper-class background of these migrants. Interviewed by geographers Russell King, Tony Warnes and Allan Williams in the 1990s, Flower made clear the privileged status of such part-time migrants:

I was the first of the British, in 1962, and then my friends came, and the friends of my friends, and then it got completely out of control ... there were 60,000 houses available in those days in the whole of Tuscany, and around here practically every second house was abandoned ... And – this is where the Chiantishire thing came in – you had this extraordinary situation of going into a Tuscan farmhouse ... and finding all the central bank heads of Europe sitting under an olive tree by a swimming pool debating ... And you'd go to the little bar in Castellina – there were no telephones in the houses in those days – and you would find Oliver Poole, who was chairman of Lazard's [a global finance company], as I did one day, and he was trying to get through to London, having a coffee while he was waiting, to arrange the merger between Leyland and the British Motor Corporation! So, yes I suppose there was a sort of Chiantishire feel about the place in those days

... all the big names were here, and they brought other names, and it was actually very jolly, but only in the summer, that is what we mean by Chiantishire ... but it only lasted a very short time. (Quoted in King, Warnes and Williams 2000: 154)

In his own memoir, Flower recalls how the peasant farmers (*contadini*) were increasingly supplanted by 'the disappointed city-dweller' from both Italy and abroad (Flower 1979: 219). These homebuyers were overwhelmingly part-time residents who came for a few weeks in spring and autumn (ibid.: 211). A New York Herald Tribune article from September 1968, entitled 'Remodelled Hideaway in Chianti is Europe's Latest Vacation Chic', reported the influx of 'fashionable British, Dutch, Americans, and even a few Italians' over the previous three years:

The secondary residence has become the new sign of the times. People may be stuck within the center where they have to make their money, but where they live, entertain and decorate with more lavishness than home bases are the vacation centers of the world. The lustre places on the international circuit for lucky house guests are Marbella near Malaga in Spain; Port Ercole on Italy's Monte Argentario, and now Chianti. To keep the heavily staked game on the move, house-swapping has become a norm among proprietors who want to see the same people, but against a different view. (Cited in Flower 1979: 212)

Infrastructural changes in Italy and Tuscany also played a part in increasing the ease with which new Anglo-American migrants could access holiday and retirement homes. New *autostrade* (motorways) between Rome, Florence and Siena, built in the 1950s and 1960s, meant people could now reach their holiday homes in a two-and-a-half-hour drive from either Rome or Pisa (Flowers 1979: 211). Furthermore, the Italian Christian Democrat's land reforms of the 1950s involved building roads, schools, petrol stations and shops in 'backward' and remote rural areas in an attempt to modernize peasant populations and to connect them to urban centres (Pratt 1994: 60). Italy now became a fashionable and chic country of residence for upwardly mobile American professionals and artists. By the mid-1960s, fifty thousand Americans had moved to Italy, including diplomats, journalists, scholars, artists, and those working in the vibrant Roman movie industry (Amfitheatrof 1980: 179).

Between the 1970s and 1990s, rural tourism in Italy increased dramatically, with British tourists representing one of the largest groups. A new form of tourism was developing. By the 1990s Tuscany and Umbria had the highest number of *agriturismi*, or farm-based home-stays, in Italy (King, Warnes and Williams 2000). This tourism introduced increasing numbers of Anglo-American visitors to new areas of the countryside where cheap *case coloniche* were still available, creating new waves of Anglo-American immigration.

Unlike the previous aristocrats who had bought and renovated grand villas in the nineteenth century, *case coloniche* offered less affluent Anglo-Americans a chance to pursue the Tuscan idyll.

In the early twenty-first century, second-home ownership trends have further increased due to a combination of emerging budget air travel, the popular rise of 'reality TV' programmes portraying Americans and Britons buying properties abroad,⁸ and burgeoning industries in countries such as Italy catering to foreign property buyers. This industry includes 'international property experts' (de Magalhães 1999: 13) who utilize local contacts and expertise, helping foreigners to navigate 'different laws, contracts in foreign languages, varied financial arrangements, local building methods and firms whose authenticity is difficult to check' (Furnell and Jones 1997: 131). Transnational financial markets have also expanded to facilitate house buying abroad. As one of the many 'living abroad' guides marketed to Britons advises, 'foreign currency mortgages are frequently available to expatriates when they do not wish to borrow in their home currency, and these may well be expressed in the currency of the country in which the property is situated, or there could be a choice of a third currency' (Cooke 1993: 36). Guides to buying property in Italy recommend that buyers consider placing their assets with a professional trust company located in a low-tax country. This, such guides assure, masks the real value of income generated from an individual's assets, and helps property buyers to avoid taxes in Italy (Larner and Howell 2006: 172). These practices link recent migration trends to increasingly mobile and transnational monetary markets.

This short history of Anglo-American migration to Italy and Florence demonstrates that it has a long and complex past. Driven not only by travel and class fashions, these trends reflect technological and economic developments, and political shifts. These transformations provide an important context for the lives of contemporary Anglo-American migrants in Tuscany, helping to explain the continued prevalence of rural and urban markers of distinction, the political and economic forces that have shaped patterns of mobility, and transnational migrant imaginations that are both evolving and enduring.

Anglo-American Institutions in Florence

It is not surprising that with such a historically established pattern of immigration to Florence, Anglo-American settlers have managed to maintain active and influential expatriate institutions in their host city for over a century. These institutions have been diverse in purpose, providing religious, social, educational and cultural offerings to Anglo-American migrants. Some

of the foundational institutions were religious. In the 1870s, due in part to Britain's hostility to Catholicism, a British reverend established an Anglo-Catholic church in Florence for local expatriate parishioners. In 1881 the congregation moved into a historic building decorated in the pre-Raphaelite style, where it is still housed. Now part of the Church of England diocese in Europe, St Mark's offers weekly Mass and hosts musical evenings for residents and tourists alike. A sister institution to the local episcopal American Church, these two churches demonstrate the importance in nineteenth-century Europe for migrant groups to converge around religious institutions; and their rituals of worship and practices of belief are of continuing relevance today.⁹

The Anglo-American community has also benefited from wealthy and influential compatriots who, after decades of residence in Florence, bequeathed their estates and life works to the city. For example, in 1900 the world-renowned art historian Bernard Berenson, a scholar of the Renaissance who trained at Harvard, bought and renovated the eighteenth-century Villa i Tatti on the outskirts of Florence. Here he received a constant stream of visitors, scholars and art buyers until his death in 1959. As per Berenson's will, Villa i Tatti, his extensive library, and his art collection were transferred to Harvard University, which founded the Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in 1960 (Calo 1994). Now one of the major centres for medieval and Renaissance scholarship in Italy, local expatriates and American-based supporters continue to visit, donate to, and fundraise for the Florence-based centre.

Other Anglo-Florentine cultural institutions also flourished, such as the British Institute, which was formed in 1917 to promote British and Italian culture, language and exchange. During the initial years of the First World War, the institute's goals were nationalistic and political, and its founders promoted British war propaganda, encouraging Italian involvement in, and support for, the war (Seton-Watson 1973). From its inception British residents and supporters began to donate to its growing library and reading room, which nowadays functions as a quiet retreat and place of scholarship. Today the institute offers language and art history courses, lecture series, and cultural activities from within its Roman-inspired sixteenth-century *palazzo* on the banks of the River Arno, and provides a space for expatriates to meet, discuss and reconnect.

These examples illustrate the diversity and long-standing nature of established Anglo-American institutions in Florence. In contrast to studies of expatriate groups that focus on their transnational lifestyles, and their 'bubble' of sociality 'cocooned' away from the host society (e.g. Guarnizoa 1997; Beaverstock 2002; Fechter 2007a), Anglo-American migrants in Florence have had a publicly recognized, institutionalized, and engaged

presence in the city's historical development and social make-up. One of the key ways in which Anglo-Americans have marked their presence in, commitment to, and affection for their chosen home of Florence has been through acts of charity and philanthropy. The two institutions that have participated most actively with this method of engagement have been the American Church and the American Charity Group, which are the focus of this book. In order to understand their volunteers' ideological underpinnings, ethical ideals and shared practices, I shall first provide a short historical background to these institutions and their development, from their inceptions to their contemporary configurations.

The American Church

In 1849 the governing Tuscan parliament recognized non-Catholic denominations for the first time. Such groups could now officially establish churches and buy land in the region. In the middle of the nineteenth century a small group of American residents began to form an Episcopal church, which was officially recognized in Italy in 1867. By the turn of the twentieth century, the parish was congregating in rented rooms within a small inner-city building. A rector and a reverend presided over four Sunday services, with 105 families attending. Land for the church's present site was purchased with the gift of a wealthy Massachusetts man in 1907, inside the *centro storico* (historical centre) of the city. In 1908 the first cornerstone for the church was ritually laid. Due to the world wars, the American Church was closed between 1919 and 1921, and from 1939 to 1946. After the Second World War, the parish was run by a group of wealthy male vestry members who personally paid for all of the church's running costs (Welsh and Gibson 2008: 154–55). From the 1970s onwards, however, the wealthy American population in Florence decreased. The church then formed a fundraising group to appeal to U.S.-based 'friends' and organizations.

The American Church's best-documented charitable works came after a flood in November 1966, when the Arno River, which winds through the heart of Florence, overflowed its banks to submerge large swathes of the town. Both British and American relief efforts were involved in the city's recovery.

The British consul ... delivered two gallon containers of fresh water to those who were cut off. A team soon formed around him and organised a nursing service; an Italian speaking senior medical officer arrived from London to assist, and started to give vaccinations against typhoid ... Britain's Art and Archives Rescue Fund raised £40,000 contributions without publicity through private letters of appeal, and a further £155,000 for restoration of works of art. The British and

American consulates coordinated their efforts, using the British consulate as their headquarters. (Hamilton 1974: 191)

The American Church parishioners contacted friends in the United States and raised \$151,158 (U.S.) for flood relief. In combination with the British and American embassies, the American Church established a relief agency that provided weekly grants of \$35 for needy households (Welsh and Gibson 2008: 156). Two of my participants recalled working as volunteers to check the validity of such claims by carrying out home visits across the city. Furthermore, the American Church established a weekly market, selling cheap clothing and household goods to flood victims. This continued and later become the American Church Thrift Shop, a charity shop where I volunteered on a monthly basis during my fieldwork.

In 2006 and 2007, the time of my fieldwork, the American Church had an active, diverse and sizeable congregation. Weekly Mass attendance averaged around 170, according to the parish records. Around 60 per cent of parishioners were American, 10 per cent Italian, and 30 per cent other nationalities.¹⁰ On average, each week twenty to forty of the church attendees were American tourists or students.¹¹ The parish directory, however, suggested a much wider 'church community': 472 adults and 79 children were listed, and would be sent weekly email updates on church activities. A substantial number of these, by my calculation about half, did not attend Mass. A biannual newsletter was sent out to a mailing list of around five hundred international 'friends of the American Church', most in the United States; these included previous parishioners who had returned there, and tourists who had remained in contact with the church.

The American Church sits within a nested global hierarchy. At the highest level it belongs to the Episcopal Church, the American branch of the Anglican Communion. More regionally, it is a member of the Churches of the Anglican Communion of Europe, and the Convocation of American Churches in Europe. Episcopal churches exist in Waterloo, Paris, Frankfurt, Munich, Wiesbaden, Geneva, Florence and Rome. The Bishop of the Convocation, who resides at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Paris, is the direct superior of the American Church rector. The American Church is governed on a day-to-day basis by the rector and a board of parishioner vestry members who are elected each year by church parishioners.

The American Charity Group (ACG)

The Ladies' Guild of the American Church was established in the 1960s to raise money for local charities and the American Church. By the early 1970s,

however, the Ladies' Guild was increasingly focused on social activities, and began meeting in the infamous and fashionable Harry's Bar beside the Arno River (Welsh and Gibson 2008: 158). The founder of ACG, Maggie, was an American woman born to an upper-class New England family. When in her early twenties she had travelled to Italy to study language, and had met and married a well-to-do Italian man. She was still a member of ACG in 2008, at eighty years old.

When I interviewed Maggie, she recalled that she had been president of the Ladies' Guild in the early 1970s when a new wave of Americans, many who were academics and retirees, emigrated to Florence. As she phrased in our interview, 'it was a whole new picture, and a lot of them didn't want any connection with a church'. With the blessing of the then rector of the American Church, the Ladies' Guild became the American Charity Group in 1975, and began meeting in the United States consulate, a beautifully renovated *palazzo* on the banks of the Arno River.

A small number of Italian women were part of ACG in its early years – nearly all were married to American men and had previously lived for many years in the United States. Maggie explained that more Italian women without such international experience began to join, who 'thought that it was very chic to belong to an English-speaking group, and didn't speak a word of English, and we finally took care of that'. She described how the Board of ACG 'decided that a telephone interview was a good way to test their English. We had a huge influx, in the 1980s [of Italians]. We had a huge discussion about whether the meetings should be bilingual, both in English and Italian. And I fought that tooth and nail – no, it must be only in English ... and we gradually got less and less [*sic*] Italians.' Maggie believed that the Anglo-American nature of ACG, expressed and symbolized through the English language, was crucial to the preservation of an international American club.

ACG's main fundraiser was an annual bazaar which had been occurring since the Ladies' Guild's inception. Originally funds raised were gifted to the Rector's Discretionary Fund. As Maggie explained, however, in the late 1970s 'more people complained vociferously about giving money to a church'. Instead, money was now directed to Tuscan charities. When I asked why money was not given to other charities in Italy, Maggie gave three explanations: 'Because we consider ourselves guests of Tuscany, I personally feel that ... because with [other charities] ... the Mafia gets it ... The club has always helped smaller charities that we can really help.' These beliefs, attitudes and assumptions will be discussed in the following chapters in order to explore what they reveal about participants' experiences of migration and charity, and the emerging third sector in Italy within which ACG and the American Church increasingly had to position themselves.

ACG became more institutionally embedded and publicly recognized from the late 1970s. In 1977 the club became a member of the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas, an international organization that encourages its member clubs to raise money for local and international charities. In interviews with other long-term ACG members, participants noted that while in the past the club had 'on paper' always been focused on charity work, in everyday life its role and emphasis had overwhelmingly been social. However, over the course of the 1980s and 1990s charitable fundraising and works increasingly became ACG's core focus. In 1998 ACG received from the Italian state the legally recognized status of ONLUS (*organizzazione non lucrativa di utilità sociale*, or non-profit organization for social benefit), and had now to file financial reports to the tax department to prove its non-profit status (as will be discussed in Chapter 7).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the club's annual fundraising bazaar grew from a small event attended by several hundred members of the Anglo-American community and wider public, into a large, well-publicized event that attracted thousands of people, most of them local Italians. Instead of a few thousand dollars, it began to make tens of thousands of euros each year, and in 2006 it raised €35,000. Maggie noted that over this time the demographics of Anglo-American women had also changed. During the early years of the club, she recalled, 'the Americans who came were wealthier, I don't mean rich, but we could afford to live ... the cost of living was very cheap ... and we had almost all been to good schools, and I find now, most of the young women have been to college, because you just don't not go anymore. But I think a lot of them come from ... more modest backgrounds.' Many other long-term members noted a similar socio-economic shift.

In 2007, ACG had 197 members, of who approximately 50 per cent were American, 20 per cent Italian, and 30 per cent other nationalities (the largest groups being British, Australian, Swiss, German and French). All of the active Italian members had lived for long periods in English-speaking countries such as the United States and Britain, and were fluent in English. A volunteer executive board ran ACG that, along with a president, was elected every two years by club members. The club had thus, over the course of its short history, transformed from a religious and elite social club to an officially secular, democratic and more class-inclusive charitable body, recognized by the Italian state and increasingly connected to local charity groups. This mirrors wider socio-economic shifts in the Anglo-American community, and the transforming nature of an emerging and professionalizing non-profit sector in Tuscany and Italy.

Reflections

For centuries Anglo-Americans have sought to find an improved way of life and to craft ideal selves under the warm Tuscan sun. Despite their enduring status as *stanieri* (foreigners) in the eyes of many *fiorentini*, Anglo-Americans have nonetheless influenced the social and material fabric of the city and its surroundings. While the aristocratic privilege of previous Grand Tourists and villa-dwellers appears to indelibly shape the features and practices of recent lifestyle migration, in fact contemporary Anglo-American charity practices in Florence reflect a pluralizing social sphere and diverse motivations, as the following chapters illustrate. While acknowledging these deep historical roots, this book is an exploration of migrant charity in the present, in a rapidly transforming and complex Italian setting. This book thus charts how such historical legacies endure alongside, compete with, and wither in the face of, emergent ideals and social forces.

Part II

FORGING CHARITABLE
COMMUNITIES



Chapter 2

INTIMATE LIVES AND THE ART OF BELONGING



Travel in itself is a sudden bold immersion, exposing us to experiences that we would otherwise shy away from at home. It is the perfect atmosphere for stepping outside of your life's comfort zone and into a fresh air fantasy, with yourself in the starring role. And in Italy the stages for that fantasy are plentiful. Whether looking for long-term love or seeking out short-term adventure, when in Italy one can easily fall under an exotic spell and believe anything is possible ... After all, what woman wouldn't want to at least dream about sampling a slice of *la dolce vita* with a dark and handsome stranger that spouts words as poetic and colorful as the Renaissance art around him. In my younger days I fell prey to such a stranger myself; quite happily I might add. He was a dark-eyed professional boxer who had me at 'So, you like gelato?' Franco courted me around and about the alleyways of Florence as if I were his queen, his one and only Juliet ... I remember our sunny bike ride in the open, green Tuscan hills as if it were yesterday; where he parked his bike under a shady tree and proceeded to gather pine nuts into his waiting pocket ... This slow, deliberate, confident act of romance is nothing but commonplace for the average Italian man. Since the 18th century days of the infamous Casanova, Italian men have continued this well known reputation of charming women the world over; they're suave and assured, and they flirt with precision.

— 'Cultura: Romance Italian Style'¹

'*Moglie e buoi dei paesi tuoi.*' Francesca repeated it to me twice as I sat in her small *studio legale* (lawyer's office) on the outskirts of Florence. 'Wives and cattle from your own village.' It was an Italian proverb I had not heard before. She explained, 'people here think you have to get wives and cows from your country, your village, otherwise you don't understand each other'. As an Italian family lawyer, Francesca had many American clients. She specialized in divorce. She slipped between Italian and English as she described matrimonial breakdown and acrimonious legal cases. Part of the problem,

she explained, was that with such diverse backgrounds, Italian men and Anglo-American women often struggled to reconcile their different expectations of marriage, gender roles and child rearing.

Francesca's proverbial warning and the contrasting 'conversation club' quote above give two diverse examples of stereotyped reflections of Anglo-Italian romance. Most Anglo-American volunteers at the American Church and ACG were married to Italian men, so the themes of marriage, romance and family were important discursive realms within volunteer groups. This chapter engages with the volunteers' narratives of marriage and migration. Based on life-history interviews with core volunteers and public discussions during volunteering, I argue that both private and public narratives were important vehicles through which a collective sense of female Anglo-American experience was constituted. This was based on, as Moya Lloyd (2005: 13) observes of identity politics, perceptions of 'common experiences (a narrative movement) [and] a common developmental trajectory (a psychological movement)'. A shared sense of being culturally Anglo-American was created through oppositional stereotypes of Italian gender relations and character types. At the same time as I, the anthropologist, explore the stereotypes central to the volunteers' narratives, I provide a parallel argument. In demonstrating their own 'cultural' knowledge, the volunteers reflected upon perceived 'stereotypes' within their own community and in wider Florentine life. In doing so, I shift between stereotype as an analytical device and an ethnographic object.

I approach the women's life history narratives in two ways. I first use them to glean information useful in reconstructing a social and historical account of recent Anglo-American migration trends to Florence. The narratives are therefore partly taken as sources of historical data.² In this sense I use such stories as situating devices that introduce the book's main characters. At the same time, I treat the stories as active, 'performative narratives' (Bauman 1996), and analyse them with reference to the 'identity work' that they enabled. By identity work, I am referring to the ongoing existential process of constructing a meaningful sense of selfhood. David Snow and Leon Anderson (1987: 1348) define identity work as 'the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept'. The self-concept is, however, not universal, and conceptions of selfhood vary depending on context (see Stewart and Strathern 2000). Furthermore, identity work can, as this chapter demonstrates, occur at a collective level. As claims for power and voice (see, for example, McAdams 1997), these narratives affirmed the importance of Anglo-American organizations to Anglo-American women in Florence. As such, the narratives were a form of 'identity talk' (Snow and Anderson 1987: 1348) that helped to morally legitimize the participants'

community groups. As powerfully positioned, active and socially visible actors within this community, volunteers had a stake in maintaining and legitimating the centrality of charity groups within wider Anglo-American networks in Tuscany.

The volunteers' life narratives were commonly divided into three phases or transitions: romantic tourism; settling, marriage and motherhood; and divorce, widowhood or retirement. In all three narrative phases women described the acquisition of 'cultural' knowledge and expertise as a crucial process through which they could successfully negotiate new lives and reflexively make sense of new migrant experiences. In the process of telling these stories to me and to each other the women constituted themselves both as powerful agents in their unfolding life trajectories, and as relationally configured persons constrained in their actions by wider 'society' and 'culture'. The narratives justified choices made and situations when choices could not be made within one unified story. As Stuart Charmé (1984: 2) notes, retrospective stories 'create order out of the chaos of experience'.³

Throughout the chapter I make reference to such ethnographic concepts as society, culture and stereotypes. Anthropologists note how politically salient the 'culture concept' has become (Wright 1998). In order to deploy 'culture' as intrinsic to shared experiences, culture must first be reflexively externalized (Keesing 1982: 298). Robert Norton (1993: 742) claims that the 'objectification of culture' denotes 'the way in which people may come to talk about, exaggerate or modify certain beliefs and practices as signifiers of identity, as distinct from simply routinely living their culture...discourse on identity involves ... the making of a cultural symbol or practice as object of contemplation, dialogue and affirmation'. Exploring this process, the chapter charts how 'Anglo-American' as a cultural entity comes to be objectified and made visible through reflexive narratives.

As familiar tools of our trade, it can be unsettling when those we study take up our conceptual devices. Annelise Riles (2001: xiv) notes, 'It has always been the subject's job to produce the symbols and the anthropologist's job to do the analysis ... yet what is one to make of a subject ... that one encounters already analysed?' Like Riles, I seek new analytical beginnings out of what appear to be end points of analysis. In carrying out life history interviews, the analytic project worked in a mimetic loop. Educated women talked to me about their lives in ways they anticipated that I, as an academic, would understand and appreciate. They sought to do the interpretive work for me. Correspondingly, I have sought to create knowledge out of their group practices of knowledge objectification.

Arriving: Education and Adventure

Anglo-American women typically began self histories at the phase of late youth, the starting point of migrant journeys. Many women aged in their sixties and seventies, who often referred to themselves as the 'old timers', first arrived in Florence in their late teens to attend study-abroad programmes. Most were sent to Italy before university for an educational year abroad. Such students typically came from wealthier families that valued cultivating their daughters' intellects, although often within traditionally gendered educational subjects. Reminiscent of the education of female Grand Tourists in the eighteenth century (Dolan 2001 17–26), their classes in Florence usually included Italian, art, art history, architecture and Italian literature. An education in Florence aimed to provide young women with the social distinction needed to circulate (and marry well) within high society in their home country. As Jane, a seventy-year-old American woman described:

I did all my schooling in New York and then [at] a boarding school in Massachusetts ... and when I finished my parents said, you either go directly to college or if you are really interested in art we have the opportunity to send you to Florence where there was a boarding school ... it was like a girls' B and B ... I was just turning eighteen that summer, and I [went and] studied Italian and even English literature with Miss Barry's school that existed at that time, and then I did my art studies in classical art at the *Accademia per le belle arti*, and studied with a German painter ... and the University for Foreigners where I studied Italian and Italian literature.

Despite the educational focus, many women considered a year in Florence to be a liberating rite of passage and described their desire for adventure and an escape from predictable experience. Growing up in Scotland in the 1950s and 1960s, Eve explained that her town was 'a very dreary place to live, people ... never looked outside the box, [they were] always looking over their shoulder at you. People I knew were exactly like their parents – you don't want that.' Coming to Italy for a year in the late 1960s to learn the language and experience another life, Eve explained, was a way to 'find myself', free from the constraint of upbringing. Some young women regarded the experimental counterculture of the 1960s, which encouraged young people to challenge the social conventions of the day, as the motivating force for migration. The volunteers tended to describe themselves as inherently 'different' and an 'odd fit' in their home societies. Samantha began her interview by describing herself as a 'brunette who couldn't surf' growing up in southern California. Migration as a natural and inevitable decision was often retrospectively and reflexively built into the narratives.

Migrant women who arrived in the 1980s and 1990s, often referred to as 'the newcomers' by themselves and the older women, considered education abroad and travel more generally as commonplace. With ten thousand American students a year attending Florence-based American university programmes,⁴ education had, like tourism, become mainstream, and functioned less to provide distinction. Instead, migrant narratives focused on the desire to try something new, to have fun and to 'see the world'. Knowledge was seen to emerge less from elite markers of classical education and more from informal 'experiences' gained on a global stage. Links can be drawn between these ideas and those underpinning contemporary backpacking (Noy 2004), gap year travel and 'voluntourism' (Wearing 2002; Simpson 2004). Such travellers seek to distance themselves from the 'staged' presentation of experience provided by mainstream mass tourism, and to individually, as well as spontaneously, encounter 'authentic' experiences in non-tourist spaces.⁵ As Kay, an American woman who had lived in Florence for eight years, explained: 'The [university] classes were kinda secondary. It was more about ... [finding] the real Florentine cafes and restaurants, tucked away from it all, trying to have a conversation with locals, sitting on the church steps and just watching the bustle go by ... and not knowing what to expect each day.'

The narratives of both groups of women framed such memories in relation to two experiences of liminality.⁶ They described not 'fitting in' at home, as well as their desire to seek adventure outside the bounds of everyday experience. In daily conversations, American women described how they were different from 'normal Americans', who never travel, do not speak a second language and do not own a passport. They commonly self-defined as 'open minded' in contrast to 'normal Americans'. In doing so, the character type of the 'adventuring outsider' became a foundational feature in a shared Anglo-American migrant consciousness, reiterated in public discourse. Within this shared trope, subtle class distinctions were, however, present. Old timers defined themselves as a cohort of wealthy women in contrast to the new era of 'mass tourism' and 'mass migration'. They informed me that they had been the 'true adventurers and pioneers'. These narrative contests illustrate the contrastive identity work involved in migrant claims of authentic belonging.

Stereotypes of Place

Like all tourists, the Italy that Anglo-American women sought existed first within their imaginations and 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990). Volunteers presented their pre-migration ideas of Tuscany and Florence as centred on generic images of sunshine, the rural idyll, art, romantic and exotic men, and

good food and wine. ‘I didn’t even bring a raincoat’, Bess explained. ‘It was Sunny Italy!’⁷ Studies of affluent migration have illustrated the prevalence of the ideal of the rural idyll within urban Western societies (Benson 2011; Gustafson 2001). For many tourists and lifestyle migrants, the countryside typically represents tradition, the past, moral purity, social solidarity and simplicity, while urban spaces are presented as profane sites of industrial, urban sprawl, moral corruption and decay, and social alienation (Williams 1975). This study, however, shows that Florence represented a morally positive urban idyll for many women, in contrast to the anti-urbanism they articulated regarding their home cities. While home cities like Los Angeles, London and New York were regarded as disenchanting modernity par excellence, participants imaged Florence to be a ‘traditional’ urban space frozen in time as a ‘Renaissance wonderland’. They experienced it as a highly sacred urban space, dominated by churches, robed nuns and monks wandering down streets, and crumbling tabernacles on every street corner. Through history lessons at their Florentine schools, and visits to the Uffizi Gallery,⁸ they imagined such a space as filled with communities of ‘traditional’ artisans and craftsmen from the ‘democratic’ medieval era of the guilds. The participants recalled how even working-class Italians such as butchers would recite long passages from Dante’s *Inferno* as they worked. As initially encountered, the city and its inhabitants appeared to emanate high culture.

The women recounted the noisy hustle and bustle of Florentine streets positively, originating as it did from human social interaction rather than the machinery of urban spaces (cars, garbage trucks, ambulances, etc.). In the 1960s and 1970s most people described Florentine streets as being relatively free of traffic. Sociality – long lunches, and men sitting chatting outside cafes – was taken as a sign of a cohesive and close-knit society based on a more ‘natural’ leisure ethic than the Anglo-American urban culture with its strong work ethic. The aesthetic consumption of an artistic and bohemian spirit of play was therefore crucial to their touristic experiences (Waldren 1996; Bousiou 2008). Kim, 54 years old and originally from Britain, explained her arrival as a 19 year old to be an au pair girl:

It was very picturesque, I rented a room off an Italian woman and lived next to an artist – it was a very arty situation ... I signed myself up to the *Accademia dei belle arti* and did an art course ... Back then [Florence] was very provincial ... I used to wander around the streets, there were no cars back then ... and just stare up at the buildings in absolute wonder at the architecture and the inner courtyards and the statues on the buildings.

In these narratives the women slide easily along a timescale from past to present, mixing and blurring representations of space. While their home cities in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s may have been similarly un-mechanized

and relationally 'close-knit' when compared to Florence, they are remembered as timelessly modern spaces. Meanwhile, Italy at their time of arrival is presented as suspended in a diametrically opposite 'long-past' era. Their narratives thus set up moral dichotomies between the home and host society that cast migration as inevitable and desirable.

Stereotypes of Desire

Contemporary 'romance tourism' (Dahles and Bras 1999) involved a range of 'cartographies of desire' (Pflugfelder 1999: 1): cross-border imagined encounters of love, romance and sex (Constable 2003: 28). As Sarah explained, in the United States there exists a strong 'romantic notion about falling in love with an Italian. There is a stereotype of the Italian lover ... suave and swarthy Latin lover type, very smooth and gracious and old-school courtship and that sort of thing.'⁹ Francesca, the divorce lawyer, noted of her clients that 'it's very curious ... they all look the same, the wives, and the husbands ... because maybe these women are looking for a typical, specific man. All these American women go for dark skin, Mediterranean, dark eyes and dark hair. [The women are] blond, tall – typical American and typical Italian!' Francesca's observation that Italian men were also attracted to a particular phenotypical American woman suggests that they too, like Anglo-American women, relied upon a sexualized image of the exotic Other.¹⁰ Sarah noted that the ideal Italian man was cultivated in the American media. By contrast, she said that Florentine men typically had 'the Medici nose (gestures a large beaked nose) and the pale skin. That didn't conform with my southern Italian idea, and even in [Italian] film, there are very few classic [southern] Italian types, they are more in American films.' Through these narratives they described the naïveté that accompanied the 'thin knowledge' of tourists' stereotypes.

Out in the restaurants, bars and museums, Anglo-American women reported it was easy to meet Italian men. In the 1960s, Kim understood this interaction as resulting from Italian gender relations, and the liminal, relatively free position of foreign women.

Italian women were very restricted in what they could do. And they couldn't go out in the evenings or even in the afternoons unaccompanied, and they were limited to who the parents would approve of; and even if there were young male students from other nations, they wouldn't really have access to Italian girls. Whereas we foreign girls, we were surrounded by foreign boys because we were free, there were no restrictions on us and what we could do. We used to get asked out all the time.

Because of the Anglo-American women's freedom of movement, their lack of social embeddedness and exemption from normal Italian gender rules, a prolific number of 'contact zones' (Pratt 1992: 6) were established within the city's public spaces for foreign women and Italian men to meet. Newcomers, by contrast, explained that Italian women were now more engaged in public life, but were still too preoccupied with their reputations, never 'letting their hair down' in public, as Candice explained. They also insisted that English-speaking women, commonly referred to by Italians as '*americane*', were still regarded by Italian men as freer and more open to engagement with strangers. Many Anglo-American women acknowledged that this reputation was not positive and was centred on notions of promiscuity, due to an Italian perception that young *americane* got drunk and were easily seduced. Such a reputation also related to their transient nature as tourists, with whom no lasting relations could be established. Emily explained that when she started dating her Florentine husband-to-be

his friends would tease him, 'Oh, the *americana*'. [He'd say] 'No she has a name, you will call her by her name, this is not some *avventura* [adventure] with a tourist. Her name is Emily and you call her by her name or I won't talk about her.' [They'd say] 'Oh, how is the *americana*?' [He'd say] 'No I don't talk about "the *americana*". He has always made it clear to everyone that he takes me seriously.

Women narrated both experiencing and utilizing stereotypes during the tourist phase. They conceived of 'stereotypes' as limited and inaccurate knowledge based on a lack of relational connection. Correspondingly, in anthropology stereotypes are commonly understood as simplistic representations that portray group characteristics as fixed and homogeneous, in contrast to the complexity and contradiction that in fact exist within social fields (Herzfeld 1991: 73). Politically, stereotypes involve the strategic use of 'identity taxonomies' or stock character genres in particular moments to achieve particular ends (Caldwell 2004: 128). They are attempts to categorize reality in order to better control it. Xavier Andrade (2002: 236) argues that stereotypes 'express a perverted use of the concept of culture, inasmuch as they deny its internal diversity, negate its dynamic and contradictory nature and freeze its historically situated contents'.

While Anglo-American women's narratives defined the tourist self as reliant on stereotypical knowledge, they also used stereotypes of Italian women, presenting them as caged and oppressed, and in opposition cast themselves as free-spirited, liberated and modern. This paralleled the dualistic representation of Florence and home cities along premodern and modern lines.

Settling: Unequal Relationality

During temporary periods of living and travelling in Italy, nearly all of the volunteers met and fell in love with an Italian husband-to-be. Love was presented as an apprehending force, overriding free choice and rational judgement. 'We were *in loove*, nothing could go wrong!' Janet commented in her interview with a laugh. Marriage usually occurred quickly and in response to a precarious legal status. A simple marriage in the local town hall was often needed to secure their right to reside in Italy. Mandy explained what happened after she moved to Italy to be with her fiancé:

Everyone told me I was here illegally – I didn't know that, and I was told that there wouldn't be a problem if we didn't travel, but if we did they take a picture of your passport at every hotel and send it to the police in Italy. So we were like, well, let's just get married. We were married three weeks later, and the hard part was not a lot of my side was there.

In their narratives of love and marriage, Anglo-American women portray their agency as constrained; love and national laws determined their marital fate.¹¹ The theme of lacking agency carried over into the next phase of their narratives. In trying to shift from the euphoric and exciting phase of leisure tourism and 'fairy-tale' romance to being migrant wives in Italy, many women described experiencing a prolonged period of difficult adjustment. Such an adjustment phase centred on unfamiliar family arrangements and ideals. While the phase of early romance tourism/migration was typified by a quest for and enjoyment of freedom and personal exploration, participants narrated the liminality of the settling down phase as a disempowering challenge to the self.

Through narratives participants defined their young selves as lacking any knowledge of the cultural and social realities of Florence. The terms 'culture', 'society' and 'knowledge' are here ethnographic terms, used constantly throughout the volunteers' narratives. As Candice explained, 'It took me a long time to develop a cultural foundation in order to appreciate Florence and Italy. That was not my focus to begin with.' By casting themselves as naive, innocent and empty of the requisite knowledge, they set up the second phase of their narrative to follow: demonstrating how they had, through persistent effort, acquired the requisite cultural and social capital to craft meaningful migrant lives in Italy.

The first cultural institution that Anglo-American women struggled to understand was the Italian family. For many, a strong ethos of individuality and personal freedom was at odds with new hierarchical family arrangements that placed their parents-in-law's decisions above their own. As Samantha observed:

My father-in-law seems to be very, very involved in every major decision in our lives. For example we are in the process of buying a new house and it was chosen by my father-in-law and I don't want to buy [it], but because he likes it and has endorsed it strongly – and I think it comes down to the difference between who comes first: the new family, the wife and the child or the original family. I think my husband has real issues with this and I think he is still very, very attached to his father's opinions and help.

In many narratives, however, the inequalities of status within marriages were tied to the relationship between the new bride and her mother-in-law. Many women felt 'invaded' by their mother-in-law's access to their homes. Kitchens became key sites for power contestations to play out. On one occasion soon after her marriage, Anna went for a short break to England. During this time her mother-in-law came to care for Anna's husband. Anna returned to find her kitchen reorganized. 'I was so angry', she recalled. 'So after that I said she never stays here without me again.' Kim also found herself trying, as she put it, 'to protect myself from this lady who would just arrive at my apartment unannounced and start inspecting my pans to see if they were clean enough for her'.¹²

Many women felt further undermined when their authority and competency as mothers was challenged. Kim recalled:

[My mother-in-law] wanted [my daughter] Lydia to have no manners at the table. Lydia was very difficult because she never wanted to eat, but at the same time I was taught manners, and so [would say], 'Sit up straight', or 'Don't eat with your mouth open', and she [the mother-in-law] would say, 'Oh leave her alone'; so I was portrayed as this kind of witchy woman ... and I found that very difficult. I could never give Lydia chores to do when she was around.

These familial narratives usually culminated in a key moment of triumph when, having finally understood the cause of such tensions, Anglo-American women demanded a higher status. For Betty, and other women interviewed, a husband's refusal 'to show you that you are number one' lay at the root of many Anglo-Italian divorces. Finally feeling secure that her husband put her first, she explained, she felt confident enough to challenge her mother-in-law.

She made a comment to me one time, and I was bold enough to respond. She said, 'I am his mother', and I said, 'Yes, but I am the one he chose and I am the one who sleeps with him'. I had to say it. We cleared the air. She will say things like 'Gregorio's house', and I will say, 'My house too'. I just won't let it go by.

When marriages broke down and ended in divorce, the mother-in-law's behaviour was often cited as the key reason. Personhood was, in this case, unpacked through psychologizing frames. 'My husband was treated like a

little prince, physically, mentally', Kim said. 'He was completely castrated as she never allowed him any freedom.' When Martha separated and moved out of her family home after nine years of marriage, her mother-in-law, who now referred to her as '*la puttana*' (the whore), moved in to take her place as the carer of her husband and children. 'And now she sleeps in the master bedroom and he sleeps in a single room', she said, to provide evidence of how much her ex-husband was 'dominated by his mother'. 'Their relationship is so co-dependent', she added. 'I think that really prevented him from having a relationship with me.' Frequent references to 'co-dependency' and 'arrested development' in collective Anglo-American conversations illustrates that participants' sense of collective experience was defined through asserting that Italian culture denied a healthy autonomous individualism.

In describing their experiences, Anglo-American volunteers portrayed knowledge and power as intricately linked. Personal empowerment came from understanding 'culture' as a set of psychological norms, and developing strategies to act upon or avoid such behaviours. In many instances, participants did not attempt to understand Italian culture in order to internalize it, but instead used this knowledge as an important tool to define and defend Anglo-American norms. Realizing that culture lay at the heart of a marriage's success was for many women a 'revelation'. Charlotte explained:

I think when you have inter-culture marriage you have to understand that the person you marry is who he is because of his culture, and I battled so many things with him. Florentines are very critical, and I would be like, 'Oh Cosimo, you are criticizing too much', and then I realize everyone else is doing it. And so it's just like that, they are like that, and it is part of his culture and it is not his fault he criticizes so much ... and so I think people need to realize we are who we are because of how we are raised.

Many women referred me to a book entitled *Intercultural Marriage: Promises and Pitfalls* (Romano 2001). I tracked down a well-thumbed copy in the American Church's English library. The librarian told me that it was a book constantly recommended by Anglo-American women to each other. The book outlines both the personality types that marry outside their own culture, such as 'romantics', 'rebels' and 'non-traditionalists' (ibid.: 7–13) and the 'trouble spots' (ibid.: xx) that many women encounter in marriages, such as the issues of gender roles, raising children, and conflict styles. Relying upon glossed notions of cultural habits that are largely essentialized and bounded, the book builds models of Oriental versus Occidental 'cultures' on a global scale. In Britain and Europe, Maryon McDonald (1993) shows, 'national difference' and 'national character' continue to be constituted through an enlightenment dualism that juxtaposes positivist rationality with romanticism and emotion. This interacts with a broader process

of categorical 'mismatches': when a group's cultural practices are grasped through the lens of another group, they often appear irrational and unpredictable, which can thus affirm stereotyped us/them, rational/irrational dualisms (McDonald 1989).

Anglo-American women described how reading *Intercultural Marriage* made their own individual experiences 'make sense' within broader cultural typologies, and many felt a deep sense of relief that they were not completely 'to blame' for difficulties. Like the women's shared narratives, the book had become a form of knowledge that reflexively externalized and objectified their personal behaviour into recognizably Anglo-American cultural forms. In this sense, the book and wider collective narratives relieved the women of some of the modern burden of self-making (see Giddens 1991). These categories empowered and disempowered at the same time. They placed an Anglo-American woman at the centre of her own life and future, while also situating her within powerful 'cultural' worlds that until then had been only obliquely comprehended. Such narratives aimed to bring the individual self into fuller view, but through the context of an Italian (Other) sphere.

Cultural knowledge, in the form of gendered stereotypes of Italian men and Italian *suocere* (mothers-in-law),¹³ also had the effect of creating what Melissa Caldwell has defined as 'strategic intimacy': 'the social solidarity that emerges through the practices of stereotyping the self and Other' (Caldwell 2004: 130). The volunteer women gained a sense of shared experience, based on the categories of gender, and 'culture', through both the collective practice of telling such stories and of situating their personal experiences within a wider Anglo-American female frame. Begoña Aretxaga (1997: 79) argues that 'gender consciousness' is often acquired during moments of conflict and constraint. For a group of affluent and often self-consciously privileged migrants, gender became visible to them, and visible in their narratives, within experiences defined as difficult, confronting and frustrating.

It was in these narrative spaces that the term 'Anglo-American' also came to have salience as a specifically cultural category that was not only a marker of collective experience, but a claim to collective space. Arjun Appadurai (1996) defines 'culturalism' in relation to large-scale ethno-national politics. Culturalism is 'the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of larger national or transnational politics. It is frequently associated with extraterritorial histories and memories, sometimes with refugee status and exile, and almost always with struggles for stronger recognition from existing nation-states or from various transnational bodies' (ibid.: 15).

In Anglo-American volunteers' narratives, however, culturalism operated within a much smaller frame, and with less overtly 'political' goals. 'Cultural differences' are used not to make claims on the state, to which the foci of Appadurai's work directs the term, but to small-scale public and relational

spaces. By utilizing Anglo-American and Italian ‘culture’ in their narratives, volunteers made claims that certain forms of Anglo-American behaviour, both individual and collective, had legitimacy.

The volunteers employed psychologizing portrayals of many Italian men as infants, as ‘big babies’ as Martha phrased it, or *mammoni* (big mummy’s boys), whose ‘arrested development’ was due to the poor parenting they had received. The volunteers described the interdependency of Italian mothers and their sons, in order to sanctify their own lack of conformity. This worked in many women’s narratives to affirm and justify their own ‘Anglo styles’ of parenting, and their refusal to adopt what they perceived to be typically Italian modes of motherhood. Yet to employ culture in this way was, many reflected, to remain liminal in Italian society, through a set of practices that continued to mark them out as foreign women in public space. Enacting Anglo-American culture was never easy, and involved negotiating desires to elide and assert difference.

Many women recalled that adopting an Anglo-American cultural notion of motherhood in Italy entailed less personal choice and control than they had anticipated. Charlotte became pregnant at forty-three with twins, and discovered that the Italian state had specific regulations regarding how pregnant women’s bodies should be managed. She had no choice but to have a Caesarean section because, she explained, Italian doctors did not believe that it was ‘possible to give birth naturally to twins at forty-three. No one will touch you.’

That was very hard, coming to terms with being disappointed ... you had come to believe that everything is possible and you realize that not everything is possible and your birth experience is not going to be like the experience you can mail order from a catalogue, like in the States where you pick the assistant and you pick the room and you pick the colours in the room, and your husband being beside you at the bed. And all of that you can wash away when you go to a public hospital in Italy. That was traumatic.

Once her children were born, Charlotte experienced a similar lack of control. As a trained Montessori teacher, she had specific ideas regarding the best way to raise children. She began motherhood intent on raising ‘Montessori kids’.

Then you realize you are in Italy and there are no Montessori schools, and you can’t teach things at home that don’t apply to the culture in which you live, because your job as a mom is to prepare your children to face their life everyday. So if you prepare them for Mars and they live here, you are really not doing your job. So ... little by little you have to give up that Anglo rigidity, that clenching at all costs to your principles, and for a while there I felt like I was letting go of my entire identity.

For minority groups, language can often become a key symbol of cultural continuity (Handler 1988: 159–80). Just as language came to stand for culture in Anglo-American groups, so language came to symbolize personal and cultural recognition in women's home spheres. Realizing that foreign mothers have only limited power to influence the enculturation process of their children was for some women, such as Charlotte, unsettling. In attempting to exert some parental control and validate their own backgrounds, most volunteers focused on imparting English language competency to their children. The majority of women spoke to their children only in English. During volunteering, old timers commonly discussed with new mothers the importance of only speaking in English to their children. Old timers also often commented on the children of Anglo-American mothers who refused to or could not speak English, suggesting that their mothers had not been strict enough. As Tracy said in her interview, 'These women who don't teach their children English? That is ridiculous. Or they don't celebrate American holidays – that is ridiculous. You have to keep your identity. That is part of your culture; it is a richness you bring to your family.'

While most women reported that they and their husbands were in agreement that this created a rich, bilingual home environment, some couples struggled over the predominance of one language. Kim wanted to provide her daughter with an 'English heritage' and spoke to her only in English until she was four years old. However, Kim reported, 'then she didn't want me to speak to her in English [anymore] and she refused to answer, and that was the influence of her father, who kept saying to her, "you are Italian!"'

For some mothers, speaking English to their children made them feel alienated in Italian public spaces. Dorothy reflected on her experiences of motherhood in Florence:

I was very concentrated on being the outsider, the other, the person that didn't belong here, and my focus was very much when I was in the playground with Timmy and I would say something in English and everyone turns around and looks, and it's like, oh God, here I am the foreigner again!

These stories reiterated that their sense of outsiderhood was centred on shared language and gender experiences. By understanding Anglo-American culture and personhood in this way, the volunteers deflected attention from the potential markers of difference within their groups, such as those based on ethnicity, nationality and class. These other forms of differentiation, which were indeed present, will be discussed in the following chapter. Language and gender were useful categories to emphasize because of their inclusive range; all volunteers could claim them. Italian husbands and mothers-in-law, as cultural outsiders, helped to unify and create solidarity between those within the boundary of the Anglo-American community (cf. Barth 1969).

Despite such stories of struggle, most women narrated their gradual incorporation into and acceptance by Italian families-in-law. Unlike the tourist experience, which they now regarded as reliant on superficial knowledge and lacking 'real' relationality, becoming a member of an Italian family was like, as Jessy described, 'finding a community at last'. Most described how, after some negotiation and persistence, their relationships with their in-laws improved and their status and influence increased. These accounts were part of wider community narratives that differentiated established Anglo-American migrants from Anglo-American tourists, students and newly arrived women (cf. Benson 2011: 119–36). I discuss this theme further in the next chapter. The volunteers' initial narratives of the tourist phase, which cast themselves as empty of cultural knowledge and strategy, make more sense in this context: newly arrived migrants, which included their younger selves, were a necessary contrast to the mastery of their culturally savvy settler selves. Narratives of settler lives did not, however, present the life project as complete. Narratives of their success in gaining access and acceptance in spheres beyond the family were more ambiguous and open ended.

Gaining Independence

In the initial years of being married, many women felt acutely disempowered and isolated. Lacking both Italian language competency and the support of their own families and friends, and having no professional networks through which to seek employment, many described being dependent on their husbands, and restricted in their movement. This situation was particularly apparent for younger women married for ten years or less, most of who had previously been living independently and had had professional careers in their home country before migration. Mandy explained:

When I first came over here it was really hard because ... I had just come from living by myself for seven years – it was just me and my dog and [I] had my own space, my own world ... I had my apartment. But then I came over here and I was dependent on [my husband] for everything.

A lack of social support often exacerbated these feelings. In the early years of her marriage, Nancy felt most vulnerable and alone when she and her husband argued. Living in the countryside just outside Florence, she described 'storming out' of their house after such arguments.

I would get so angry, and I would think, where am I going to go? I don't have a family to go to. You know in the States if a couple argues you go to your mom's

house, but here I realized I didn't have anywhere to go, I was totally alone, and so I had to walk back into the house and work it out.

Some Anglo-American women also felt that their husbands overplayed the 'protector' role, and did not like them to go out alone. This often led to conflict, as women tried to negotiate more independence. Emily, a 40-year-old American married for one year to her Italian husband, explained to me that 'he doesn't like me to go out at night. He gets upset that I'm going out twice this week. He doesn't like to say no, but then he's all sad like a puppy dog if I go. In the beginning we would fight, just before I went out.'

Such stories emphasized the differences between the generations of Anglo-American women. The old timers stressed in their narratives the values of holding together a marriage and their cultural adaptability. Because many had come at a very young age, they did not, to give an example from Maggie, know any other way to wash spinach than the way they were taught by their mothers-in-law, to rinse it seven times. Their Anglo-American enculturation process was open and incomplete.

When I came [in the 1950s], we have almost always succeeded in holding together a marriage. In the 1970s, [many women were] coming and marrying Italians and a great many of them went back to the U.S. and got divorced or separated because they had gone to college in the States, they had their own apartments, they knew what they wanted, and if they wanted a washing machine they just went out and bought one, and they didn't think the husband had a say in it. So of us that married earlier, [we] survived. Those who came in their thirties had a much harder time adjusting ... we were impressionable and adaptable.

By contrast, younger women stressed the importance of cultural continuity, autonomous selfhood and uncompromised individual choice, sometimes describing the older women as 'doormats' to their 'overbearing' husbands. Within the shared Anglo-American female experience, 'flexibility' and 'compromise' were differently valued with regard to the permeability of the self's borders to Italian cultural norms, depending on the narrative goals of particular age cohorts.

Many volunteers explained that Anglo-American groups provided women with an opportunity to engage in their own public sphere, independent of their husbands' social worlds. Volunteers presented such groups as providing them with an opportunity to build independent lives and acquire knowledge about living in Italy from their migrant peer group. As Belinda explained to me,

[The American Church] offers community – [for] someone who comes here for the first time and needs a doctor ... you get help here, tips on where to get your

dryer and washing machine, if you have children there is the lending library and the nursery, if you want to sing in the choir we have got a choir. There is a bit of something for everyone, you need that.

Asserting the value of Anglo-American networks involved claiming a public space dedicated to migrants (cf. Kondo 1990). This point will be reiterated and expanded throughout following chapters.

Work

Finding work in Italy that was permanent and rewarding was, for many women, one of their biggest challenges. Women across the generations told similar stories of only finding short-term, often undeclared work. Carol, a sixty-year-old American who quit university in the United States to move to Italy and marry an Italian when she was twenty, explained that she and other foreign wives were, in the 1960s and 1970s, 'lucky if we could find work'. Italian employers, she explained, 'had a way of hiring you in the black, and when you needed to get written up for your pension and medical, suddenly you didn't have a job and you went off to something else'.

In many contexts, migration entails downward mobility in relation to paid work (Charsley 2005: 90). Nearly all the women interviewed described finding only limited employment sectors willing to hire foreigners. Their English language skills opened doors to the tourism industry, translation work, teaching English, and foreign university appointments. Yet women who had worked in professional industries in their home countries described finding it impossible to restart such careers in Italy. Annabel, who had worked in public relations in the United States and now worked as an administrator for an American business and earned sixteen thousand euros annually, described her situation as typical. 'Professionally, Florence is a tomb yard, so a lot of valid people are being wasted, a lot of women, phenomenally gifted women, are being wasted [by] being secretaries.'

Emily had a master's degree and had been earning 'decent money' in the United States as a physical therapist. Once she moved to Florence she discovered, like many foreign women, that her professional accreditation and education were not recognized in Italy. Furthermore, retraining would be a long and expensive process. Now she worked two part-time jobs, both of which were only short, fixed-term contracts. One job involved teaching at a local American university's study abroad programme. Emily pointed out that, under the terms of her contract, her boss could fire her at any time after three months. 'So it's hard here ... I don't have a pension,' Emily said, 'and that makes me feel sad sometimes because I left a good job in America

to come here, but what can you do?’¹⁴ In reflecting on the role of Anglo-American groups, many women described how such groups circulated job notices on member email lists, and through volunteering roles, gave women the opportunity to utilize dormant professional skills. In doing so, the volunteers positively positioned their groups as the solution to their lack of opportunities within Florentine work spheres.

Friendship

In becoming independent, younger Anglo-American women described the need to create their own friendship networks distinct from their husbands’ social worlds. For most, such discussion involved narratives of an impenetrable Florentine society, with particular reference to the ‘closed’ Florentine woman. Even after seven years of being married, Lucy felt she had no close Italian girlfriends. ‘Italian women are not the most open to ... foreign women. Even when I have been at social events and parties and there have been Italian women there, I have never felt welcomed into their group of friends or invited to things.’ Nearly all interviewees admitted that they did not have many or even any female Florentine friends.

Many explanations were offered to account for the ‘wall’ preventing sociability. These explanations did not fault the migrant women themselves, but rather looked to Italian culture for an explanation. The traditional family focus, particularly of Italian women, was contrasted with the ‘open’ home societies in several interviews. Sue argued: ‘In the States it is something left over from the pioneering spirit, you have to help each other, but in Italy you’re always helped by your family’. Many women described Florentines as culturally specific within Italian society and a particularly closed society.¹⁵ In everyday conversations Anglo-American women referred to the city’s history, noting that for centuries it had had many feuding factions. This, they argued, has led to a closed and distrusting disposition towards non-kin and outsiders. Furthermore, as Kate explained,

My theory is that Florentines seem to have these really long relationships with people that start in Grade school and they surround themselves with people they have known for like twenty years. My husband has many like that and he is only thirty-five; all of his friends are friends from school. I think people think that, well, I already have my friends. I will be friendly with acquaintances, but as far as inviting someone out and ... having a solid relationship with someone, they have already got all of that.

Amy put such hostility down to the threat foreign women posed to local women in the competition for local men. ‘My theory is that it is also a bit of

a jealousy thing, the foreign women coming here and taking their men ... This is a city with a lot of foreign women, and they are really popular with Italian guys.' While the stereotype of the 'promiscuous American' was mainly directed towards the 'drunk college student', it also continued to negatively affect married Anglo-American women. Participants told me on many occasions that Italian women regarded Anglo-American women as threatening potential affair partners for their husbands. Annabel explained to me that at parties, '[i]f you are talking to a man, within five minutes his wife will come and take him away. Anglo-American women don't keep their men on such a tight rein, [they] offer them more freedom. The men like that.'

Other women explained that Florentine and Anglo-American women did not get along because, typically, they were not compatible friends. Clementine, a wealthy and upper-class English woman told the other volunteers at a fundraising cooking lesson that she had not formed friendships with any local women in her Tuscan village because they were not concerned with her interests. 'They don't want to know how your holiday was in France, or about other places. They don't care about life anywhere else – just recipes and gossip.' Clementine had travelled extensively and her own 'global outlook' was, she told me, completely at odds with the rural Tuscan women. Betty, who was from New York City and a family that 'discussed ideas regularly', also explained to me that Florence's 'provincial' nature frustrated her.

The women are expected to talk with the other women and the men are meant to talk to the other men, and my sister-in-law sure can tell you a lot about cleaning fluids, but I don't care, and often what [my husband] and the guys were talking about I would find more interesting – politics or something like that – and it was made known to me immediately, 'No, talk with the women'.

Such explanations wove together a series of stereotypes of Italian otherness that relied upon distinctions of wealth, history, education, experience and background. In public spaces the volunteers would describe their 'theories' of 'the wall' to each other, adding layers of explanation like I have rendered above. They sought to create knowledge out of thick description and to account for their experiences more subtly, marking such knowledge as distinct from 'thin' stereotypical knowledge. Yet while the models used to account for this social phenomenon were multilayered, they still ultimately essentialized the social phenomenon of Italian women in an oppositional manner to Anglo-American norms.

Susan Wright (1998) argues that the anthropological 'culture concept' is now being widely utilized, often for political or nationalist purposes (see also Hann 2002). It is, however, commonly a model of culture as bounded, homogeneous and 'authentic' rather than a 'contested process of meaning

making' (Wright 1998: 9). The act of creating cultural classification systems, as Hal Levine (1999: 169) shows, depersonalizes diverse persons into exemplars of homogeneously defined groups. Essentializing narratives of the typical Florentine female objectified culture into something largely beyond the control of Anglo-American women. These narratives were commonly expressed in Anglo-American public spaces and everyday conversations, affirming to the old timers and socializing the newcomers that women had few strategies to change their situation. Not surprisingly, instead of persisting in their attempts to break into these networks, many women concentrated their energies on building close friendships within Anglo-American groups, often describing their migrant friends as being 'like family'. By crafting such narratives, volunteers worked to position their volunteering groups at the centre of Anglo-American female social networks.

Aging: Divorce and Widowhood

As Dorinne Kondo (1990: 307) argues, 'Identities on the individual level resist closure and reveal complicated, shifting, multiple facets'. In this vein, the female Anglo-American sense of personhood required constant renegotiation over time. Several life events often caused Anglo-American women to reflexively question their migrant lives, opening up the possibility for major life changes. Upon divorce or widowhood, many volunteers returned to their home country. 'I've seen a constant stream of women return to the United States', Libby told me. 'Either they are divorced or they are widowed, and they can't really afford to live here. They can't find jobs.' Despite decades away from their home society, these women's opportunities remained stronger there. Libby's narrative provided a poignant example. 'One of my friends worked as a high school teacher before she moved to Italy, and then twenty-five years later, when her husband died, she went back to her home town because she couldn't afford to stay, and she got her old job back, at the exact same school!' Despite living for more years in Italy than in the United States, Libby's friend had not managed to build up the required connections and skills to find work. Such stories were often told in public spheres, reinforcing the volunteers' continued collective sense of marginality.

Following divorce, however, many of the old timers realized they had few connections left in their country of origin and chose to stay. 'My parents were dead, my friends had all moved, I didn't really have much to go back to', Sandra, a seventy-year-old divorcee, told me. 'All my friends are here'. Divorce and confronting the choice to return to their home country made many women consciously evaluate their social networks. Many realized that

their deepest and most enduring ties existed within Anglo-American groups. Having decided to remain in Italy 'for good', they felt a strong need to invest in these ties. As a consequence they became increasingly engaged in Anglo-American groups and dedicated considerable energy to such networks. Major life changes acted as the reflective means through which participants could step back and envisage themselves as situated social beings with limited options.

For younger women facing divorce, the decision to remain or return was more difficult. Francesca, the Italian divorce lawyer, described the typical characteristics of her recent clients, providing an anecdotal profile of recent marriage and divorce patterns. The women, she explained, were nearly all American, aged about thirty, and married for about five years: 'They get married immediately and have children, and then they feel like they are stuck here, like they are in prison, and this is the crisis period'. The problem was, she said, that '[t]hey have fallen out of love with Italy and their husband and they are terribly homesick for the States. Italy was not what they expected it to be. It's hard to find jobs here too.'

The choice of return, however, was not always available to such women. Those who had children found themselves governed by international laws. In order for these mothers to take their children out of the country, Francesca explained, they had to gain consent from their ex-husbands. 'Usually the men don't give it, because Italian fathers want to stay in touch with the kids.' Despite this, some of her clients did attempt to return to the United States with their children.

They try and go back to the States, and it's a real crime, and they get stopped. They come and ask me, 'Can I go back?' And I say, 'Yes if you have the consent – but if not, don't even try'. The [governments] are very severe with this, and they have a trial there and are told to come back. This is international law: The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction; Interpol works together to enforce this in all signature countries.

Francesca noted that her clients had often, prior to divorce, worked for their husband's business, 'and they had all the friends together, and when they split up ... she has no friends and is lonely, and usually I suggest ... to make their own friends, to have their own community'. Forced to remain in Italy, and now without the familial, work and friendship networks associated with their husbands, such women often, as Francesca suggested, turned heavily to Anglo-American institutions for support and opportunities. Francesca was not the only person to draw a connection between divorced and lonely Anglo-American women and their charity groups. Many women recounted to me this predicament of child custody. Like a proverbial warning, it functioned to remind young and old Anglo-American women of the

dangers their migrant lives posed to the freely choosing individual, and to inflect Anglo-American narratives with gendered stories of hardship.

Retirement

Retirement changed women's lives and their ideas of the self. With retirement came more free time that women wished to fill with 'productive' activities. For many, this phase also coincided with their adult children leaving home. Sandra, a dedicated ACG and American Church volunteer, explained that when her children moved out of home the friendships she had formed through her children with Italian mothers did not endure. Although she had been unaware of it at the time, such social ties had been premised on the shared task of motherhood and needed children to mediate them. In search of new friendships she had turned more exclusively to Anglo-American groups.

With retirement also came a longitudinal perspective of social change. Many old timers felt Florence had degraded socially from the 'early days'. When I asked how the city had changed, Betty explained, 'For the worse. Florentines used to be a happier lot – you used to hear whistling and singing down the street, and you didn't think that is a nutty person ... old people on their bicycles whistling, it was a different atmosphere'. Jane placed the blame for such social decay at the feet of foreigners.

Today we have all these other people here, I mean foreigners were very few when I came here, and especially [American] students. I mean now it has become an international city, then it was *very* provincial. All this migration has made it much dirtier; when I first came here ... I never felt there was anyone that would knock me over and take my bag ... and there weren't people living on the street, at least not visibly. It seems to me it has lost its essential Italian spirit, because of all the other people who have put their input into it. It was purer ... It seems to me the Florentines are getting less, and we have so many of these *extracomunitari*.

The tourist/migration trend that brings migrants to an idyllic location is, ironically, often seen by the same migrants to ruin the authenticity of such a space over time (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a). Thus the problems caused by drunken American students were a constant topic of discussion for volunteers. Moreover, some participants perceived the increase in *extracomunitari*, or migrants from developing nations such as Eastern Europe and North Africa, as a threat to the 'true character' (historically oriented urban idyll) of Florence. Not surprisingly then, Anglo-American charity work was largely directed at these groups, including a weekly dinner for American students, a food bank for the needy, fundraising events for local charities and church

handouts to the poor, which all served predominantly *extracomunitari* recipients. The old timers who chose to stay in Italy upon retirement worked hard to reverse the 'social decay' and recreate the world they had first sought (imagined) in coming to Italy. Tourist dreams lived on in settler lives.

Reflections

Identity politics are often deployed to bolster claims for resources and legitimacy. Yet they commonly do so by strategically glossing over complexity and creating a stereotyped image of unified experience. For Anglo-American women in Florence, personal memories were connected to a 'collective memory' intrinsic to a shared sense of female migrant experience. The Anglo-American community was framed and experienced as a place to find friendship, self-esteem, solidarity, independence and self-empowerment. The narratives of this chapter demonstrate that most women struggled to feel accepted, connected or empowered within Florentine life. Anglo-American women 'linked women's subjectivities to operations of exclusion' (Aretxaga 1997: 105). Such subjectivities, however, were not simple. By describing the *extracomunitari* migrants of modern-day Florence, and their own elite tourist experiences, they also used these narratives to express their position as privileged migrants – a theme that will be explored further in subsequent chapters. Reflection on gender and class therefore intersected to position volunteers as migrants simultaneously empowered and disempowered within local life.

The remainder of this book will show that charity was a key avenue through which these Anglo-American women attempted to make desired connections, 'become involved', feel useful, and gain recognition. As Aretxaga (1997: 18) shows, 'any positing of identity entails a claim to political space, just as any account of experience is a claim to existential recognition and presence'. By claiming marginality, these women justified the need for Anglo-American, English-speaking-only spaces. By also asserting a privileged migrant status, they positioned their groups as elite spaces, making the public performance of charity and benevolence towards less privileged migrants a logical practice. For the core volunteers of charity groups, who wielded decision-making power and gained social recognition in such groups, narratives about the shared experiences that female Anglo-Americans faced were important domains through which they could reiterate the importance of their groups to the wider Anglo-American community and enhance their own influence, visibility, self-worth and relational ties. This illustrates how subjectivities are always articulated in performative contexts of power (Kondo 1990; Aretxaga 1997). I have, moreover, explained

these stories as a form of objectification whereby the women's internal experiences took on an external narrative form, and were able to circulate within Anglo-American groups as objects of reflexive 'cultural' knowledge. In such stories, knowledge – in the form of knowledge of stereotypes and stereotypical cultural knowledge – constituted an important means by which to demonstrate membership in the Anglo-American community.

Yet narratives were never completed and notions of success had to contend with a sense of failure. As Charlotte explained to me:

[Living overseas and raising children] helps you to let go of the suitcases that you drag around that aren't just baggage from your past but hopes for your future. When you live overseas you are forced to throw those in the river. One day life just says, 'okay, give that one up, because that will never happen'. And I say, 'wait a minute you can't just give up hope – I am a good Anglo-Saxon, I can delay gratification, but I am not willing to give it up completely!' But that's what living in a foreign culture does; you learn to give that up. So destiny wrenches the suitcases out of those hands and you are angry about it for a long time.

While the women tried to narrate success and agency, their reflections were far from smooth and cohesive. Reflexive identity work was an iterative, fragile process. In order to create an Anglo-American community, narratives were not enough. Telling personal stories and remembering the past took place within the collective everyday practices of charity group activities in which such stories of the self could be put to the test.

Chapter 3

FOOD, COMMUNITY AND INCORPORATION WORK



Cucinare è voler bene (To cook is to love).

– Italian proverb, written in Kay’s kitchen, ACG cooking lesson

Our senses of self are never simple or coherent. As Barbara Myerhoff ([1979] 1994: 183) argues, a ‘group’s ideology is never completely systematized or internally integrated. People mobilize one norm for one occasion and an opposing norm for another, unperturbed by their contradictory premises.’ In the previous chapter I illustrated how oppositional identity was created through narratives of settlement. In this chapter I show that the formation of an Anglo-American community in Florence depended on a second movement, often in tension with the first. Anglo-American women formed social networks and community bonds through what I term ‘incorporation work’. Studies of affluent migrant clubs and expatriate women’s groups often focus on the maintenance of borders between these groups and their host society, utilizing such metaphors as ‘cocooning’ and ‘living in a bubble’ (Fechter 2007a). While the borders of and within the Anglo-American community were indeed visible, they were not simply in contrast to outside Others. Rather, volunteers formed their Anglo-American community by demonstrating their incorporation beyond the bound of their own group, and through attempting to extend the borders of their community outwards.

The ethnographic lens I use to explore incorporation work focuses on rituals surrounding food. For Anglo-American women in Florence, charitable giving and fundraising activities commonly centred on gifts of food, and meal-sharing rituals. Italy is a seductive locale to enact charitable commensality: Italian cuisine has an international reputation and a global reach, and many women regarded Tuscan food experiences as a deeply appealing aspect of life in Italy. Discovering the regional food specialties was often an integral part of migrant women’s first engagements with local life and people. Anthropologists frequently examine food practices as a means through which

relations are constituted. Cross-culturally, feasting and food sharing have been shown to express and create both solidarity and status distinctions (see, for example, Young 1971; Douglas 1984; Tierney 1993). Cooking, eating and sourcing food for charity were central components of Anglo-American volunteers' philanthropic enterprises in Florence. By basing their interaction on gendered food practices, ACG and the American Church placed women at the centre of volunteering work and at the heart of community-building practices and incorporation work.

Recent analyses of community argue that the concept should not be theoretically reified or categorized, but taken as a multi-layered aspiration used in diverse ways to wide-reaching ends (e.g. Amit 2002; Creed 2006a and 2006b; Curtis 2008). The ethnographic moments outlined below demonstrate the complex and often countervailing ideals and effects that the performance of community produces, the conflicts that community maintenance relies upon and creates, and the ways in which the enactment of community can ultimately subvert its own ideals. This does not aim to expose community solidarity as an illusion, but rather reveal how categories of collective experience and purpose manage to hold together and remain meaningful for those who claim them, with all their tensions and contradictions intact and often visible.

Incorporation Work

Recently scholars of migration have more finely calibrated theories of diasporic and transnational migrants, moving beyond descriptions of fluid lives and disembedded liminality (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Fechter 2007a). Scholars have thus focused on how mobile migrants make active use of and transform a range of localized identity resources and emplaced forms of belonging, and contextually enable and enforce social and spatial boundaries and mobilities (e.g. Lave 2003; Hage 2005; Trundle 2010; Bönisch-Brednich 2010; Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle 2010; Benson 2011). In such practices the use of the concept 'community' continues to be variously employed, acting as an affectively charged category to describe diverse forms of sociality, intimacy, temporality, movement and place.

Migrant groups can try to realize the ideals of community in varied ways depending on their goals and experiences. Migrants that highly value or idealize the host society into which they move often treat the boundaries between their own group and the host society in different ways to other migrant groups, such as refugees. Financially secure 'lifestyle migrants', who act out of choice and aspire to a new and improved way of life abroad

(Benson and O'Reilly 2009b), depend on their new migrant lives successfully demonstrating the ideal values that they sought to locate in local life (Benson 2011). For Anglo-American volunteers, demonstrating connections to 'the local community' provided avenues through which a successful migrant identity was individually and collectively forged. Accomplishing incorporation work allowed the idealized migrant dreams that brought participants to Tuscany to be socially performed and ritually realized.

Making Community

Anglo-American women in Florence referred to themselves as a 'community', and made active use of the concept of community to discuss and describe 'local' Tuscan life. Community is a commonsensical term used ubiquitously in a wide range of social settings within contemporary life. It has also remained a core concept utilized, deconstructed and reconstructed within social analysis. A foundational anthropological theory of community, specifically useful to this chapter's task, charts the symbolic contours of identity categories. Anthony Cohen (1985) argues that a group's identity is constituted by and made salient at its outer border. It realizes itself and finds coherence in opposition to outside groups. Identity politics, many scholars point out, aim to 'erect and maintain stable boundaries between groups' (Caldwell 2004: 128; see also Evans-Pritchard 1940; Barth 1969; Boon 1982; Banks 1996; Rapport 1997). The boundary thus 'encapsulates the identity of the community' (Cohen 1985: 12).

The sense of social self at the level of both individuality and collectivity are informed by implicit or explicit contrast. Individuals are said to define themselves by reference to a significant 'other'; likewise 'self-conscious' cultures and communities ... Since the vitality of cultures lies in their juxtaposition, they exaggerate themselves and each other. Culture is thus inherently antithetical. (Cohen 1985: 115)

This conception of identity is necessarily relational, uncovering where similarities and differences are socially mapped. It suggests that the real and imagined Other is an essential component to the definition of self, more so than the content of shared identity categories themselves.

People become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundaries: when they encounter other cultures, or when they become aware of other ways of doing things, or merely of contradictions to their own culture. The norm is the boundary ... Such an awareness is a necessary precondition for the valuing of culture and community ... and is a precondition for its maintenance. (Cohen 1985: 69)

When first published, Cohen's work offered an important challenge to the essentialist claims of community identity and the structuralist assumptions of some social theorists. These approaches took community to be a social glue, safeguarding against the anomie and automizing forces of an urbanizing, industrializing world, or as a form of social solidarity and communitarianism in contradistinction to emerging individuality (Redfield 1955; Durkheim [1893] 1964; Putnam 2000; Tönnies [1887] 2001). Cohen instead revealed the constructed and symbolic basis of identity work.

Cohen's approach has been critiqued for its limitations. His assertion that a community's vitality is crafted through opposition did not square with the emerging work on hybrid, diasporic and cosmopolitan modes of being. Scholars have also pointed out that the concept 'community' does not just describe symbolic boundaries, but performs efficacious political and ideological work, in part for what it evokes as threatened or lacking. Zygmunt Bauman details the ongoing seductiveness of the concept community in contemporary post-industrial life, and its common usage in referring to 'a "warm" place, cosy and comfortable place ... in a community, we all understand each other well, we may trust what we hear, we are safe most of the time and ... we are never strangers' (Bauman 2001: 3–4). Through the concept of community one can critique a wide range of perceived social ills within modern life. As a multivalent aspirational concept (Creed 2006a), community is also used in order to essentialize a group's links to place and their claims for resources and voice. And it is used to naturalize forms of social categorization when state regimes attempt to govern emergent 'populations' or devolve social responsibility to collectives in a neoliberal system (Bauman 1996; Rose 1996; Curtis 2008). Despite scholars' attempts to problematize or even abandon the community concept as a theoretical tool (e.g. Young 1986), these wider uses and diverse meanings illustrate the salience and power of notions of 'community' in contemporary life, and the continuing importance of scholarship exploring the aspirations and social effects enabled by invocations of the community ideal.

As Vered Amit (2002) has shown, a focus on the symbolic and discursive aspects of community also leaves under-explored the fabric of intersubjective relations that rely upon affect, intimacy and material modes of engagement. Jennifer Curtis (2008) demonstrates that a sense of community can depend as equally on sensation, knowledge and emplaced memory as on the symbolic realm. The phenomenological elements of such relations, therefore, are just as important as the contrastive politics of boundary making. In his theorizations of symbolic community, Cohen recognized this and proposed that, when defining themselves as a 'community', a group does not refer to an abstracted and purely symbolic entity, but rather 'a reality, invested with all the sentiments attached to kinship, friendship,

neighbouring, familiarity, jealousy, as they inform the social process of everyday life' (Cohen 1985: 13).

Since the 1990s social scientists have shifted their gaze from the boundary of group categories towards the situational enactments of 'alterity', 'otherness' and the politics of difference. Contra Cohen, rather than seeking to define a group's identity as a form of categorization that can be mapped with relative precision against other discreet groups, scholars have sought to chart the contextual performances of difference. When traced through the filaments of everyday lives, these expose a range of creative transformations, contradictions and 'competing social impulses' (Povinelli 2002: 5). For example, a celebration of difference in liberal multiculturalism butts up against an intolerance of 'repugnant difference' (ibid.); otherness can be transformed into valuable resources, opportunistically commodified in cross-cultural encounters (Davidov 2010); and oppressive representations of alterity can be re-appropriated and given new signification when transported along transnational routes (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). The boundaries between groups, such scholars demonstrate, are never stable, and are creatively deployed with complex consequences and costs. Yet alterity and otherness remain vaguely defined in this literature, and perhaps consciously so: as versatile tools embedded within contemporary conflicts, they can be put to diverse ends. By contrast, the earlier work on the symbolic construction of boundaries sets a more exact, seemingly rigid task: that of mapping how groups symbolically demarcate the centre and periphery of their group categories against 'outsiders'.

Here I return to the question of boundary maintenance and the oppositional work of community, yet do so in light of recent approaches to community and the politics of difference that explore the affective, situated, contradictory and fluid 'doing' of community categorization (Creed 2006a). For Anglo-American women in Tuscany, the boundary was indeed crucial in the creation and assertion of community, but not as Cohen originally formulated it. For these migrants, dwelling at the centre of the Anglo-American community meant demonstrating an ability to exist comfortably at its border, and often outside it. But by trying to find incorporation within Tuscan life, the volunteers took on roles that marked them as cultural experts, cultural Others, and long-term migrants, and throughout their narratives were countervailing stories of isolation, distinction and disappointment.

Arcadian Dreams

As discussed in Chapter 2, on first arriving in Florence, Anglo-American women experienced the city as an urban idyll. Participants' perceptions of

place also extended to include a Tuscan Arcadia, and a 'traditional southern' Italian sphere. In both, food practices were used as key symbols of a particular ideal of community living to which many volunteers made claims. Every month of my fieldwork I attended an ACG fundraising cooking lesson. Each lesson was hosted by an ACG volunteer in her home. These volunteers always lived in the Tuscan countryside within a forty-minute driving radius of Florence. An excerpt from my field notes details one lesson:

I received a lift with Tina, an Australian, to the April cooking lesson. We arrived at 10.30 A.M. at our 'hostess' Kay's house. Originally from Wales, Kay had for seven years lived with her Italian male partner in the Chianti countryside in a fully restored and converted three-storey mill. Kay was wearing a pink mohair cardigan, tidy jeans and a silk ribbon choker necklace. She offered the eight attending women fresh coffee prepared in a Neapolitan coffee pot. We sat in a lounge filled with antique furniture upholstered with stylish fabrics, an open fire warming us. Soon we proceeded to her kitchen to begin cooking. I noticed there were few supermarket items in her fridge. Everything was wrapped in the waxy brown paper typical of 'local family-run' specialist stores. She began teaching us how to cook a simple celery risotto and the traditional Florentine Lenten cake *schacciata alla fiorentina*, dusted with an icing sugar *giglio*: the fleur symbol of Florence. She explained that she was given the cake recipe from the old 'ladies of Greve' in the next valley over. She told us the old beam in her kitchen was milled by the local villagers who 'carted it here'. As we sat to eat she explained from which local family farms she had procured her olive oil and wine. We ate off plates crafted by an old Tuscan family firm that many of the ACG guests recognized. Kay told us that she and her partner were passionate about preserving Tuscan food traditions. Afterwards she cut up the left-over cake, wrapping each piece in brown paper and tying them with natural twine into parcels for us each.

Driving home, Tina admitted that she would feel too embarrassed to offer her house as a venue. 'My house, it's just not quite enough', she said. I had visited her home many times and considered it a lovely two-storey city house, filled with traditional Tuscan furniture, a dining table for ten, three bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms and a beautiful garden. I wondered how she could feel so anxious. I thought back to other cooking lessons and realized the bar was indeed set opulently high. I had cooked in the kitchens of a four-storey tower, a large villa with drawing room walls covered in eighteenth-century early impressionist landscape paintings, and a ten-room villa with *trompe l'Oeil* paintings and frescos from the eighteenth century adorning its walls.

At first glance this extract can be read as an example of the role food rituals played in creating status distinction within the Anglo-American

community. Only women affluent enough to own impressive villas offered to lead cooking lessons, demonstrating a historical continuity with their aristocratic forbearers. Anglo-American migrants of the nineteenth century performed their social standing to each other by purchasing or renting and then restoring villas that had once belonged to powerful aristocratic Tuscan families. Historical memoirs from Anglo-American migrants of this time are replete with examples of drawing room parties, receptions and afternoon teas, key rituals through which membership to such an elite group could be negotiated (see, for example, Lubbock 1906; Ross 1912; Waterfield 1961; Neville-Sington 1998). In continuing these class-based rituals, a group of my participants utilized ideas and practices of unhurried leisure to express social distinction. Cooking lessons took up most of a morning and afternoon, thus excluding those members who lacked extended periods of free time – for example, those who worked during the week.

Yet while such rituals affirmed hosting women's membership of an elite group of wealthy migrants, they also allowed participants to demonstrate what they deemed to be Italian cultural competency and Italian relational connectedness. The version of rural Italian community to which they attempted to connect in cooking lessons was Arcadian, and one that downplayed hierarchy, conflict and change. This is not to suggest that they experienced rural living so simplistically, but through most of the public rituals in which they presented rural subjecthood to each other, the complexities and contradictions of rural living were often absent. The recipes taught were often 'traditional', originating from older female villagers. Participants sometimes jokingly referred to these women with the adjective 'DOC'. This acronym stands for '*(Vino a) Denominazione di Origine Controllata*', or 'certification of authentic origin'. Such a quality assurance label is awarded to vineyards in Italy that preserve regionally specific grape varieties and wine-making techniques (MiPAAF 2009). By using this label for certain Italian people, the volunteers were mimicking Italian models of regional demarcation and identification (cf. Schneider 1998; Stanley 2008), making assertions about who could be considered authentic symbols of Tuscan rural personhood and 'community' and their own proximity to such networks (cf. Benson 2011: 146–48).

By buying food and collecting recipes from 'DOC Tuscans', cooking lesson hosts hoped to help to preserve the 'artisan' nature of their villages against modern, industrial food systems (supermarkets, mass-produced products). Many thought such non-traditional food systems do not engender 'community' relationality: the ongoing and face-to-face ties one should form with food producers based on loyalty, friendship, a certain level of reciprocal gift giving and unhurried interchange (cf. Sutton 2001). 'When I go into a shop in my village', an American woman named Sandy told me

at a cooking lesson, 'they know my name, they give me something special every once-in-a-while, and we'll often just [start] chatting away. My butcher, Marcello, he even knows my dog's name. I always ask how his son is who moved to Torino a few years back.' In their public presentations of selves, volunteers emphasized that 'community life' was based on gift giving and intimate ties. By underscoring the narrative efficacy of such conversations, I am not suggesting that in reality the women failed to build up such gift-giving relations in rural villages. Rather, in public ritualized talk they tended to reduce the variety of their village relations to those that represented the harmony and intimacy of country life.

Many women took inspiration from 'Slow Food', a now global movement that originated in Italy in 1989. Slow Food advocates the preservation of local, artisanal food traditions against the perceived encroachment of industrial, mass-produced foodstuffs, prioritizing the ties food consumers and producers build up with localized and regionally bounded eco systems, skills and knowledge, and economies (Miele and Murdoch 2002). Slow Food critiques the modern economic imperatives that drive ever-busier lives, and instead 'exalts leisure and pleasure as an antidote to the blind pursuit of efficiency' (Pilcher 2006: 69). Conceptions of 'time' are ideally reconfigured so as not to be governed by economic efficiency (quantity), but rather by the 'quality' and durability of human relations (Caldwell 2006: 99). According to the movement, 'slow' living also allows 'ecological harmony' to prevail over the desire for profits. As Richard Wilk shows, 'food is a potent symbol of what ails society, a way of making abstract issues ... into material, visceral reality' (Wilk 2006: 21–22).

The 'traditional' Italian food systems that volunteers venerated and that Slow Food seeks to preserve are, however, relatively modern practices.¹ Moreover, the values that Anglo-American women adopted from the Italian Slow Food movement were selective, lacking reference to the movement's left-wing critiques of global food production or ecological crises.² Instead participants focused on a romantic veneration of the natural and traditional, and the leisure of food activities. Slow Food thus relied upon a form of nostalgia whereby representations of time and space collapsed into 'generic, imagined and stylized accounts of "the good old days"' (Caldwell 2006: 106). Participants realized the moral economies of close-knit food practices through emphasizing the rich sociality of food, and the ability of commensality to create enduring community.³

These Tuscan-specific themes are loosely tied to a wider nostalgia for a morally virtuous Arcadian past that is evident in Britain, the United States and other Anglo settler countries. Broadly, these ideals can be traced back to Romantic thought, responses to urbanization and industrialization, and shifts in Christian doctrine regarding 'nature' that began during the

Enlightenment, all of which have led to the increased veneration of ‘natural spaces’ (Williams 1975; Massey 1994; Halfacree 1995; Pratt 1992; Creed 2006b). Migrants to Florence have sought such idealized natural spaces for centuries. As Katie Campbell makes clear, Anglo-Americans in Florence in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused much of their attention on the countryside surrounding Florence and the rural features of villa life: ‘These villas represented the essence of Florence. Since the eighteenth century, gentlemen on the Grand Tour had populated images of the city painted from the hill towns [around Florence] ... These panoramas reinforced the idea that Florence was merely the focal point of a vast landscape’ (Campbell 2009: 26).

Yet volunteer women not only relied upon the resources provided by a historically enduring Anglo-American cultural narrative. They also utilized local expressions of a rural idyll. Many Anglo-American women had married into middle- and upper-class Italian families, who regarding the Tuscan countryside as a healthy and pure location, a space for periodic escapes from the climate of low-lying urban Florence, which can be chillingly cold in the winter and stagnantly hot in the summer. Many Tuscan villas were originally built in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to allow aristocratic families to escape the crowded city space of Florence, and to take advantage of the refreshing country breeze. While many wealthy Florentines of this era regarded the city as a space of commerce, the countryside was a space for relaxation and contemplation (Campbell 2009). As I have detailed elsewhere (Trundle 2010), migrants can make use of the perceived identity resources available to them in the host society in order to make claims of belonging, often embracing them with greater vigour than ‘locals’ do. Correspondingly, the collective migrant identity that Anglo-American women performed through food rituals mimicked perceived host society ideals, and demonstrated knowledge of local moral norms. Through this they attempted to exhibit both incorporation within Italian life and compatibility between Anglo-American and Italian community ideals.

Southern Food

In romantically idealizing ‘tradition’, southern Italian food also served as a marker of close-knit community, ideas of the family, and simple, natural living. Demonstrating knowledge of these food traditions, albeit in a gentrified form, helped certain Anglo-American women to garner public prestige. An example of this moral rhetoric can be seen in an extract from my field notes. At one ACG meeting the guest speaker was a food writer.

Angie was a vibrant American woman in her fifties. She wore colourful clothes and long bead necklaces. She wrote food articles for *Bon Appetite* and *Gourmet* magazines, she informed us, and had published two cookery books. She now lived in Tuscany. She began by recalling how she recently took part in a celebrity cooking competition in the United States, where she had been sabotaged because someone double-salted her pasta. 'I was bound to win', she assured us. She had prepared simple, authentic Italian: spaghetti cooked *al dente* with excellent olive oil and fresh parsley. All the other contestants had used all of the ingredients on offer. Her approach to food was minimalist: to use only two or three best-quality ingredients, just like traditional southern Italian peasant food.

She then told a story of smuggling unpasteurized buffalo yoghurt through United States customs as hand cream with a fake label. She wanted to serve it as a '*pre-dolce*' [before dessert] dish with honey, to cleanse the palate. The audience giggled. Angie said that the farm producing such buffalo mozzarella in Naples gave the animals homeopathic medicines and wouldn't let them stay in a 'muddy swamp' as it caused 'dirty bacteria' to reside on their skin. Instead they slept on rubber mats with a fine mist spray. She warned us that 'refrigeration kills the flavour and texture of *mozzarella di bufala*'.

Next, Angie turned to the topic of olive oil, explaining that most people don't realize they're eating rancid olive oil because they have not tasted 'the real thing'. She had brought in a few bottles of her favourite olive oil from Sicily, for us to try. She named its tiny village of origin and asked who knew it. Several women said they had been there, while a few others nodded, affirming they knew its whereabouts. She then described the 'idyllic' and 'untouched' location, a great place for a holiday.

Finally, she turned to her own history, recalling how she had learned to cook in the south in a little trattoria with two Michelin stars that served 'Italian home cooking', run by a husband and wife. 'Home cooking in Italy is the best – if you ask Italians who's the best cook, it's always *la mamma*'. She then gave us her recipe for *spaghetti al pomodoro*: 'quartered *pomodori* [cherry tomatoes], *aglio* [garlic], a little *peperoncino* [chilli], high quality olive oil, and a little *prez-zemolo* [parsley]'. At the end of her talk she received rapturous applause, most women beaming with enthusiasm. Next to me sat Janice, an English volunteer for ACG and the American Church. She whispered that she thought the talk was 'a load of pretentious twaddle ... Americans can be so self-promoting'. She rolled her eyes. 'And that olive oil was boring – nothing on the stuff we get near our [Tuscan] country house.'

Southern food stories reinforced many elements of the tourist/migrant dream that had brought Anglo-American women to Italy: the kin-based society (family restaurant, home cooking), living in harmony with nature (animal welfare, organic), simple, slow-paced living (minimalist recipes), and adventure and leisure (southern holidays, 'smuggling' goods). Both Tuscan and southern food stereotypes relied upon regional rather than national cultural markers. In this sense the volunteers were connecting their own identity work to identity typologies within Italy. Scholars have noted the historical significance of regional identities in Italy (Cole 1997; Stanley 2008), and Anglo-American assertions of southern culture tie in to a long-standing 'radically dichotomous discourse of Orientalism' (Schneider 1998: 5) within Italian social and political spheres. Such a discourse casts southern regions as socially and economically backward, kin-centred, and governed by irrational, premodern thought (*ibid.*; see also, for example, Chubb 1982; Putnam 1993). Anglo-American women's engagements with a southern ideal through food may have taken the more positive elements of this typology, but they were nonetheless imbued with these stereotypes.

As illustrated in Chapter 2, many Anglo-American women were drawn to Florence because it represented a space in which they could, as Henry James described, 'turn aside from the modern world' (James 1909: 381). By pursuing this particular vision of Arcadia through food rituals, participants were attempting to fulfil their original vision of migration. Performing such food expertise was prestigious for volunteer women because it allowed them to demonstrate to each other that they were realizing, through daily practices, an Anglo-American dream, and were integrating into local rural communities. It confirmed to participants that this dream was and should continue to be obtainable, even if in other areas of their lives (such as friendships, work and family) such an 'Italian dream' had been only partially or precariously achieved.

Janice's dismissive response to Angie's food talk (in the field notes extract above) shows how participants could draw national distinctions regarding the correct performative styles of 'food talk'. In doing so, some women challenged the authority of other women's food expertise, positioning themselves as more centrally connected to local life. A further form of distinction within the food rituals detailed above involved volunteers constantly peppering their conversations with Italian words and phrases. During cooking lessons, if an Italian volunteer was present – they could always speak English well – the other volunteers would speak for extended periods in Italian, helping those who hesitated in their speech with Italian vocabulary prompts. In these situations, recently arrived women were sidelined, and often looked visibly awkward. Despite being declared an 'English-speaking group', Italian

language was used in ACG rituals to reinforce claims of inclusion and integration within 'Italian life' that distanced others from such a category.⁴

Countervailing Experiences

Despite participants' portrayals of an idyllic version of local community, their narratives did not always prove so tidy. In the private and reflective space offered by life history interviews, some women contemplated the relationship between reality and dreams, and these unsettling contradictions complicated their stories of Anglo-American migration. During an interview with Hesta, an American who had lived in Tuscany for five years, she expressed unease with such romantic ideals:

Hesta: I think it's fair to say, many of us came ... we all had this vision of Tuscany, it was gonna be like those books you read about moving to Tuscany, do you know ...?

Catherine: No, what are they like?

Hesta: Well, there's an old farmhouse [on] a hill with cypress trees, and [a] little village where the old people talk about the war together, and singing in the local *osteria*, sharing their harvest wine (laughs).

Hesta's nervous laughter was as important as her words. Many women knew that the harmonious dream was imaginary, and that living the Tuscan village life was a richly textured mix of conflict and cohesion, historical continuities and social change.

Narratives always speak on many levels, subversive sub-themes cutting against the grain of dominant discourses. A small amount of talk within Anglo-American groups sought to deal with the disappointment of discovering the complexity of country life. In one cooking lesson, these themes percolated through the rural food talk.

We arrived at a large villa, forty-five minutes' drive from Florence. It was set on a gentle hill with a valley of vineyards below. It was stunning, like a postcard of a perfect Tuscan landscape beneath a hazy, rose-tinted sky. Our hostess, Alana, came out to meet us at the bottom of her villa's steps, and welcomed us in. We ventured inside to a lounge. A fire burned in an open fireplace, and antique furniture was arranged on a terracotta-tiled floor. Above were high vaulted, wooden-beamed ceilings. A New Zealand woman, Bella, told me that I should go and look at all the paintings on the walls, as they were all early impressionist paintings that Alana had bought while living around Europe. 'It's really just like a gallery in here.' She added that Alana wouldn't be one to show off, but I should go and look. Feeling like I was being nosy,

I went to peruse. The paintings were set in ornate golden frames, depicting picturesque rural scenes. Bella added I could tell people that I went to a 'lady's house which was like an art gallery'. Six ACG women gathered in Alana's kitchen and, with warm humour, Alana began to show us how to cook the dishes. We began to make a liver pate, a duck casserole cooked with balsamic vinegar, and a rich chocolate dessert. Alana had already set the table with antique-style crockery and silver cutlery. Decorating the farm-style kitchen was an old butter churn, a timeworn hand-pumped espresso coffee machine, and a copper polenta pot hung on the wall. An old coal range stood beside a modern gas oven.

As we chopped and cooked we discussed how to cook polenta, with each woman giving her own recipe. An American woman, Stephanie, recalled how she made bread in a new wood oven that she and her husband had built with the help of various men in her village. She gave each helper some bread to take home, and after that, 'well, I never heard the end of it!' All the men's wives, when they next saw her, instructed her how to make better bread, and while it was hard, she felt she had 'learned a lot'. As we sat down to eat lunch, we talked about the difficulty in meeting Italian women. Carla, an Italian member of ACG who for years had lived overseas, said that most Italian women have 'a very small world which just revolves around their families and you are born into social groups here'. Alana said that she just finds she has 'nothing to talk about with local women', that they can be so boring, and 'not at all interested in, for example, if you have been to Tunisia. They don't want to find out how it is there.' Alana added that local women talk about what they had for dinner, and gossip, and 'that was it'.

Carla then told me she went to an international school, and she was very pleased when I complimented her English. She told me that Florentines are a little arrogant and think they are better than anyone else and are quite closed. I noted that the red wine we were drinking was in an unlabelled ornate glass bottle and tasted divine. Carla mentioned which vineyard it came from, and there were many 'mms' of approval. The New Zealander, Bella, asked me about my home city of Wellington and grew visibly nostalgic as I described the developments of its waterfront area. She told me she feels homesick sometimes and her husband doesn't want her to go home on her own to New Zealand, but it was hard for him to accompany her as he did not speak English. She described in lively detail her converted farmhouse in the Tuscan countryside. After the meal I offered to do the dishes but Alana waved me away, saying that 'there is a maid to do that'. As we left, Carrie, an English woman, described feeling guilty for taking a whole day off from her work at home and her fundraising activities for Tuscan charities.

These food events rarely provided a coherent sense of migrant belonging. While at once demonstrating their ties to rural social networks, participants also expressed forms of status and experiences of disconnection, immobility, and cultural differences. In connecting themselves to a rural idyll, some women also distinguished themselves from a relationally homogeneous image of local life. One cooking lesson participant described the difficulty of getting good hired home help in rural villages, while a cooking lesson host described her maid as 'typically negative and complaining, like many local women'. Hosts often described the discomfort they experienced due to the difficulty of heating such majestic rooms with high vaulted ceilings, and they sometimes retreated to living in only a few rooms of their grand homes. Some complained of the remoteness of such picturesque and quiet locations. Through such comments, participants presented their experiences of Tuscan rural life as entailing privilege, social isolation and discomfort. Moreover, as Carrie's comment above illustrates, the ethic of unhurried leisure within cooking lessons contended with some participants' commitment to a charitable ethic or hard work, an ethic explored in the next chapter.

These counter-narratives slipped out in passing conversations, often through quiet, rueful humour. They served to express Anglo-American women's anxieties that fulfilling their migrant dream was a precarious achievement, threatened by the complex reality of the very factors that appeared to fulfil it: tranquillity and social distinction. Despite these uncertainties, the positive moral values attached to an ideal rural community were embedded in collective Anglo-American life, reinforced and reiterated through the performance of food rituals. The dream of a Tuscan Arcadia worked as an important trope through which volunteer women could perform morally ideal selves to their group. Mastering these tropes, even only in symbolic, performative terms, helped to cast individual and collective migration quests as successful, illustrating that a lucky few had found their Tuscan paradise. Partaking in cooking lessons and 'cooking-speak' allowed Anglo-American women to affirm to each other that they had, in the form of food-based relationality, found what they were looking for. Food became a metaphor for a desired self (cf. Tierney 1993: 3).

Social Connectedness

Incorporation into an Italian social world was valorized not only for the migrant ideals it expressed and reinforced. It also enabled the types of relationships that charity work and voluntary organizations relied upon to succeed. Anglo-American women who had links to 'traditional' Italian communities were regarded as useful. By being on personal terms with 'traditional' food

producers and restaurateurs, they could procure for free goods and services that were highly valued by volunteers for raffle prizes at events such as the annual ACG bazaar. They could also obtain a 'good price' for items used for charitable dinners, or for fundraising events such as the ACG Christmas cocktail party. Women who procured these benefits were always named and thanked publicly, and listed in newsletters. The 'traditional' food goods they acquired were displayed at events, picked up, perused and commented on. Through volunteering, women could display their ties to Italian society, and convert these ties into prestige within Anglo-American groups.

In order to regularly buy food and wine from artisanal producers, or to attend restaurants frequently enough to build up the required relationality for gift giving and 'favours', Anglo-American women needed a sufficient level of wealth. Access to such relationships was ultimately underpinned by affluence. While most members of ACG were finically comfortable, some members of the American Church did not have the requisite incomes to build up these relations. As a result, students and low-income Americans, Africans and Sri Lankans were excluded from these prestige-building relations. As such, food-based social capital valued by the Anglo-American community was concentrated in the hands of older, white, female members.

Teaching Tradition

Incorporation work was a never-ending task for Anglo-American groups. In an interview, the American Church rector reflected on the difficulties of his job.

The shock of discovering that there isn't a lot of permanency, that the community is constantly moving and changing ... I think people join the church, when they may never have been churchgoers, because they need a community to belong to, and ... we do that very well, where people are accepted and are encouraged to join, apart from worship, it's an all-inclusive community.

The constant stream of new members and visitors looking for social contact led members of the American Church and ACG to continually practise incorporation work, and for the leaders of Anglo-American groups to become well versed in performing rituals of welcome. Established volunteers had little idea which of the short-term migrants, tourists and students would stay; but the possibility that some sojourning women would meet Italian men and stay was ever present. Every new face was a potential long-term parishioner and/or ACG member. The difficulty in determining which relations were worth investing with emotional energy was a constant issue, but having a default position of 'welcome' made sense in this context. These

rituals of incorporating newcomers into the Anglo-American community often ultimately aimed to connect newcomers to Italian life, and in the process, hierarchies and cultural expertise were exposed in the Anglo-American community.

In Florence, some Anglo-American volunteers consumed local food in ways that distanced themselves from the stereotypes of 'ignorant, uncultured' tourists and students. In doing so they found self-worth and a shared sense of incorporation. One day, as I volunteered in the church library, Irene, a 63-year-old American volunteer, exclaimed to me that students and tourists 'eat spaghetti with a spoon!' She rolled her eyes disapprovingly.⁵ Tourists drank cappuccinos after eleven A.M., which was such a 'no-no' in Italian culture, she informed me. And she 'absolutely hate[d]' that Americans ate early. She was thus always telling tourists, 'If you want to eat that early you're gonna get bad food'. She added that she detested being treated like a tourist, and when the waiters ask her if she wants a cappuccino after dinner, she replies, 'Come on, do you have to treat us like tourists?'

To counter these stereotypes, volunteers attempted to teach new migrants, tourists and students the 'correct' ways to enjoy Tuscan food, to incorporate them into a less stigmatized sphere of migrant belonging. While in the church undercroft and at ACG meetings, I constantly witnessed established Anglo-American migrants explaining to newcomers over coffee how not to be treated like a tourist: 'Don't giggle with embarrassment at Italian men, they think it's invitational flirting', or 'Italians don't wear shorts, only American tourists'. At a weekly American Church dinner for American college students, volunteers taught students about Italian food, bringing them good olive oil to taste, explaining that 'real' Tuscan food did not involve pasta, and suggesting restaurants where they might try the 'typical' bean dishes of rural Tuscany. Such conversations were both displays of seniority and superior knowledge, and attempts to impart to newcomers that in the 'Anglo-American community' of Florence, integration was a valued trait, and newcomers should learn to display markers of incorporation. Through this practice, knowledge that reduced the visibility of outsiderhood circulated from established group members to less established members, creating a hierarchy of inclusion. This illustrates how the performance of 'food traditions' can function to publicly articulate idealized selfhood, and gives 'immediate, material substance to the narratives of positive local identity' (Heatherington 2001: 334).

Reflections

Challenging theories of oppositional identity construction, I have argued that Anglo-American women who dwelt at the boundaries of their community

and performed incorporation work were central figures in these groups. Through rituals and practices centred on food, volunteers attempted to demonstrate their relational connections to a romanticized vision of rural Italian community. The most virtuous members of the community dwelt and worked at its boundary; being at the centre meant simultaneously inhabiting the periphery. Yet in working on incorporation through such food rituals, a range of other boundaries were situationally exposed within Anglo-American groups based on wealth, class, ethnicity, age, experience and knowledge. In building an Anglo-American community the volunteers encouraged those who did not know the group's unwritten rules and insider knowledge to aspire towards incorporation, and in the process those who did not have the social and financial capital to forge the requisite symbolic relations were less able to garner prestige. In doing so these volunteers created hierarchical gradations of inclusion and exclusion within their own community.

The ingestion of food, anthropologists note, is both richly symbolic of and central to practices of social incorporation (see, for example, Meigs 1987; Fischler 1988; Harbottle 2000). In anthropological studies, migrant food rituals are commonly understood as markers of ethnicity used to enhance group solidarity in contradistinction to the dominant host culture (Harbottle 2000; Lave 2001; Fechter 2007b). In this case study, certain food rituals were understood to engender the opposite effect. While they did reinforce an Anglo-American community through iterative commensality, they did so through various methods of incorporation, by symbolically and in practice drawing ties with a Tuscan social world into view. Cooking and eating became metaphors for individual and community transformation, from unknowing and unconnected outsiders into knowledgeable and relationally embedded people (cf. Lévi-Strauss [1970] 1992).

Yet the complex reality of local lives percolates through the paradisaical assertions of the migrant dream. Gerald Creed (2004) shows that 'community' can be as much constituted out of conflict as it can be out of solidarity. In this case study, Anglo-American community was ultimately created out of a conflict between valuing integration and feeling out of place; between dreaming of a new and improved life, and needing the deeper belonging that they could only find in a familiar Anglo-American lifeworld. Such a migrant milieu was valued for the rich sense of cultural and social commonality that it enabled among women with similar experiences of immigrant liminality. For volunteers, the iteration of shared food-based rituals over time provided the means through which their groups became places of familiar belonging. At its heart, a sense of Anglo-American community reflected time spent eating together – relations that were sensually embodied through shared practice.

In Anglo-American charity groups, prestige was expressed through showing what social experiences and cultural knowledge one had built up outside the bounds of the migrant community (cf. Benson 2011). The borders of the Anglo-American community were symbolically drawn around a site within which scarce resources and markers of integration did *not* originate. But these performative acts were directed to an audience of insiders – other Anglo-American migrants – demonstrating that it was, at a deeper level, a migrant community to which volunteer women ultimately claimed membership. The borders of the community did indeed shape the centre. But they did so not through opposition, as it was through their constant symbolic crossing, by incorporating in ‘local’ practices and objects and by venturing out into ‘typical’ Tuscan networks, that Anglo-American women could deem their community, and their migrant selves, successful. In the process, volunteers constructed their ideal of an Anglo-American community on a series of status distinctions, which contradicted the intimate and undifferentiated Tuscan sociality that they desired to emulate. They sought to ritually incorporate into their lives a society that in countervailing narratives and other collective and private spheres they reflexively defined as impenetrable, culturally unfamiliar and unwelcoming. Volunteers oscillated between experiences and assertions of inclusion and exclusion, and were never entirely certain of their status or place in Tuscany and Florence. The frictions between these divergent experiences and goals expose the ongoing and complex nature of migrant belonging, the shifting nature of group boundaries, and the unstable work involved in building community.

Chapter 4

ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT

CRAFTING CHARITABLE RELATIONS



Luke does not spiritualize his earthy gospel and does not talk symbolically about attenuating hunger. His Jesus looked at his church – his own disciples – as I can indeed look at some of my friends here in Florence, who come to my door or reach out their hands to receive communion each Sunday morning, and say to them as he did: ‘blessed are you poor people – yours is the reign of God in our time’. Blessed are you who came here hungry – I’ll see you have a good meal ... blessed are you excluded ones – lame, blind and deaf, gays, freaks, different – when they expel you from the church and make fun of you – be welcome here.

– *Rector’s sermon, Sunday Mass, American Church*

ACG is about people. More specifically, it’s about a group of women volunteering their time, energy and expertise to help others. In this way, the club is also about generosity – the generosity of wanting to do good things for others. ACG creates the need for us to work together. It brings us closer together.

– *ACG Board Member*

When carrying out charity work, volunteers often reflect upon the virtuous modes of relationality that best enable giving. For many voluntary organizations, the goal of improving charity recipients’ lives is the fruition of a prior moral project that seeks to foster what I term an ‘ethic of engagement’ between charity actors. If ethics is the ongoing project of working on the self’s mode of being in the world (Foucault 1988), then charity provides a potent means for givers to reflect upon their practices of social interaction and emplacement, and to make this reflective process a site within which charitableness can be expressed and moral personhood can be shaped (see Read 2011). In this chapter I explore the ways that Anglo-American women sought to build an ethic of engagement in a range of charity spaces. I examine practices that brought Anglo-American volunteers into contact with Italian volunteers, non-American churchgoers, church guests and, perhaps most

crucially, with each other. In such encounters, volunteers worked to express a range of ideal relationships that were built upon civic ideals, democratic participation, Christian hospitality, and a persistent, patient work ethic. In the process they tested and defined the moral dimensions of an Anglo-American community. While the previous chapter examined incorporation work as a process through which Anglo-American migrants sought to situate themselves within an ideal Tuscan sociality, this chapter explores another dimension of incorporation work, where volunteers sought to incorporate, influence and affect others through cultural practices and relations they deemed distinctly Anglo-American.

In building the idea of a charitable 'ethic of engagement' I have drawn inspiration from the work of Ilana Feldman. In her study of Quaker refugee relief efforts in Gaza in the late 1940s, Feldman (2007) examines how relief workers continually reflected critically upon the 'ethics of interaction' that emerged between themselves and the recipients of their aid. For Quaker relief workers, 'ethical labour' involved successfully enacting the techniques and principles of relief work, as well as Quaker values. 'At the same time, the idea of ethical labor applies just as directly to the work on themselves that had to accompany their work ... This care of the self was not simply an internal practice – a work of self-reflection and correction – but was also about ways of interacting with other people' (ibid.: 693). This chapter engages with Feldman's idea that ethical labour is an intensely relational project, and asks, in the case of Anglo-American charity volunteers in Florence, which particular relationships and which particular ethics were the source of moral reflection, ambition and investment. While Feldman uses the motif of 'interaction' to investigate the ethics of relational work, I utilize the more ideologically loaded ideal of 'engagement'. This better fits with the actions and desires of Anglo-American volunteers. As migrants striving for a deeper involvement with and recognition from their host society, volunteers claimed meaningful belonging to local life through their ability to participate in, criticize, challenge and support local systems of charity and cases of need, or, as they often put it, 'to be engaged'.

Such an analysis draws inspiration from the recent anthropological turn towards ethics and morality. According to Didier Fassin (2012: 15), a critical moral anthropology does not conceive of morality as an object conscribed to a specific subfield of study, to a specific social domain, or to a priori and formal codes of conduct (see also Lambek 2010: 10). Rather morality and ethics cross-cut diverse spheres of social life, such as politics, religion, science and kinship, and are discernible in social action and reflections, and projects of self-formation. Ethics in this sense is both immediate and ordinary (ibid.: 4), and located in the 'movement between explicit local pronouncements and implicit local practices and circumstances' (ibid.: 7). As anthropologists

attending to ethical and moral action point out, a sense of the moral or ethical often emerges out of ordinary and ongoing moments of uncertainty, danger and paradox, out of 'confounding conditions that threaten to undo our thin mastery over those deeper things that matter most' (Kleinman 2006: 4). For my participants, the frictions and tensions revealed through charity work created spaces for their own ethical codes to emerge and solidify, and through these they came to articulate their own place-specific senses of charitable subjecthood.

Ordered Civility

For Anglo-American women, volunteering in Italy uncovered what values they brought to bear on charity action, and through articulating these values they drew upon and re-crafted national and cultural distinctions. Volunteering sometimes brought Anglo-American women into contact with their local Florentine counterparts, particularly during national charity drives. During and after these engagements, participants often reflected together on what culturally constituted a distinctly Anglo-American mode of volunteering and motivation for giving. An ACG community service event, recorded in my field notes, provides one poignant example.

It was the national food collection day at Coop supermarkets throughout Italy. All the food donated was to go to the national 'Banco Alimentare' [food bank], a Catholic organization that distributes food to charities feeding 'needy people'. Several ACG women had organized to meet at the Coop supermarket in a suburb of Florence to help to collect and box up food donated by shoppers. We worked in a storeroom alongside four Italians: two students and two regular volunteers from the local branch of the Banco Alimentare. The small room became stuffy and hot as we raced about, trying to box up the food as fast as it arrived in brimming shopping carts. The Italian volunteers smiled at us but did not enter into conversation. I began shifting boxes onto a trolley and accidentally knocked to the floor an Italian child I had not seen. I apologized as the child scuttled up and under the feet of another ACG volunteer, returning teary-eyed to his father. An ACG woman, Sandy, smiled at me with frustration, gesturing to the increasingly disordered room. 'They just don't know how to run things like this', she muttered, pointing to the floor. 'People are slipping on this used sticker tape – we need a bin; and if the box-tape rolls and scissors were hung from string above us, we wouldn't constantly be looking for them.' She rolled her eyes. 'And if we divided up the tasks, instead of all trying to do everything, it would work twice as fast. Only in Italy are things this disorganized!'

The perceived lack of a rational division of labour and an efficient packing system was, as Sandy expressed in the excerpt above, an example of what Anglo-American women saw as the weakly developed organizational level within the civic sphere of Italian society. Yet Joan, a regular American volunteer at the church, complained that sometimes American volunteers themselves were not immune from such an approach, and could lose their rational methods. After many years in Italy, they could become ‘an American with Italian attitudes’.

In the States it would be done like *that*, in England it would be done like *that*, in Italy we do it the way the Italians do it. You call a meeting for seven or five, [and] they’ll walk in at five past, ten past if you are lucky ... So you are dealing with an Anglo-*Italianized* mentality. And sometimes it’s very frustrating.

Charity experiences such as this led many volunteers to assert the value of a distinctly and unpolluted Anglo-American model of engagement. Volunteers believed that they came from societies with historically developed national ideals of civic-mindedness. In daily conversations they described how their national ideals encouraged social participation, efficiency, the rational execution of tasks, teamwork within civic organizations, and creative ingenuity towards problem solving. Many participants complained that Italians did not have the same volunteering ethos as Americans, and that ‘community engagement’ was a new and underdeveloped phenomenon.

Eve: In America, well because it’s quite an old country, not like Italy, I mean, it’s old, but only recently [was it] unified, and even then not really, I mean *properly* ... In my home town [in the U.S.], everyone volunteered. It was what you did ... This is normal for me.

Sarah: Maybe because people don’t trust the government so much [in the U.S.], and just do things themselves ... and the churches play a big role ... But people just get together and get things done, and [they] feel responsible for their neighbourhoods ... and [are] very proud of America.

Such views reflect an enduring nationalistic story about American life. According to Elisabeth Clemens and Doug Guthrie (2010: 25), the notion that forming associations is an embedded and fundamental tenet of U.S. society ‘is central to the celebratory story often told about American politics and civil society. Grounded in a stylized reading of Alexis de Tocqueville ... this story portrays voluntary associations as an expression of conditions in the New World and a guarantee of the continued health of the new democracy.’ Indeed, in *Democracy in America*, de Tocqueville claims that,

American of all ages, all conditions, all dispositions constantly form associations ... I have often admired the extreme skill with which inhabitants of the United States succeed in proposing a common object to the exertions of a great many men, and in inducing them voluntarily to pursue it ... feelings and opinions are recruited, the heart is enlarged and the human mind is developed, only by the reciprocal influence of men on each other. (de Tocqueville [1835–40] 1956: 198–200)

Scholars have questioned the accuracy of such descriptions and their applicability to contemporary U.S. society, charting instead decreasing engagements with associational life and the rise of social individualism and isolation (e.g. Putnam 2000).¹ Critiquing this position, other scholars have observed the transforming nature of public life and the rise of new, sometimes radical, social movements and networks that do not fit so neatly into the model of associationalism (e.g. Boggs 2001). Yet in the workings of foundational national myths, these social complexities or historical transformations are often glossed over. Anglo-American volunteers in Florence readily drew upon a synthesized, timeless and oppositional vision of American values as they attempted to make sense of their own contribution to public life in Florence. As Caldwell argues, ‘essentialized traits are the vehicles through which individuals position themselves in society’, in ways that enhance self worth (Caldwell 2004: 129). In creating such narratives, participants used charity, and ideologies of Anglo-American civic-mindedness, to situate themselves as productive and necessary contributors to local life.

The portrayal of local social patterns as lacking this crucial American sensibility also reflects a simplified representation of Italian society. The historical legacies of charity in Italy are long standing, although they do not resemble the early emergence of the civic and charitable ‘volunteer’ found in the United States. For example, during the nineteenth century, after unification and the embryonic emergence of the Italian state, non-profit groups tended to form around credit cooperatives, mutual benefit societies and worker collectives, often with a socialist leaning after the Second World War, which did not so directly promote the value of volunteering commensurate with American ideals and practices. In his study of civic culture and democracy in Italy, Robert Putnam (1993: 97–98) argues that Tuscany in the 1970s and 1980s was in fact one of the regions with the ‘most civic’ attitudes in Italy, based in part on the number of people involved in ‘civic community groups’. Yet the associations he reported did not easily map onto the volunteer groups that Anglo-American women spoke of when they talked about building a charitable and civic society. Putnam describes sports clubs, ‘literary guilds, local bands, hunting clubs, cooperatives’ and engagements in politics as evidence of social capital and civic-mindedness

(*ibid.*: 97). From the 1980s onwards, when the Italian government began legislatively institutionalizing volunteering and encouraging an emergent ‘Third Sector’ to meet social need, volunteering rates have been increasing sharply throughout Italy, as have the official registration rates of voluntary organizations.² Moreover, Tuscany has one of the highest numbers of voluntary organizations in relation to population in Italy (Rapizza 2006: 9).

Anglo-American women’s complaints regarding the absence of Florentine civic life as reflected through volunteering revealed a strategic misrecognition of the different ways that the civic domain has been constituted cross-culturally and historically. It also shows the ways in which the volunteers’ narratives downplayed the contemporary, albeit recent, burgeoning of voluntary action in Tuscany, and the transformation of social life in modern Italy. Yet if national binaries are tactical narrative devices, then such complexities are necessarily backgrounded. Volunteers’ often offhand remarks about distinct civic domains do not necessarily reflect a lack of nuanced historical knowledge or reflection, but a shorthand stock story useful in articulating frustrations, feelings of alienation and a sense of difference as they arose in migrant lives.

The Virtue of Strangerhood

According to the cultural dualisms outlined above, what were the underlying ethics that supposedly encouraged an Anglo-American civic ideal? In daily conversations and in interviews, participants asserted that, at its core, civic-mindedness was based on a particular manner of interacting with strangers. In participants’ home countries, strangers were perceived to interact with civility and courtesy in public spaces. According to Clemens and Guthrie (2010: 25), Americans widely believe that voluntary associations have acted as “schools for citizenship” in which Americans overcome excessive individualism [and] forge social ties with others’ (see also Neem 2010). In interviews, participants commonly expressed such attitudes and experiences.

Anna: What I really miss ... it bothers me quite a bit sometimes ... the way you can just walk down the street [in the U.S.] and people will be civil. It’s not a battle like it is here. Or go into a store and just expect people to be pleasant ... Here [in Florence] I feel myself getting tense and preparing for battle every time I go into the post office or whatever. You just learn to put on this protective armour with everyone.

Tina: If you smile at someone and talk to them, even just say hello, a guy, they think you are flirting ... you learn just [to] keep your eyes downcast and this steely look on your face – [a] severe look.

In Italy, many participants complained, interaction in public spaces was typified by rudeness: Florentines did not give way to others on the pavements, they pushed in queues, were disrespectful to other drivers, and attempted to charge more to non-Florentines in shops. The ability to sympathize with strangers and treat them as members of a shared community, participants believed, was a mind-set that made Anglo-American migrants particularly effective in being charitable and delivering care to strangers. Many believed that a generalized charitable ethic was missing from Italian society. Bronwyn, a regular church volunteer, explained to me that Italians were generous only to those they trusted. She provided an example to illustrate:

At my yoga class – this is a good example, a couple of years back – this one lady explained her son’s terrible situation. He needed expensive surgery that she couldn’t afford. Every person in the class gave her some money ... but that [idea] doesn’t connect [to] how they treat people who are begging on the street, or gypsies, illegal immigrants ... or any people they don’t know. They don’t feel compelled, for them.

Volunteers believed that a civic ethos sprung from what Benedict Anderson ([1983] 2006: 7) has labelled an ‘imagined community’: an affective sense of shared belonging and social responsibility that elides inequalities and differences, emphasizing a basic commonality or ‘horizontal comradeship’ (see Putnam 1993: 173) or ‘stranger sociality’ (Povinelli 2006: 2).³ Many volunteers perceived strong kin ties to be the root cause of a lack of a ‘civic spirit’ in Italy. The American Church rector explained:

I’ve found Italian life very closed off and it’s very difficult to break into an Italian community because you trust very few people outside your own groups, and even the architecture stresses that. In Europe there are walls, and they’re not just architecturally, but between people, because it has become a necessity to protect yourself and your family from outside ... so the architecture expresses how people are inside ... And in a way Italy is worse because it has been attacked so many times and ruled by so many people and there isn’t unity in Italy itself, from Sicily to the North ... it has been divided by so many people and it has only been one nation since 1860 ... the trust ... they don’t trust anyone outside the family.

The rector’s assessment of the historical reasons for such a stunted civic spirit reflects dominant currents within American and English commentaries of Italian civic life. When reflecting on the underpinnings of ‘traditional’ Italian culture and its incommensurability with modern civic life, Anglo-American volunteers drew upon a range of local, transnational and intellectual debates and stereotypes.

The American political scientist Edward Banfield has arguably left the strongest legacy on this debate, shaping intellectual and public perceptions for decades. In his book *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1958), Banfield famously coined the term ‘amoral familism’ to typify southern Italian culture. After researching in 1955 the moral fabric of Chiaromonte, a town in the region of Basilicata, he argued that local townspeople obeyed the logic that one should ‘maximize the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise ... In a society of amoral familists, no one will further the interest of the group or community except as it is to his private advantage to do so’ (ibid.: 85). For Banfield, such an ethos ‘is of course consistent with the entire absence of civic improvement associations, organized charities, and leading citizens who take initiative in public service’ (ibid.: 86). Following Banfield’s thesis, the question of familism and its corrosive effects dominated anthropological and sociological research in Italy into the 1970s (Cancian 1961; Marselli 1963; Pizzorno 1966; Cohen 1972. For critiques, see Miller 1974; Pierpaolo 1978) and lingers in more recent scholarship (e.g. Putnam 1993).⁴

According to Alessandro Cavalli (2001) this stereotype is not simply perpetuated by intellectuals and foreign commentators. It ‘is not just a figment of American social science: it also has deep roots in the image Italians have of themselves’ (ibid.: 123). Italians, he argues, ‘have a deep-seated lack of confidence in their own civic values’ (ibid.: 127; see also Patriarca 2010). Yet studies show that the reality of Italian civic engagement is more complex than either foreign or local stereotypes suggest, and in some domains civic action is burgeoning, inciting deep commitment rather than apathy.⁵ Research does clearly show, however, that Italians do worry and complain about the health of the civic domain and regularly discuss threats to a vital public sphere (Cavalli 2001). For Anglo-American volunteers, therefore, partaking in such debates within their own groups acted partly as a form of social participation in localized concerns, anxieties and modes of talk.

Volunteers’ attempts at modelling the civic ideal of stranger sociality to Italians through charity had two effects. These practices helped participants to assert a positive self-worth through oppositional, essentialized and morally weighted claims about ‘culture’, ‘history’ and ‘society’. Yet they did not just draw boundaries. Volunteers were also demanding inclusion within the system of obligations that they believed functioning citizenship should entail. They articulated membership of an imperfect Italian civic sphere by complaining about it and desiring its improvement, and by demonstrating their emotional investment in it and their right to criticize. They regarded their complaints about the public sphere as a sign of their ‘Italianization’ and engagement. ‘The way we go on sometimes,’ Martha, an American volunteer, explained to me during volunteering, ‘despairing, grumbling about this

or that ... you'd think we were real Italians'. 'It shows we care', added Betty, another American volunteer.

Democratic Inclusion

The discussion regarding civic ideals and involvement has thus far focused on an ethic of engagement that tended to unify volunteers by narratively stressing their cultural cohesion. But what are the micro-political manoeuvres that an ethic of engagement creates within a group? Who gets included and excluded in the process of articulating such ideals? In the discussion below I show how conflict about democratic process became the means by which a particular tension within the volunteers' ethic of engagement was reflexively negotiated. In attending to the power dynamics of such ethical labour, I demonstrate that an ethic of engagement created a range of social divisions.

For Anglo-Americans, being charitable and civic-minded not only occurred when dealing with strangers, but began 'at home' as they practised forms of ethical engagement within their own groups. One of the core ways that these charitable goals were reiterated and practised in the ACG was through debates about democracy – an ideal seen to be a particularly American moral virtue. In daily conversations, participants portrayed Italian national politics as corrupt, overly procedural and inefficient. In doing so, participants attempted to define an Anglo-American migrant character by creating an idealized notion of the democratic-ness of participants' home cultures, particularly the United States. This ethos was tied to an American nationalistic belief that the United States was one of the most established and 'free' democracies in the world, based partly on its robust associational life.⁶ American members of both the American Church and ACG were active in the Democrats Abroad group, and a high number made sure that they voted in the 2009 election.

Conflicts about democratic practices in ACG could be acrimonious but also sometimes productive in articulating the group's ethic of engagement. The connections between conflict and group solidarity have long been noted by anthropologists and sociologists. For example, Georg Simmel (1955: 15) argues that from conflict flows 'all the vitality and the real organic structure of the group'. Max Gluckman ([1956] 1966), drawing on E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), shows that in a range of African societies, enduring social cohesion lay in the conflicts that arose between a criss-crossing web of customary and kin allegiances that constantly undermined the formation of separate and opposing factions capable of creating lasting social schism (cf. Roberts 1979). The idea of the 'peace in the feud' (Gluckman [1956] 1966:

1) has been further explored by Myerhoff ([1979] 1994). In order to fight, she argues, 'people must share norms, rules, vocabulary and knowledge. Fighting is a partnership, requiring cooperation. A boundary-maintaining mechanism – for strangers cannot fully participate – it is also above all a profoundly sociable activity' (ibid.: 184).

Hays draws a connection between cohesion and dispute, and reflexivity and virtue, arguing that communities 'would not be so devoted to [their] traditions and so familiar with their values and vocabularies if they did not argue about them' (Hays 1994: 6). When conflicts 'are handled well, they bring the key ... virtues into prominence and test the tradition's strength and flexibility' (ibid.: 127). While these thinkers offer insights into the productive qualities of conflict, I do not wish to replicate their essentially functionalist assertions that disputes lead to stable social reproduction. In fact disputes about democracy irreversibly altered ACG, with certain members bearing a heavy and lasting personal and social cost. Instead, I follow these scholars' lead in examining how certain shared values can be negotiated and rendered visible through conflict.

Every two years ACG members voted for a new board, which would make major decisions about the club's direction and coordinate charity activities. After elections, each new board attempted to demonstrate its desire to work productively with members, to serve them well, and to enhance leaders' responsiveness to members' needs and concerns. The club met monthly in the meeting room of a historic hotel, set among olive groves and opulent villas on the hills overlooking Florence. In my field notes I recorded the first meeting of a new season:

The newly elected board had arrived early to set up the room, and make sure the tea, coffee and pastries were laid out. As women arrived the room began to buzz with anticipation and conviviality. Some had not seen each other over the summer months and embraced their old friends, kissing both cheeks. I noticed that most women were adorned with carefully applied make-up and well-chosen jewellery. Some even marked the occasion by wearing their fur coats. When the meeting was called to order a new member of the board, named Sarah, welcomed everyone and explained that the meetings would be organized slightly differently from last year. Firstly, the chairs had been reorganized 'to be more inclusive, and to make people feel more involved'. Instead of being ordered in short rows that went all the way to the back of the room, each row was now longer, thus making the last row closer to those speaking at the front. She then said that the 'creative' secretary had designed a poster showing what activities would be coming up in the month ahead, and a suggestion box for 'new ideas', to help people to get involved. The secretary at that point added with a smile, 'only constructive ones please'.

Sarah then explained that in order to make the meetings run more smoothly than they had in the past, and to try and prevent them going over the allocated time, all announcements to be made by members in the meeting must be submitted to the secretary by the day before at the latest. Also all information already covered in the newsletter about upcoming events would not be repeated by members. She pointed to the 'events poster' and said that it could be referred to during the breaks. She then stated that her goals for the organization were 'to have fun', to make the club more 'democratic', and to raise more money for charities than in previous years.

While talking with a group of women a few weeks later, one said she had found it rather ironic that Sarah had talked about wanting to be more democratic, and had attempted to be more 'inclusive' by rearranging the chairs, and had almost in the same breath declared a new rule that members could not speak freely at the meeting anymore. The new focus on being 'constructive' and 'efficient' was, many felt, to the detriment of inclusive debate. That new ideas had to be individually turned in, in a written form and to an anonymous box rather than directly to a person, with no indication or guarantee of how those ideas would then be read, shared or put to the members, was cast as being at odds with the more spontaneous ethos that many members remembered prevailing in the past. If one had something to say or share, one just got up and said it, I was told.

In conversations with Sarah, she explained to me why she was seeking to change the system and be a strong leader. The prior so-called 'inclusive' way of running ACG meetings had its exclusive tendencies and disadvantages: certain individuals monopolized meetings by endless repetition of personal gripes and goals; shy people did not say as much as bold personalities, and tended to 'zone out' as a consequence of not participating; issues that were important for only a minority of members were ignored; and 'meetings went on forever'. ACG members were now 'equal before the anonymous suggestion box', she explained.

Yet the suggestion box created a filter and potential censoring mechanism within the club. The new rule regarding the prior submission of items for the agenda had the same effect. The board now had the power to decide to whom it gave voice (or not), and for how long they could speak. As Barbara Cruikshank argues, 'Like any mode of government, democracy both enables and constrains the possibilities for political action. Democratic modes of governance are not *necessarily* more or less dangerous, free, or idealistic than any other' (Cruikshank 1999: 2, emphasis in original; see also Paley 2004). In ACG, the tools of democracy, such as the suggestion box, were as much an enactment of power as a means to inclusion, capable of silencing dissatisfied or disrupting members of ACG. Some women who were used to speaking

freely in meetings, and who had once been influential in such debates, felt undermined and increasingly marginalized by the new system.

Conflicts over democracy allowed ACG women to argue over the tension between two aspects of their communicative and relational code: paying attention to the values of kindness, egalitarianism and inclusive relations, symbolized by debate and discussion; and their selfless attention to the greater good beyond their club's borders and their duties towards outside others, symbolized in voting and acting. At its core, the women were arguing over the relative importance of what Habermas (1984) has defined as 'procedural' (decision, voting-based) versus 'substantive' (discussion, debate-based) democracy (see also Farer 1989; Fraser 1992; Barsh 1992; Calhoun 1994; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Young 2001).⁷

At one particularly acrimonious democratic vote during a club meeting about the future of the club's charity work, a committee in charge of proposing possible options for change urged members to vote 'for the common good, and with the idea of what the club does, our common cause, which [is] *beneficenza* (charity); and [do] not be afraid of change and a fresh start'. A board member, Candy, then said she wanted to recite a passage from her parliamentary handbook. In a clear, slow tone she read aloud, 'Good democracy involves the majority giving to the minority the chance to express their opinions, and the minority to accept the decision made by the majority'. Procedural democracy was a way of cutting off grievances from being heard again, of creating clear end points to communicative processes in order to enable charitable giving.

After the voting ballots were counted, forty-one votes were in favour of the status quo, while the new procedures had received fifty-nine votes. Despite the heated acrimony before the vote, there were now no particular shouts of joy or despair about the result. Muffled discussion arose within small groups. Most agreed it was time to move on, 'for the sake of the club' and to 'listen to the will of members'. Charity work and charitable selves were, after all, underpinned by sacrifice. Putting aside differences of opinion for 'the greater good' was a moral ideal expressed and agreed upon by the majority of members who 'let the issue drop' in the following months.

Debates over these conflicts and club members' involvement in them had another effect: they allowed women to claim or deny the legitimacy of a member's place in the community, to argue over their contribution, participation and moral character. Board members fought back against criticism of their leadership by pointedly noting that those causing trouble were not active or consistent volunteers. Moreover, the debates allowed ACG women to prove who they were *not* like. In her study of a Jewish rest home, Myerhoff shows that arguments served to allow members to distance themselves from group traits they feared.

In fighting with each other, the old people established a negative identification, proclaiming who they were by asserting who they were not. By treating their fellows as antagonists they emphasized the distance and differences among them and so were saved from seeing themselves as reflected in their peers, most of whom they regarded as pathetic, weak and lonely. As long as they fought, they knew certainly that they were 'not like those others'. (Myerhoff [1979] 1994: 184)

During conflicts in ACG, leaders and their detractors described each other as isolated, unhappy foreign women with not enough to do all day. ACG women commented on protagonists' philandering husbands, or their divorced or widowed status. 'Lonely' and 'bitter' were two words repeated often. These comments reflected a deep communal fear of loneliness, abandonment in marriage, and being unfulfilled in old age (as discussed in Chapter 2). The archetype of the unhappily married or divorced woman with nothing to do all day but grow angry and cause trouble was something many women said they saw too often, and feared becoming themselves. Distancing themselves from those who represented the archetype was a way of knowing that they were clearly not becoming such a person, and a way of reaffirming the immoral nature of this archetype. In an interview with Jane, an American and an active member of ACG, she said:

If I look around ... [it] is a little bit alarming that most of the women who have married Italians have grown bitter and alcoholic over the years (laughs nervously) ... I don't want to become one of them, you know, and that is something I have to come to terms with ... I don't know, that the [unhappy women's] husbands started out like [my husband] Angelo. I mean there is always the possibility that they were good when they picked 'em and they just ... I see more frustration amongst the women in general in this community than I would expect to see in other places – of bitterness, generalized grumpiness and frustration.

The ACG dispute allowed its members to publicly articulate and argue over the purpose of their group and indeed their own lives. It drew into communal consciousness the models of relationality through which such a purpose could be realized. As volatile social dramas, these conflicts induced reflexivity.

Since social dramas suspend normal everyday roleplaying, they interrupt the flow of social life and force a group to take cognizance of its own behaviour in relation to its own values, even to question at times the value of those values. In other words, dramas induce and contain reflexive processes and generate cultural frames in which reflexivity can find a legitimate place. (Turner 1982: 87)

For many women, carrying on despite these disputes proved their resilience as Anglo-American charitable givers acting together. At one level the

disputes created cohesion. Yet disputes also entailed shifts in power relations, the emergence of new networks, and harsh personal tolls. For some ACG women intimately engaged in these disputes, conflict involved deep psychological costs (cf. Ross 1993: 1). It involved a sense of being judged unfairly, losing their voice in public life, having their pride hurt, and 'losing' rather than 'winning'. Many could not forget or forgive the personal costs that they bore, and remained bitterly estranged from each other and angry about how they had been treated.

In the eyes of most ACG members, acrimonious conflicts that were allowed to fester over months often indelibly undermined their leaders' reputations and legitimacy. Members believed that their leaders had not displayed the appropriate qualities to represent their moral community: they were too aggressive or too insecure, they divided the members, and they did not like listening. They had also not engendered the right affective moral relations between members through their rational 'procedural democracy'. Some decided to 'sit the next year out' and not attend ACG events until new leaders had been elected. Many members of the elected board were hurt and angry by these obvious snubs. Those who voiced harsh criticisms of board members received equally harsh criticism themselves: they had been aggressive, selfish and irrational. Many felt their call for extended debate and discussion had distracted the members from their moral focus towards needy outsiders, even though, ironically, these debates had helped to bring that moral focus into sharp reflexive relief.

Conflicts about democracy within ACG had a further effect. Through the ongoing public debates that they generated the women took turns to find a public voice. They allowed migrant women who struggled to be visible within Florentine life to be seen on a shared stage. As Myerhoff notes in her study,

Center life was a constructed world that served as a frame within which the people could appear – be seen, act, interact, exist ... giving themselves a stage in which they came into full being, enacting their continuing life. Center politics provided one of the most reliable and satisfying arenas for visibility. In the end knowledge of the self is required for complete consciousness; consciousness requires reflecting surfaces. (Myerhoff [1979] 1994: 147–48)

Yet Myerhoff does not acknowledge that by being visible, members of a community expose themselves not only to affirmation, but also to having their social and moral selves reduced. Conflict about democracy allowed ACG women to argue over and display their personal credentials, their contributions and their worth, but at the risk of having that worth denied publicly. Conflict was a dangerous public process to reflexively seek visibility, strengthen group cohesion and configure collective solidarity, as through it

certain members risked their self-esteem, influence and continued access to Anglo-American public life. In debating their ethic of engagement using the lens of democracy, volunteers sought to work through the meaning of inclusion, to balance an emphasis on volunteer relationality with an ethic of outcomes, and to come to terms with the forms of social exclusions that such debates generated.

Christian Hospitality

This chapter has so far explored how civic values associated with Anglo-American culture were the ethical terrain through which volunteers negotiated engagement in social and public life. While these ideas were crucial for the performance of volunteering and charity, they were not the only ethical principles at play. For many participants an ethos of Christian hospitality powerfully undergirded their motivations for volunteering. Yet here the religious and the secular were not distinct domains. At the American Church, Christian hospitality was most elaborately expressed and highly regarded when participants extended a group ‘welcome’ to unknown outsiders. Stranger sociality was once again the revered model for engagement in Florence.

Sharing meals was a common way to achieve such hospitality. As the rector explained, ‘the hospitality is just as important as what goes on in the church [service]; I mean the dinners we have, all those things we are involved in are *just* as important’. Communion was offered to all church service attendees, regardless of religion – it was an egalitarian, inclusive invitation to participate in church life. This ethos was equally embedded in the regular parish lunches offered to parishioners and church guests. As the rector stood at the church door at the end of each service, shaking everyone’s hand as they left, he took extra time with newcomers, asking them about themselves. He would often introduce them to a regular parishioner nearby, pointing out a similarity that existed between them such as a shared hometown, encouraging the parishioners to make tea or coffee for the guests, and inviting them to parish lunches. Christian hospitality was, the rector explained many times, about ‘incorporation’.

The church officials – the Rector, Development Officer and Parish Administrator – dedicated a considerable time each day to the task of ‘welcome’, chatting with newcomers about their experiences in Italy. The American Church was well known as a place where English-speaking tourists could find ‘friendship’ and advice. They were welcomed each week at Mass with a round of applause and were referred to as ‘guests’, a word imbued with Christian ideals. The Development Officer explained in a church newsletter

to parishioners the importance of their own individual hospitality work. 'I cannot emphasize enough how fundamental YOU are in nurturing this process along; each time you greet one of our visitors with kindness, you are not only making God happy, you are also helping keep our ministry alive.'

An ethic of hospitality is central to Christian doctrine. As a global and proselytizing religion, Christianity does not seek to limit its membership; spreading 'the Word of God' and enacting Christian salvation is indeed a basic duty. Inclusion is therefore built into a faith-based ethos in which the spirit 'is constantly transfiguring the world ... the dividing line between the church and its neighbours is always changing and no form of human sociality can claim finality or permanence' (Bretherton 2006: 128). Hospitality is a central theme in the gospels, in which Jesus regularly eats and feasts with social outcasts. Acting both as guest and host, Jesus inverts the rules of purity and pollution present in the Old Testament. Rather than being defiled by contact with the marginalized, 'Hospitality becomes the means of holiness ... it is in Jesus' hospitality of pagans, the unclean, and sinners that his own holiness is shown forth' (ibid.: 130). But it is not only through the role of host that Christians hope to emulate Christ, albeit imperfectly. According to New Testament doctrine, coming into contact with the moral state of the poor and vulnerable brings givers closer to God. Being less distracted by material comfort and more reliant on help from God in their daily lives, the poor and their plight remind Christians of the priorities of a Christian ethic that will ultimately lead to salvation (Linnenbrink 2005: 307).

In church sermons, the rector made clear that the doctrine of hospitality was based on action rather than intentions. In his sermons he explained that the theology of Jesus grows 'out of his praxis ... The actual living out and acting out of the revolutionary witness, this is how the community's creed is arrived at.'

Our task is to fight politically and socially to see that there is 'daily bread' – hope for those here who are in need and for the millions throughout our world who are starving. Jesus didn't multiply the pieties or perform a miraculous draught of pocket testaments ... Jesus summons us to his liberation, to social liberation as well as interior liberation, so that we each work to eliminate poverty.

When turning ethics into action, church leaders and volunteers made efforts to offer hospitality in a material sense through parish lunches that tangibly attenuated hunger. In seeking to make this hospitality accessible and meaningful, these meals were performed according to egalitarian and inclusive principles. The symbols of commensality did not mark out or privilege any participant above another. The long tables were set out identically with simple paper placemats and napkins, and plain plates and cutlery.

Neither parishioners nor visitors had specified seats, and the Rector, his wife, and core volunteers would deliberately sit next to different church members or guests each time. Tables were always called up to the serving table in a different order, and parishioners, church leaders and guests queued together to receive food, scooped onto their plates by a volunteer. Everyone received an equal amount of the unpretentious food. These rituals served to highlight solidarity amongst a community of equals, with the hosts gaining no visible marks of prestige from their acts of giving.

Yet even when the space and rituals suggested solidarity, the ethical labour within practices of hospitality was not easy work. Several homeless Italian men attended the American Church. At parish lunches, volunteers attempted to be welcoming, even sitting beside the homeless men and striking up conversation. Some of these homeless men suffered from mental illnesses, and offering friendship could be an unpredictable and difficult task, exposing parishioners to long spells of uncomfortable silence, solicitations for money and even, occasionally, verbal abuse. In such situations that parishioners consciously worked on a patient comportment, and from the strain sometimes expressed on their faces, it was clear that these exchanges were rarely smooth or comfortable.

Working hard to offer ongoing hospitality in the face of such barriers expressed and enabled a central tenet of Christian faith. In her ethnography of volunteers at a San Francisco soup kitchen, Rebecca Allahyari (2000: 35–73) describes a charity work ethic of ‘personalist hospitality’. This Catholic organization expected volunteers to build welcoming, intimate and non-judgemental relations with poor recipients. Regarded as ‘dignified guests’, recipients were not expected to give anything back to volunteers. Accepting this and paying attention to one’s emotional responses and attitudes was considered part of the ‘self-monitoring moral work’ (ibid.: 44) that a volunteer had to carry out. At the American Church, a similar ethic prevailed. The ‘work’ of hospitality was deemed successful if non-judgemental hospitality was offered, and continuously maintained, despite difficulties. This downplayed an emphasis on questions of whether gratitude or kindness was returned, or if marginal people were ‘saved’. Within Christian thought, gift giving is inherently sacrificial, with God’s gift of Christ’s life for humanity’s salvation the paradigmatic moment (Seasoltz 2007: 14). Being a host who offers hospitality is always a role displaced by the fact that, as Luke Bretherton argues, Christians are ‘the recipients of God’s abundant and costly hospitality’ to humanity. It is thus seen as ‘a mark of a truthful disclosure of God’s nature by a people who themselves are guests of God’ (2006: 138). The difficult sacrifices volunteers experienced when offering generosity and hospitality to strangers were not the unfortunate side-effects of charity, but a central component of realizing a hospitable ethic. Not only was ‘sacrifice’ a

Christian duty, but so was 'forgiveness'. Like sacrifice, parishioners perceived it to originate emblematically from Christ's teachings and actions towards the dispossessed and outcast. 'The new glue that will bring people together and bind them together will not be the prohibitions and rituals and expulsions, but will be *forgiveness*', the rector explained in a sermon.

That givers accepted hostile engagements and did not expect anything back from recipients did, however, signify the highly asymmetrical nature of these relations; from their 'true friends' volunteers expected equality, respect and reciprocity. By expecting nothing back from 'outsiders', volunteers marked such relationships as distinct from their enduring intimate ties. Parallels can be drawn here with other contexts of religious charity and the work of impersonal giving. In his discussion of Jain giving in India, James Laidlaw (2002b) demonstrates how *dān* was a charitable 'pure gift', for which no return was expected, and out of which no reciprocal or enduring relationality was created between giver and recipient. Laidlaw situates his argument in contradistinction of Chris Gregory's (1982) typology that contrasts commodities, as impersonal exchanges between independent actors, and gifts, as 'personal, reciprocal, and socially binding' (Laidlaw 2002b: 46). Laidlaw makes it clear that the pure gift can facilitate impersonal ties. In a similar vein, for volunteers at the American Church, enacting non-judgemental, personalist hospitality and giving to strangers facilitated relations that were fleeting, unidirectional and circumscribed.

Christian Multiculturalism

The ethic of engagement within the American Church included discourses of multiculturalism as filtered through notions of Christian universalism. In a Sunday sermon, the rector explained that 'Paul the preacher ... he goes to the middle of Turkey to tell fellow Jews about Jesus. The gospel starts travelling and we are the successors of that message – from every nation, tribe and language; young and old, rich and poor, a garden of many colours.' The multicultural composition of the American Church, which included parishioners from Sri Lanka and a range of ex-British colonies in Africa such as Nigeria and Malawi, was a source of pride for many parishioners. Philosophically, 'multiculturalism' stands for the belief that a 'society' containing distinct cultural and ethnic groups can be made cohesive only if diversity is recognized and in fact valorized (Reitz 2009: 1). For the American Church volunteers, the ideal of 'multiculturalism' represented the group's inclusive ethos as well as the international nature of the Anglican Communion and 'global Christian family'. Yet multiculturalism was in most contexts a gloss for 'multi-ethnic', and was used to highlight specific racialized differences as

much as it was utilized to enhance cohesiveness. A Nigerian man in his forties represented the 'African community' on the vestry. Involved in lay-priest volunteering, he was well liked within the church, and vestry members were keen to make sure that through him they gained an 'African perspective' on church issues and decisions. During church events the African community was often 'celebrated' and encouraged to be involved through 'traditional' dance, singing and drumming performances. After the centennial festivities in 2008, the administrator of the American Church wrote an article in the English-language *Florentine* newspaper, in which she reported that, '[t]o the delight of all present, members of the parish's large African community, in full festival regalia, processed through the gardens, chanting and dancing to traditional drums'.

The rector, however, was aware that the 'African community' was a category used by non-African parishioners who knew little about the national distinctions, and little about the individual members. 'Within the "African community" there is the Kenyan group and the Nigerian group and the Malawi group ... we say they are "the Africans", but they are not all the same, and they all have their own little ways of doing things.' In stressing community unity, however, the rector added that the English language and Christian faith was the 'common connection ... between all of us here, the common thing that draws us all together'. Ethnic differences were ideally subsumed within shared practices of belief.

Not everyone felt comfortable with the level of 'real' multicultural inclusion perceived to exist within the church community. This unease was evident during a Lenten parable-studies dinner hosted by members of the American Church, when we discussed the meaning of Jesus' Good Samaritan parable. This parable (Luke 10: 25–37) describes a man who lies hurt and unconscious on a road between Jerusalem and Jericho. First a Hebrew priest and then a Levite passed him without stopping to help, fearing ritual defilement. Finally a Samaritan found him, took him to a nearby inn and paid for his bed, food and care. At the parable dinner, the rector explained to us that

'Being a neighbour means not restricting our love and kindness to our real neighbours or family, but to anyone in need.' After a moment of contemplation, a parishioner, Joy, said, 'I find it really difficult to know what to do with people asking for help on the street – I'm always worried they will spend it on alcohol'. Kaitlin, an active volunteer, replied that, 'There is a place for them to go every night of the week for a hot meal, and somewhere to sleep, but many of them choose to beg instead of get help'. Henry then added, 'You can't help them, there are just too many, and they will spend it on drugs'. His wife Tina reflected on her response to such situations, explaining, 'It makes me feel uneasy'. Another parishioner, Betty, commented on how moving the parable

was, as the Samaritan did not even know the person in need, and risked much in offering him help. A 32-year-old woman, Olivia, admitted to the group that she felt bad that she did not know any of the Africans in the church community. 'I wonder if I should make more of an effort, if it's my fault for not reaching out?' she considered. Many other parishioners nodded in agreement, eyes uncomfortably downcast. A few tried to explain why these relationships were hard to establish: the Africans usually arrived late for church and sat in the outside rows, making it hard to chat over coffee and biscuits before church and pass the peace during the service. Henry noted that when he was at school, 'all the Irish kids sat together, and all the Italian kids sat together'. He concluded that sometimes groups like to be separate and it's hard to do anything about it. There were nods of agreement, but the mood remained troubled and contemplative, signifying that the problem of reaching out to strangers and those in need was not simple, and that no practical resolution to the issues had been reached.

The notions of social inclusiveness that parishioners debated in such settings not only reflected Christian ideals of hospitality, and an Anglo-American liberal politics of multicultural inclusion, but also were situated within the broader religious and political contexts of Florence and Italy. Jeffery Cole (1997: 23) notes that middle-class Italians express 'paradigms of solidarity' across racial and class lines when discussing immigration. Cole ties such views to 'ideologies of religious universalism and leftist internationalism, which hold an influential place in postwar Italian political culture'. Florence's left-wing political coalition has held a comfortable majority within local politics since the mid-1980s, and articulated similarly inclusive views in public rhetoric. As Davide Però (1999) notes in his study of refugees in Bologna, however, that attitudes within left-wing regions of Italy revealed a deeply ambivalent relationship to immigrants and, despite rhetorics of inclusion, local governments devised policies of exclusion, marginalization and containment. Florence was no exception, and during the time of my fieldwork the *Comune* outlawed car-window cleaners at road junctions, an activity performed mainly by East European migrants. Anglo-American volunteers debated the justness of this law and, as when they discussed beggars on Florentine streets, the tensions between an ethic of tolerance and a concern about hospitality exploitation were visible in their moral code. As Bretherton argues of Christian ethics:

Care for the vulnerable stranger is not without its problems. A number of tensions emerge within the practice of hospitality. There is a tension between greeting every stranger as Christ and discerning who would genuinely benefit from care ... between provision and the capacity to provide wherein the integrity and

resources of the community can be overwhelmed by the abuse of, or extensive need for, hospitality. (Bretherton 2006: 142)

Despite these ethical paradoxes, the ideal of a fully inclusive community was still actively enacted by many parishioners. I noticed at parish lunches that many volunteers would purposefully stop to choose their seat, avoiding the comfortable company of their close friends and instead sitting with those they knew less well, such as Africans or tourists. Yet these gestures of incorporation did not encourage African members to get involved with church outreach or fundraising work. African members of the church were heavily involved in volunteer worship roles, such as lay priests, ushers and acolytes, but not in church charity. While the church outreach volunteers often put this down to a 'cultural difference', the logic of fundraising volunteering subtly reinforced these divisions. An excerpt from my field notes provides one example.

I was volunteering at the bake sale table at the American Church Craft Fair, selling cakes and biscuits donated by female parishioners. An American student volunteer explained to the Italians who came to peruse the stall that such goods were '*dolci tipici americani*' (typical American sweets), and indeed they were; chocolate brownies abounded, as did banana bread, lime pies and maple walnut tarts. Two Nigerian women had teamed up to contribute to the bake stall and spent several hours in the church kitchen baking pies. However the pies were savoury, and long-time bake sale volunteer Betty was visibly perturbed when the two women came to deliver the four trays. 'They're not sweet?' she said with a puzzled look, and then placed them at the far end of the table. As the day wore on we did indeed sell all of the tuna pies. They were particularly popular with Italian customers. I asked one volunteer if I could try one and she replied, 'Sure', but lifted her palms up and added with a smile, 'I ain't trying them!'

The category of 'baked goods' and the volunteering associated with it could rely upon American gendered knowledge that had exclusionary tendencies. Chocolate brownies were the most highly prized baked good, and would always sell out early at church fairs and the annual ACG bazaar. Belinda, a retired American woman who was reputed to make the most delicious brownies, continually received high praise in public, and her brownies circulated almost as a currency of their own: people bought them for their friends who would then 'owe a big favour' in return, while some women could extract promises from their children to behave and 'play nicely' at church fairs with the reward of one of her brownies. The 'knack' of cooking perfectly moist brownies, according to some, took patient practice. The

centrality of bake sales to fundraising ultimately rewarded and incorporated Americans into the community of female volunteers more easily than it did other nationalities. The bake sale – perceived as an egalitarian and inclusive form of volunteering through which anyone could contribute – drew distinctions within the Anglo-American community along the axes of gender and nationality, and reinforced the status of the core American volunteers.

The Volunteering Work Ethic

The discussion so far has focused on the ethical underpinnings of ethical labour. But this emphasis ignores the crucial twin element of such projects: the art of labouring. This chapter has already discussed the patient persistence required in offering Christian hospitality. The value of hard work, however, extended into all areas of charity action. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the American Church ran a weekly student dinner for American college students in Florence. Here volunteer cooks sought to create a safe and inclusive space for young Americans and Italians to meet.

Jackie was busy cooking the dinner with four female American student helpers in the church kitchen. The girls were volunteers, and would gain recognition for their work on their ‘study abroad’ programmes as part of a ‘community service’ component – a component that many universities had introduced to ‘give something back’ to the city of Florence and to improve the reputations of such students.

An Italian boy who often helped out at the event had arrived. He was mildly intellectually disabled, and Jackie always gave him the job of setting the tables. He had recently been bringing his Italian friends, also with special needs, and for a few months Jackie had been trying to get the group actively engaged in the church, helping out in the kitchen at fairs and parish lunches. She recalled that for some time she had considered starting a catering company with special-needs Italians, but after working with these young men, she realized it would be more difficult than she originally anticipated. ‘They can be quite volatile, stubborn and angry. It was more than I bargained for’, she reflected.

Another church volunteer, Tracy, had arrived. We chopped tomatoes together with the American students, teaching them how to make *bruschetta*, and teaching them the Italian words for the vegetables: *aglio*, *pomodoro*, *cipolle rosso*, *prezzemolo*. The American students were beginning to file in for their five euro meal. The room resonated with their chatter as they made friends easily. A few young Italian men were arriving too. ‘Here come the *Ciao Bella* boys,

“to practice their English”, Tracy joked sarcastically, referring to those Italian boys who many volunteers believed came only to chat-up American students. ‘So much for this being a safe place for the students to hang out. It’s becoming a pick-up joint’, she sighed. I recalled how after last month’s dinner I went out with a group of the students to a nightclub and drank cocktails until three. ‘This event doesn’t really stop them going into town to get drunk, it just gives them a place to meet up beforehand’, I observed. ‘We do what we can, even if only a few students benefit’, Jackie piped up.

In attempting to extend the church community’s boundaries outward to American college students and some ‘needy’ Italians – members of Florentine society deemed marginalized or stigmatized – the volunteers hoped that their giving would be transformative and incorporative. They felt frustrated when female students still went out and got drunk, perpetuating the stereotypes of them that had led to their social stigmatization. Volunteers felt equally helpless when disabled Italians proved to be too difficult to deal with in a long-term and sustained manner. Volunteering thus involved cultivating an ethic of commitment that dealt with disappointment, the rejection of support, and scaled-down expectations.

At an ACG community service meeting, Lanna confessed to me that helping an ACG volunteer at a disabled persons’ home had really ‘saved’ her from becoming depressed in Florence. ‘I really need to feel I’m doing something worthwhile in my life and with my time. That’s why I hate those stupid ACG meetings. You can spend the whole day there just chatting. That’s why I avoid those luncheons after the meeting like the plague.’ Lanna believed that a morally good use of commensality built relationships of giving. This was contrasted with the ‘ladies who lunch’: ACG members who engaged in food rituals based on a closed and leisured relationality. While cooking lessons raised money for the club’s charitable work, and demanded of the hosts the donation of food, time and energy, some considered the restaurant luncheons held after every ACG meeting to be a ‘gossipy, cliquy’ waste of time. Women tended to relax and group together in close friendship circles at luncheons, limiting the ability of newcomers to be incorporated into the ACG community in such spaces. For many volunteers these events did not demonstrate any tangible benefit for needy others, nor did they develop or test the skills and talents of the members.

Studies of American church charities have amply demonstrated that fundraising and volunteering are used to instil a Christian work ethic in volunteers (see, for example, Allahyari 2000: 173; Bartkowski and Regis 2003: 83). This ethic both witnesses the faith-based significance of ‘commitment’ and a protestant valorization of hard work,⁸ as well as fulfils a more secular adherence to the values of labour within a capitalist system. Many

Anglo-American women in Florence who had worked or built careers in their home countries before migration expressed that, once their children grew up, they sometimes felt idle and purposeless in their lives. Without being able to find employment, self-worth was gained through transplanting an ethic of work and achievement onto the sphere of volunteering. Hard work also allowed newcomers to pierce through Anglo-American hierarchies. Against the elitism of certain group practices, such as those detailed in the previous chapter, 'hard work' as a virtuous membership trait allowed those who did not own lavish villas to still become highly regarded and valued members of the groups, and to gain positions of influence and prestige.

Reflections

The ethic of engagement that volunteers cultivated and argued over was a significant element of charity work and an essential practice through which moral migrant selves could publicly emerge. It reflected the moral ambition (Elisha 2011) of charity actors as they sought to define, extend or reconfigure the bounds of their community and the nature of their commitment to local social problems, Italian concerns and the vitality of public life. Yet in attempting to enmesh themselves within localized settings, Anglo-Americans forged narratives about themselves that both proved their contribution to, and marked them as distinct from, their host society.

This chapter has shown that building an ethic of engagement is not a neutral or abstract ethical project, but one that precisely reflects and facilitates the degrees of social inclusion and exclusion that emerge within voluntary action. For Anglo-American volunteers such an ethic could act to naturalize such inequalities and make them imperceptible. At other times this ethic incorporated volunteers' reflexive efforts to comprehend the discomfort generated by such unequal relations. Sometimes it even encouraged them to affect such inequalities through ongoing Christian and civic reflection and action. While the tensions within their ethic of engagement were both paradoxical and unresolvable, their dedication to labouring in the face of adversity, often with spiritual purpose, made such tensions a valuable and enduring space through which a migrant community could continually be made and recast.

Part III

THE MORAL WORK OF
CHARITY



Chapter 5

‘GETTING THE WORK DONE’, OR AN ETHOS OF DISINTERESTED EQUALITY



Social scientists have often sought to expose the unintended effects of charity and its relationship to systems of inequality (see, for example, Blau 1964; Simmel [1908] 1971; Heilman 1975; McCarthy 1990; Zelizer 1990; Bowie 1998; Caplan 1998; Mindry 2001). Like some of the ethnographic case studies in chapters 3 and 4 of this book, such an approach seeks to uncover, often with ironic effect, the friction of charity: the unequal power structures that result from practices that profess to address inequality and lessen human suffering. While this analytical approach serves the valuable purpose of exposing particular contradictions between ideology and practice, it often does not foreground the strategies that givers and volunteers develop to make sense of and reconcile the frictions that can occur between goals and endpoints. Taking this as a starting point, in this chapter I ethnographically detail the complex and transforming ideas that guide charity workers at the ‘street-level’ (Lipsky 1980).

In the previous chapter I examined the ethical principles and values from which an ethic of engagement emerged, prioritizing the ideational foundations of charitable motivations and actions. In this chapter I continue to explore the Anglo-American volunteers’ ethic of engagement, but shift my attention to the ways in which the patterns of interaction and relational conflicts engendered a charitable ethics, and became endpoints in themselves for action. In detailing the practices and dilemmas surrounding the American Church’s weekly food bank, I show how charity relations relied upon an emergent framework of equality and distance between givers and recipients. In such circumstances, charity action was affected by the fragility of the volunteers’ power to shape the relations of giving, as well their desire to turn everyday charity work into durable structures of support.

In his study of development programmes, David Mosse (2005a) argues that within such projects, ‘the logic of political mobilization and the logic of operations are different’ (ibid.: 16). Contrasting developmental policy

and implementation practices, Mosse asks, 'What if the things that make for good policy are quite different from those that make it implementable? What if the practices of development are in fact concealed rather than produced by policy?' (ibid.: 2). In a different context, I pose a similar set of questions. What is the difference between charity action as understood through knowledge systems that aim to inspire volunteers, enable Christian hospitality and compassion, and place charitable action within a theological frame, versus charity action that aims to 'get the work done', as volunteers often referred to it? I show not only that, as Mosse argues, 'Ideas have to be understood in terms of the institutions and social relationships through which they are articulated' (ibid.: 10–11), but also that for volunteers, framing their guiding ideals through the process of 'doing' was one of the core moral practices involved in being charitable.

As Jonathan Parry (1985) points out, Mauss's ([1924] 1990) study of 'primitive' gift-exchange reveals that these gift-giving systems in many non-Western settings did not easily separate interest or disinterest. Yet Parry shows that Mauss has often been read through a Western lens, which stresses the moral value of disinterested gifts in contrast to a competitive market sphere. As a consequence, notions of egoism versus altruism have subtly underpinned many anthropological studies of gift exchange. Those who have explained gift giving as a process that creates and cements social status or builds alliances have often shown that gift giving ultimately operates in the giver's best interests (see, for example, Malinowski 1926; Strathern 1971; Weiner 1992; Frank 1996). Indeed, in Chapter 3, while not adhering to the language of egoism/altruism, I examined the relationship between food rituals, volunteering, privilege and status, demonstrating how charity bolstered and reflected social connectedness, power and prestige. But exploring Anglo-American charity only as a route to prestige does not adequately account for the volunteers' diverse experiences, nor does an emphasis on theological motivations expose the rationale of practice. In attempting to detail a wider range of charity motivations, I am prompted by recent anthropological studies of philanthropic and humanitarian action to examine practices and ideologies that combine incongruous and dialogical motivations and effects (see, for example, Malkki 1996; Redfield 2005; Bornstein 2005; Feldman 2007) and which take seriously participants' professed moral ambitions and dilemmas (Elisha 2008; Scherz 2013).

At its core this chapter explores how the desired function of charitable giving came to inhere within the form of charity work, and how the elaboration of form emerged as the moral terrain within which charity volunteers could reflexively carry out their work. I detail how the volunteers understood charity through the formation of a charity system, and through attempts to control, delineate and limit the relationships that these acts

engendered. For volunteers, the interaction between the givers and receivers of charity was underpinned by an ethos of ‘disinterested equality’, an ethos quite different from, yet evolving out of, doctrinal explanations of charity and hospitality.

The Food Bank

The American Church food bank occurred weekly throughout the year. It was the church’s main ministry in Florence and was run by a small core of eight volunteers who attended every week. Caitlin, an American woman heavily involved in the church, oversaw the event. Between forty and eighty people came to collect a food bag and choose from the tables of free used clothing each week. Only 10 per cent were Italians, and nearly all of these were *pensionati*, elderly men and women living on small state pensions. The rest were immigrants, the three largest groups being Romanians, Poles and Peruvians, of which Florence has sizable populations, but also migrants from other parts of Eastern Europe, as well as Africa and the Philippines. Many were undocumented migrants, and most had only very basic Italian language skills.

When I asked the rector, the food-bank organizer and volunteers why the church had established the food bank and what their aims were for the project, their answers commonly centred on what it meant to be both a Christian person and an Episcopal church. At Mass, the rector’s sermons clearly articulated this Christian obligation to the parishioners. ‘Jesus says to us’, he preached one Sunday, ‘today this scripture is to be acted out in your presence’. In one of his sermons he preached this message further:

Luke’s blessing is simply to say this, ‘that the Kingdom of God is theirs’ – [this] means concretely that the gospel, the Christian message, and hence the church, belongs to them, the poor-hungry-weeping. Any ministry by religious organizations or religious people to the church of the poor – the real church – must work to make these hopes of Jesus come true in our lifetime, in our global village ... He is raised, blessed forever, in the poor-hungry-weeping ones, and in our sisters and brothers persecuted and perishing, dying and being raised.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the ‘poor-hungry-weeping ones’ in this theological tradition are conceived to embody Christ, and working closely with the vulnerable was a way of both imperfectly emulating Christ and of being physically and socially near to such embodied spiritual virtue.¹ The Christianity espoused by the rector was one that was, as he phrased it, ‘earthly’, based in the here and now. It relied upon direct relations with the ‘needy’. Being a good Christian involved situating oneself in one’s immediate

material and social world rather than a far-off heavenly realm of future salvation. Distinctions between faith and action, and prayer and service, were ideally annulled (cf. Bartkowski and Regis 2003: 143).

The food-bank organizer, Caitlin, was a devout Episcopalian. Like many of the volunteers, compassion lay at the heart of her explanation for volunteering: 'It's just what you do, as a Christian – following Jesus' example, [being] compassionate to those who need it, regardless of who they are'. These ideas and motivations stemmed from the need to enact a Christian persona, and were focused on fusing both the spiritual salvation of self and the material salvation of an already spiritually virtuous 'needy other' into one project. It was scripture, Bible group readings of the parable of 'the Good Samaritan', sermons, and volunteer meetings that provided the knowledge systems to understand and articulate charitable action.

When Means Meet Ends

Studies of Christian charity have shown that, in practice, these theological ideals often operate in dialogical tension with other contrasting spiritual and secular ideas, creating 'ideological discrepancies' (Elisha 2008: 157) that volunteers must work through. For example, within contemporary American Christian charity projects an ethic of compassion often contends with an ethic of accountability and empowerment (Elisha 2008), self-sufficiency and judgement (Bartkowski and Regis 2003) or shrewd fiscal stewardship (Bialecki 2008) which fuses both neoliberal and Christian ideological currents. These themes, especially the interaction of compassion and accountability, are also important in my study and will be foregrounded in the following two chapters. However, I necessarily bracket them from consideration in this chapter's analysis in order to allow an alternative set of charity principles to become visible and be given due attention.

Within the food bank, Anglo-American volunteers formulated their charity aims through the valued process of 'doing': through, as Mosse (2005a: 79) states, 'the collaborations and compromises that practical action brought' to the ministry. I argue that the ideal end goals and tangible results of their actions came to be understood within the framework of iterative and unfolding action. In place of a sense of outcomes, results and purpose (spiritual, economic and social), in performing charity work the volunteers focused their energy and conceptual work on the *means* of charity work.²

A useful theoretical starting point in defining action outside of the paradigm of outcomes is Simmel's understanding of the relationship between means and ends in modern society. In his impressive exploration of the philosophy of money, he notes that:

It must always be emphasized that the contrast between egoism and altruism in no way fully embraces the motivations for our actions. In fact we have an objective interest in whether certain events or things are realized or not, and this is so regardless of the consequences for the human subject. It is important to us that a harmony, an order based on ideas ... prevail in the world. We feel ourselves obliged to cooperate in this without always asking whether it gives pleasure or will be of advantage to any person, that is, whether it is of interest to oneself or to another. (Simmel [1900] 2003: 239)

Simmel focuses our attention on the realm of aesthetics within action, whereby actors focus on the form of action as an ethical domain. He argues that a constant awareness of purpose is an exhausting endeavour. In everyday life and in repetitive acts, ends fade from the view of consciousness and cease to be the driving force of action.

If the consciousness of purpose remains alive then it is ... a process that consumes the organic strength and intensity of consciousness. The general practicality of life will therefore tend to eliminate it, since – apart from any complications and diversions – it is basically no longer necessary for the teleological guidance of our actions. This seems to make clear ... that the ultimate link of our practical sequences, which can be realized only through the means, will be better realized the more our strength is focused and concentrated on producing these means. The real practical question is then the production of means ... if we are constantly conscious of the final purpose then a certain amount of strength is withdrawn from the labor by the means. The most expedient attitude is that of the complete concentration of one's energy on that stage of the sequence of purposes that would be realized next. (Simmel [1900] 2003: 230–31)

This is insightful precisely because it shows how aims can emerge and be located within forms, and can become tied up with processes rather than endpoints. Put another way, the realm of aesthetics can generate the direction of action, and become teleological in itself. This insight proves useful for thinking through the practices of charity. In her study of humanitarian action in Gaza, Ilana Feldman (2007: 693) offers one example. Aid workers, she argues, often attempted to juggle two ethical realms: an 'ethics of interaction' with recipients, and an 'ethics of outcomes'. The tension, Feldman argues, between these two ethical spheres, one means-focused and one ends-focused, leads humanitarian work to become 'compromised action', and 'frequently produced difficult dilemmas ... [V]olunteers often found themselves having to choose among ethical principles, a circumstance that made them profoundly uncomfortable' (ibid.). Yet charity as underpinned by such uncomfortable tensions suggests a conceptual separation between equally valued and visible 'means' and 'ends' that does not play out neatly in this chapter's case study. What constituted the most important moral

work within Anglo-American charity volunteering was not the resolution of compromise between two discrepant and separate spheres, but the creation of new ends out of the means of volunteering and being charitable.

Riles' (2001) study of Fijian NGO networks suggests an alternative framing for these processes. She shows how networks of people, material objects and information became aesthetic forms that generated their own effects. 'Networks do not refer to a reality outside themselves' (*ibid.*: 22). Action is generated by the various forms of networking, such as documentation processes, rather than vice versa. This approach is useful, but has its limits. It can disembed such practices from the wider economic, political and historical domains that make certain forms of network possible. However it does allow us to consider how participants themselves experience action when it is form-focused, when the logic of their action makes such wider contexts invisible to them, and when they themselves feel immersed within the questions of means.

Remembering Uncompromised Action

The main organizer of the food bank, Caitlin, had been working for this ministry for over twelve years. She recalled that the food bank had started small, funded only by bake sales, and that the original 'clients' were a group of between ten and twenty elderly Italians who lived locally. She described this as a harmonious time, when the givers and receivers of charity developed personal, unique bonds of affection for each other. After twelve years, their names and personal characteristics still rang clearly in her memory. 'There was Furella, there was Anna, there was Giuseppe', she remembered with a smile. 'There was a Neapolitan couple, Rosa and Antonio.' Her use of the word 'client', a word she did not use to describe current recipients of church charity, illustrated how she demarcated this early phase off as a positive experience of charity volunteering, where givers and receivers developed strong and enduring client-patron bonds.

Caitlin's memories of these early stages of the food bank were in sharp contrast to her recollection of its more recent past. She explained that, beginning in 1997, immigrants slowly became the primary group of charity recipients. Her experience of this shift was not positive. 'We started getting all the Albanians,' she said, 'and that was hairy. We were a bunch of women, and it never got totally out of control, but we would give the bags out through the gate.' The majority of the new recipients were young or middle-aged men, and the small group of volunteer women soon began to experience a sense of physical threat, especially as the recipients numbers grew and began to outnumber them by at least three to one, Caitlin told me.

The food-bank volunteers' sense of unease corresponded to a nationwide moral panic regarding the perceived threat new immigrants posed to the social and cultural fabric of Italy. Caitlin described how many Albanian food-bank recipients during this time always demanded more goods, or different items, than the volunteers had.³ At this point, Caitlin said, the quiet and informal atmosphere of the food bank disappeared. As the number of food-bank recipients rose, so too did their ethnic diversity. Instead of a relatively small and homogenous group of elderly Italians, the volunteers now encountered a great variety of nationalities, ages and backgrounds, and many did not have a common language with which to communicate. This, she explained, led to more competitive interaction between food-bank recipients, and a tenser atmosphere. The volunteers found they had less time to spend with each recipient. What was perceived by many volunteers to be an increasingly 'demanding atmosphere' led many to withdraw from relationships with recipients and to act defensively and sometimes coldly with them. A new anonymity, she recalled, entered the social relations of charity.

By the time I arrived in 2006 to become a regular food-bank volunteer, Caitlin had made the decision to spend her time during the food bank stationed in the food preparation room set in the church's undercroft. Here she supervised the preparation of the food-bank bags, replenishing the shelves and ordering the small room as the morning progressed. 'There is only so long you can do it for, before you get burned out', Caitlin explained. 'Now I'm not so good at dealing with them. I work better here.' The consequence of this reflexive decision was that the main organizer of the food bank, the person who determined what was given out, how much, and any changes to the rules, rarely interacted with the recipients of charity.

Many volunteers had suffered from what is termed, in volunteer-sector parlance, 'compassion fatigue' (Elisha 2008: 155). They had found they had become emotionally desensitized after hearing the same stories of need over and over again. Their cynicism also related to what volunteers described as years of being verbally abused, as well as a sense of constantly being 'duped' by untrue stories. As Caitlin explained in an interview,

Now it is a different atmosphere; now we get cheese thrown at us, [and] people would get stuff out and throw them at the ground. There [were] a couple of times when I would just take the bag back and say, 'If this is your behaviour, then give it back, because there is someone who needs it more than you obviously [do]' – because I would not be afraid of these people.

Belligerence and defiance, I was told, begot belligerence and defiance. In response to a situation in which the volunteers felt they were 'losing control', a new ethic of interaction developed. As the recipients attempted to shape

the food bank into a realm that more closely met their own needs and desires, so the volunteers were forced to adjust their procedures and understanding of their own action. Caitlin recalled that they soon developed a very clear set of rules for recipients to follow in order to give out the food effectively in such an atmosphere and, they hoped, to defuse the rivalry and tension that existed between recipients. The volunteers' control over the moral tone of the event, which in previous times had involved receivers of charity conforming to expected ideals regarding gratefulness and passivity, lost its hold. Now the food-bank recipients – often in competition with each other – refused to recognize their relatedness as recipients, as a charity category.

Similar memories were related to me by several of the long-term food-bank volunteers. These shared narratives of the past were part of an important reflexive process that helped the volunteers to understand their own responses to changing circumstances in ways that made the present ethic of interaction logical, moral and unavoidable. As Mosse (2005b: 29) argues, 'Coherence is after the fact'. Such reflexive memories emphasized the co-created, specific and situated origins of current volunteer behaviour that had emerged at the coalface of charitable work. For such women, compassion became a puzzle of enactment rather than a theological force, emergent and understood within cumulative and small acts.

Impersonal Knowledge at the Personal Level

In order to continue to be Christian towards those deemed poor and needy, the volunteers focused their energy and attention towards providing a consistent and sustainable service. In settling into the routine of charity work, the volunteers expressed one key concept through which these ordered relationships were realized and made meaningful. A phrase repeated often was that charity was about 'getting the work done'. At its core, this phrase encompassed what I shall term an ethic of 'disinterested equality'. Theories of bureaucracy are a useful starting point in thinking through this ethic.

As Max Weber argues, bureaucracy develops best 'the more completely it eliminates from official business love, hatred and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation' (Weber [1956] 1978: 975). Peter Blau points out that in order to treat each 'client' equally, bureaucrats must disengage and become aloof in order to avoid offering favourable treatment to some clients over others.

For rational standards to govern operations without interference from personal considerations, a detached approach must prevail ... towards clients. If an official develops strong feelings about subordinates or clients, he can hardly help letting

those feelings influence his official decisions. As a result, and often without being aware of it himself, he might ... discriminate against some clients in favor of others. The exclusion of personal considerations from official business is a prerequisite for impartiality as well as for efficiency. The very factors that make a government bureaucrat unpopular with his clients, an aloof attitude and a lack of genuine concern with their problems, actually benefits these clients ... impersonal detachment engenders equitable treatment of all persons and thus fosters democracy in administration. (Blau 1956: 30)

Weber ([1956] 1978) argues that disinterested equality is inherent in a bureaucratic model and emerges from above, from ministers and policy. Post-Weberian approaches have attempted to insert cultural nuance and agency into such theories by showing how bureaucrats transform policies of 'indifference' (Herzfeld 1993) through practice, and develop their own systems and sets of rules, against top-down pressures towards disinterest (see, for example, Lipsky 1980). Others have shown that inequality and interest can be built into the very institutional fabric of bureaucracy (Shore 1989), or that emotional labour is an essential component of the workings of bureaucratic relations (Martin, Knopoff and Beckman 1998; Payne and Cooper 2001).

Weberian rationality is today often the butt of criticism: the failings of many projects seeking to improve social conditions are commonly attributed to bureaucrats who are out of touch and distant from the social problems they seek to address. James Scott (1998: 311) argues that many state development projects fail because they rely solely on what he terms *Téchne*: abstract, impersonal and universal knowledge. This knowledge is schematic, and contains within it all the causal explanations necessary to be self-contained and self-perpetuating. *Mētis*, by contrast, he defines as local and informal knowledge. It represents 'a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment' (ibid.: 313). This difficult to articulate knowledge relies on 'feel', on the adaptive skill gained through iterative 'doing'. Scott associates *Techne* with the bureaucratic ethos and structures of the modern world.

Scott's model, like other models of bureaucracy discussed above, argues that the pressure to behave bureaucratically comes from a structural level above everyday human action. Despite inserting agency, adaptation and resistance (read *Mētis*) into accounts of agents' responses to bureaucratic pressure, 'bureaucracy' as a trope with *Techne* qualities remains largely untouched. By contrast, in this case study 'disinterested equality' emerged, I argue, at the level of *Mētis* rather than *Techne*. Such impersonality was a response to the contests and collaborations seen to be at the heart of everyday social interaction, which both givers and recipients had a hand in shaping, rather than simply a response to a governing structure or ideology that was presented as self-contained and schematic.

This analysis calls into question a deeper assumption in many models of bureaucracy. Timothy Mitchell (2002) argues, in his account of modernization and development in modern Egypt, that social science and capitalist systems have often produced similar effects: the tendency to bifurcate ‘reality’ from ‘representation’, and ideas from objects. Mitchell’s account shows how global development policies and designs are implicated in the replication of such a dualism, by hiding the complex interaction of practices, contingencies and forms of agencies that shape ideas and plans as they unfold. In this chapter I show how the volunteers did not understand their charity model or experience the impersonality of their practices in this way. Their mode of action did not conceal or tidy the underlying complexity of their charity work or hide the importance of contingencies and the volunteers’ reactivity to them. Rather, volunteers acted as if this messy process determined their ethic of interaction. They regarded impersonality as a force created out of the intimate interactions of actors, creating a morally acceptable system of ‘making do’.

Building Impersonal Relations

By 2006, the food-bank volunteers had developed new and effective means through which to source the food and clothing they gave out. As the number of recipients had gradually increased, church bake sales became insufficient to fund the amount of food required. One of the volunteers, Jacky, heard about a national Catholic charity called the Banco Alimentare della Toscana that provided food for charitable groups helping the needy.⁴ She enquired at the local branch and ‘organized the paperwork’. By 2006, approximately 80 per cent of their food goods originated from the Banco Alimentare.⁵

The success of the church’s ‘Thrift Shop’ clothing sale now meant there were huge piles of clothing donated to the food bank every month, often more than could be given away. The thrift shop also donated half of its monthly earnings to the food bank, and Caitlin was proud to tell me that her carefully kept accounts now showed that the food bank had enough savings to buy food for several years. From the informal, ad hoc and personalized environment of its early years, the food bank had become formalized and efficient. For Caitlin, pleasure was gained from a sense of having created a durable, transparent and efficient charity structure (especially against the perceived corruption of past church practices, as will be discussed in Chapter 7). Her energy was therefore directed towards fine-tuning the structure and making the mechanism of charity work over time.

The volunteers treated the food bank as a space highly regulated by ‘rules’. According to the volunteers, these ‘rules’ aimed to guarantee the

manageability and smooth-running of the event, and the fair and equal distribution of clothing and food amongst the recipients. The food-bank recipients each had to conform to very specific and restricted movements in space. First, they were made to line up outside a locked gate and, once the food bank was open, were only let in four at a time by a volunteer stationed at the gate. The restricted route that the recipients travelled – through the front of the church grounds to collect their bag, browse through the clothing, and then exit through a different gate – was clearly marked by tables and volunteers. To begin, they were each handed their bag, to ensure they received the right one and that they only took one. Volunteers often complained that if they turned their backs from this job they would soon see recipients attempting to take a second bag. These rules had not been installed with regard to an overall planned structure of management, but had developed one by one in an ad hoc and reactive way, I was told, in response to the method of food distribution not working well. The volunteers were firm with those who lingered over the clothing longer than five minutes, asking them directly to leave. Libby, the woman in charge of organizing the clothing each week, felt frustrated that the first few groups would often take large piles of clothing, leaving only a few items for the remaining recipients. ‘It’s just not fair’, she often said to me with a defeated sigh. To try to counter this she would shout out in Italian, ‘Please leave now, there’re more people outside; take one or two things and go’.

Food-bank recipients often complained bitterly that the four items of food and a few pieces of used clothing were not enough to meet their needs. Those who arrived last always asked why it was that they could not have another bag when there were clearly leftovers. Most volunteers refused to give more than the standard amount, as they were unwilling to set what they saw as a dangerous precedent of asking and of unequal access. Often recipients would attempt to explain their particular situation to a volunteer – their inadequate housing, the number of children that they had to support, their husband’s unemployed status – in order to ask for more than was normally permitted: an extra bag of food for their family, or a particular household item. Against the anonymity of the category, ‘the poor’, individual recipients attempted to insert themselves into such relationships, as unique and unequal cases of need. At the same time, however, recipients were careful to watch any attempts other recipients made to garner more from the food bank than the rules permitted. If they witnessed this behaviour, they would immediately seek equal treatment and invoke the equal-access policy normally enforced by the volunteers. Between these responses the volunteers felt caught in a double bind.

In most cases, the volunteers would reply to a request for extra items by firmly stating that the goods on display were all that was available that

day. This was despite the often large number of bags of goods downstairs, donated for food bank recipients. If the volunteers did try to meet such diverse needs, they often found that the resulting interaction discouraged them from breaking the rules of disinterested equality again. 'Things just get out of hand', Caitlin explained to me. On one occasion a volunteer listened patiently to a Filipina woman's story. It was raining and the woman had holes in her shoes. The volunteer felt sorry for her and so went downstairs to the storeroom. Upon appearing from the food-bank storeroom with several pairs of shoes in her hand, the volunteer found herself surrounded by a gathered group of Romanian women. The volunteer found the pairs of shoes being pulled out of her hands, as the Romanian women said, 'We need shoes too'. The volunteer, thinking of nothing else she could do, threw a too-small pair at the Filipina woman for her to take. With a defeated shrug the volunteer observed that doing a favour for one of them was so difficult: the others, she said, just became too angry.

The pressure to be 'fair' and to treat each recipient equally, came as much from those who received support and were keen to demand more if they saw others receiving more. Ironically, the ethical logic used by givers to maintain a manageable space was co-created and utilized by charity recipients as the acceptable rationale to make claims; at the same time recipients complained that such an ethical logic was unfair and unresponsive. In this situation, rules to enforce equality became a bind to prevent givers from extending their support, as well as a protection from recipients' attempts to extend the orbit of charity into areas of support that recipients themselves sought to define.

When I first began volunteering at the food bank, Caitlin explained that, 'You can't get too involved [with recipients] or they start asking you for too many things'. This extension of the orbit of help had to be restrained, and the volunteers were quick to turn down any requests that went beyond the food bank. Listening to people's personal stories was regarded as a dangerous situation that would inevitably lead to requests for more help. One recipient, after telling us about his friend in hospital, asked the volunteers to deliver food to him, as well as other supplies. One volunteer told him this was impossible, as well as unnecessary, as he would be provided with food in hospital. Another Italian lady in her sixties complained that it was too far for her to walk to get to the church, and the volunteers should start running a bus service to pick her up and drop her in town. This 'unreasonable' request caused a great amount of laughter amongst the volunteers. For the volunteers the borders of the food bank were tidy and had to be maintained as such; their responsibilities towards the recipients were clear cut and limited, and a significant amount of energy was put into maintaining these borders.

Another factor that contributed to an ethos of disinterested equality was the food bank's high level of accessibility. The food bank was run on the

principle that food and clothing would be given out to anyone who came and asked. But while a Christian ethos of open 'hospitality' and compassion towards the 'universal poor' was behind the original open-access policy, this policy contributed to the volunteers disengaging from the recipients as people with unique histories and situations of need. Many studies of charity show that when givers monitor the spending of charity money or the use of charity goods, recipients often feel the criteria for assessment is paternalistic, disempowering, and insensitive to their situated worlds and particular situations of poverty (see, for example, Zelizer 1990; Cruikshank 1999; Bornstein 2005). The opposite approach, when givers take no interest in accounting for how their charity goods are used, can also engender feelings of unfairness in recipients. Giving charity is never morally or politically neutral.

No questions asked regarding deservedness meant no glimpses into the complex situations that caused poverty or the individual strategies used to deal with it. The open-access policy prevented the volunteers from morally judging the individual recipient's efforts to deal with their marginal social position. Unlike the Victorian charity workers who carried out regular 'poor visits' to inspect how their charity was being used (McCarthy 1990), the food-bank volunteers did not attempt to determine if the charity they gave out did in any way 'improve' the lives of the recipients. To do both these things – to determine a scale of need and a scale of charity efficacy – would have meant a complex engagement with the poverty of the recipients, with the 'ends' of charity work. It would have required the eight volunteers to offer many more hours volunteering and to make complex assessments of deservedness.

By not delineating a limited and specific group of people as the 'deserving needy', the food bank was potentially faced with an unlimited number of recipients. Not increasing the amount of food and clothing to try to meet recipients' wishes could, therefore, be seen as a tactical strategy to limit recipient numbers to a level that did not outstrip charity goods and the number of volunteers available. If, most volunteers believed, the food bank increased the quantity and quality of the goods, more 'poor people' would start attending, so they would then need more volunteers and more food. This cycle was potentially endless. Their Christian ethos of openness was marked by a strategic and pragmatic limiting of gifts that consequently kept the number of recipients in equilibrium with what the volunteers saw as their available human and material resources. But such justifications do not just have pragmatic effects. They are ultimately deeply political manoeuvres because they confine the concerns of charity to immediate spatial and temporal realms where politics is barely visible. By refusing to engage with the wider issues of collective social justice and need, the possible alternative forms and effects of charity receded from the volunteers' view.

Defining Need

As Feldman (2007: 699–700) notes, in charity there often exists an inequality to define the ethical nature of the encounter between givers and receivers of charity. In these situations, the givers of charity are more able to determine what constitutes need, virtue and deservedness than recipients, and as a consequence, limit the realm of support they offer. At the food bank, the givers' actions were underpinned by several deep-seated assumptions regarding how the recipients should present their neediness.

The volunteers assumed that food was a more essential and virtuous gift to the poor than clothing. The organizer and several of the volunteers did, however, acknowledge the importance of the clothing. Caitlin told me several times that the recipients could get a hot meal every night in Florence, and really did not need to buy food. 'There are so many services. They really need the clothes though; warm, clean clothes, especially in winter.' Some of the immigrants lived in substandard housing that quite literally did not provide full shelter. One Moroccan family told the volunteers that they lived in the garden of an abandoned house. Often the migrants and homeless people did not have adequate clothes-washing facilities, and so required a constant stream of disposable clothing. Furthermore, Florence is bitterly cold in the winter. Clothing poor people was also a deeply moral project. As Hansen (1999: 345) notes, 'wearing rags plays a major role in the characterizations of poverty' in many social contexts.

Despite knowing that clothing may have been more important, food was still the ideal primary focus of the food bank. Money from the food-bank account was never spent on clothes, except to buy gloves, hats and scarves once a year at Christmas. This was despite a constant stream of weekly requests for good footwear, jackets, blankets and baby items such as strollers. Instead the food bank relied on all clothing and household items being donated. This is another example of how the volunteers attempted to limit their emotional engagement with recipients. If they attended to requests for specific clothes or household goods, they slowly became entangled with stories of specific need and situations of poverty. The recipients were expected to take their food first, and then, only on the way out, to look through the clothes. Instead, on some occasions, food bank recipients went straight to the clothing, and had to be followed by a volunteer to be given a food bag. The volunteers often found this irritating, and an indication that the recipients were not really 'needy' if they did not want the food foremost.

On some occasions the clothing was not given out, as there were not enough staff to set up and supervise the tables. It was the most laborious food-bank job, involving much unpacking and repacking of boxes. On the rare occasion, clothes were not offered because the volunteers felt that

they did not have the time or energy to do it. It would, by contrast, have been unthinkable to not give out the food. Volunteers considered food to be the more virtuous good, a more essential symbol of poverty, need and charity, as well as Christian hospitality. Despite the recipients' attempts to define their needs otherwise, the structure of the food bank requires them to demonstrate their neediness by requiring food above all else.

Every few months the food-bank recipients were allowed to choose one item each from a table of miscellaneous food goods. These were one-off food products deemed 'non-essential' items. To put such items in the food bags would have meant that not all the food bags would have been equal, and this did not fit with the 'fairness' ethos that governed the food bank. On these occasions the food-bank recipients nearly always preferred the least-essential food items. Chocolate, sweets, nuts and crisps were chosen first, leaving those who arrived at the food bank late to choose between rice flour, pasta, polenta and tinned meat. The volunteers did not say anything to recipients about their choices, respecting their autonomy in this small realm, but often later reflected that this was a troubling trend. They expected the food items that could provide a substantial meal to go first.

Once again, volunteers made assumptions regarding food, virtue and need. The more virtuous food items were those that were nutritious or highly calorific starches, which could have fed more people. That the food bank recipients did not take these foods when given the choice made their neediness suspect; the true 'needy' could not afford to pick such luxuries. In fact these choices can be seen as rational. If the recipient had little or no cooking facilities then the ready-to-eat food items, versus the pasta and rice, made sense. Furthermore, the favoured items were all expensive items, and if the recipient had little money it was logical to take the expensive items for free and themselves pay for cheaper items such as pasta, which cost less than fifty cents a packet. By maintaining control over what constituted need within the food-bank space, yet keeping any doubts and concerns to themselves through a polite social distance from recipients and their choices, the volunteers could limit how engaged they became in recipients' lives, and uphold the ethos of disinterested equality.

Tricky Compassion

Despite all efforts to perform disinterested equality, the volunteers did sometimes distinguish those who were more deserving recipients than others. It was clear that a hierarchy of the 'deserving needy' intersected with the volunteers' ethos of fairness and open access. Often it resulted from some recipients' 'neediness' being visually tangible through bodily evidence. Some

of the volunteers had close relationships with several of the elderly *pensionati* who had been attending the food bank for many years. Remnants of the old client–patron system were evident. The volunteers would often greet these recipients by name, kiss their cheeks, and put a hand to the shoulder of their shrunken frames. The volunteers often chatted for a time with them before handing them their bags. The *pensionati* were sometimes discretely given something extra if they asked – perhaps a carton of milk, or an extra bag. The volunteers often discussed the extreme difficulty of being on a state pension, which they told me was only around six hundred euros a month, and which helped to justify occasionally breaking their own rules of fairness. The elderly recipients' need was plainly evident in the difficulty they endured in carrying their food bag with shaking arms, and the laborious effort required for them to walk slowly through the food-bank space.

The homeless recipients were also helped as much as possible. They 'wore' their need on their bodies even more starkly than the elderly. Volunteers often commented sadly on their dishevelled clothing and pungent smell. The homeless men also demonstrated their need by the highly public locations in which they hung around, drank and slept. Many of the volunteers knew exactly which part of the train station a homeless man went to bed on his flattened cardboard box each night. These men were always given extra time if they asked for a blanket or a pair of shoes, and items were often put aside for them.

These two exemplars of the 'trusted needy' – the elderly and homeless – relied on notions of innocence, vulnerability and powerlessness. As will be discussed further in chapters 6 and 7, when the narrative of deservedness was right, compassion was allowed to flow and disinterest could be displaced. Yet Fassin (2007) shows that this engagement is still premised on a form of disengagement and disinterest because of its reductive quality. The abstract and essentialized 'victim' is vital, he argues, to the humanitarian enterprise, casting givers as subjects of intervention, and recipients as objects of intervention.

The logic of their intervention lead[s] them to what might be termed a humanitarian reduction of the victim ... all that is retained of [recipients'] worlds is what contributes to a telling image in the public space ... suffering beings who can only be described in terms of their physical injuries and psychological trauma ... the individuals in question tend to conform to this portrait, knowing that it will have an impact on public opinion, and thus offer the humanitarian agents the part of their experience that deeds the construction of them as human beings crushed by fate. (Fassin 2007: 517)

Despite enabling compassion, engagements with the elderly and homeless were still a form of 'abstraction' because they preconfigured giver–recipient relations and compassion in ways that ignored the specificities of particular life histories and political circumstances (Malkki 1998).

There were also those members of the food bank who were thought *not* to need help. One woman who attended the food bank was known to be a millionaire, as one of the volunteers had worked in a bank where she held an account, and it was commented on that she should not come. Another lived near a volunteer and was seen at their local supermarket with full trolleys of groceries and was known to drive a car, 'better than the one I have' reported the volunteer. Another food-bank recipient turned up in a new Mercedes to pick up his food bag, and was treated with hostility by the other waiting food-bank recipients. They shouted to him that he obviously did not need the food bag, and should not come again. While he did return to the food bank, he never arrived in his Mercedes again. In aid of maintaining the 'openness' and equality of the food bank, volunteers tolerated these 'un-needy' recipients and gave them a food bag, but they received no extra help. If the volunteers were to begin limiting access to only those they deemed deserving, they would have had to enter into the world of assessing need and determining recipients' poverty status. As has already been shown, such a process would have involved extending the food bank beyond the realm of the churchyard, and into recipients' homes, families and histories of need.

The social status and level of need of the majority of food-bank recipients was, however, very difficult for the volunteers to determine. As many of the volunteers dressed casually for the event, they often joked that the recipients were better dressed than them. There were few visual cues that could be relied on to determine the authenticity of neediness. The unease that many volunteers felt about whether a recipient was indeed 'needy' was expressed in humour. Volunteers frequently commented during the summer that the reason so many recipients stopped coming was because they were all on the island of Capri, an exclusive Italian holiday destination. The assumption was clear: real needy recipients do not go on holiday. On one occasion, as we were closing up, a man came in who one volunteer was sure had already received a bag that day. When confronted politely with this question he said he had not, and he was handed another bag. One volunteer said, 'Where would he have put the other bag?', to which another volunteer jokingly replied, 'Perhaps he put it in his BMW around the corner'. These jokes reflexively expressed cynicism and doubt regarding the effectiveness of their charity work, and the volunteers' lack of certainty regarding how much of a difference they felt they were really making towards improving the lives of Florence's needy population.

Furba!

When I asked why the volunteers directed so much of their energy towards enforcing the rules, their response was simple: because the recipients broke

them so often. It was an answer that displaced the centrality of their own agency, placing it in dialogical tension with recipients' agency. Again, these explanations show that the volunteers' foci temporally and spatially limited charity work to the realm of immediate social interaction (cf. Scherz 2013), bracketing out questions regarding wider life histories of need or long-term charity support. Perhaps, one volunteer told me, they might have had more time to listen to individual stories of need and to consider how needs could be met were they not constantly dealing with recipients' attempts to 'outwit' them.

As a volunteer, I did observe many instances of recipients attempting to subvert the rules of the food bank. Some brought in large bags and tried to hide the first food bag they received in order to gain another from a different volunteer. Others left and returned twenty minutes later to get a second bag and hoped the volunteers would not remember they had been through. The volunteers found these constant attempts to 'dupe' them annoying, and kept a close eye on those who had reputations for such behaviour. Some food-bank recipients who developed elaborate ways of garnering more goods were labelled as '*furbola*' (cunning, sly).

On one occasion a Nigerian woman had somehow been let in before the food bank opened. She sat quietly on a bench, pushing her baby in a pram. She explained in proficient Italian that she needed a food bag and baby food, as she had a doctor's appointment for her baby at the time the food bank opened. She also asked for women's and baby clothes. I said I would ask the others if it was okay, and when I did, two volunteers told me she has done this before and that there would be no appointment. I was allowed to give her the food bag and the baby food, but if the other food-bank recipients saw her riffling through the clothes they would get angry. I proceeded to give her the food and explained that the clothes were not ready. She said that her appointment was actually at 10.30 A.M., and she would wait for the food bank to open. When I told the other volunteers this they rolled their eyes, laughed and said, 'We knew it, they're always doing this. *Furba!*'

Towards the end of the food bank on another day, when there was no one else waiting outside the gate, an East European man took two bags. Libby told him that he could only take one. He said he was hungry and rubbed his stomach. He kept hold of both bags. Libby said no, but did not do anything to take back the bag. He stared at us and told us he needed it so much. Libby said no again. He stared at us further, with a look of desperation. Libby sighed and gave in, telling him to take them, but adding 'Only this once, and don't tell the others'. He gave us a weak smile and left immediately, murmuring '*Grazie*'. Libby turned to me and said, 'I hope you're not mad at me', to which I said, 'No, God no, it's just such a tricky situation'. She nodded and replied, 'Yeah, it's hard. That's why I'm on clothes and not on

food distribution'. I nodded and added, 'Me too, I'm such a soft touch'. These incidents reflexively exposed the fear volunteers had, not just of being seen as weak and malleable by the recipients, but by each other. In the food-bank space, acts underpinned by compassion, listening and indecision were viewed as having dangerous consequences for all volunteers.

On other occasions the defiance was more hostile. Two Russian women appeared one morning as the food bank was quietening down. They had only been through fifteen minutes before and had collected their food bags. The volunteers told them that they had been seen earlier. The two recipients stared at the volunteers; one was a little embarrassed while the other looked defiant. The volunteers asked them to leave. The defiant woman pointed to the leftover bags, of which there were fifteen, and said in Italian, 'Who are they for?' to which a volunteer replied 'For other people'. The volunteers again asked them to leave, and the woman became angry and refused to leave, insisting she had not yet received a bag. At this point, one volunteer, Kathy, became annoyed and said to her in Italian, 'Do you think we're stupid?' The angry recipient looked even more incensed and replied back in Italian, 'There is no need to call us stupid', having misunderstood what Kathy had said. Kathy then said that she would escort them out, and put her hand out to take the woman's arm. At this point the two women turned and left.

The volunteers immediately discussed how outrageous the behaviour was and how ungrateful the recipients were. One volunteer recalled that the previous week a similar situation had occurred and another Russian had tried to spit on an 80-year-old volunteer. Another volunteer, Tracy, added angrily, 'Right, next time we'll ask them to wait and we'll call the *carabinieri* [Italian military police], and they can sort it out. I mean, they probably don't even have proper papers and they have the nerve to cause that sort of trouble!'

Kathy laughed at this remark, and said that the *carabinieri* might be a little high up the ladder to go to. But Tracy remained firm, saying they really could not treat the volunteers like that and think that it was okay. 'We are not here to take that', she insisted. The volunteers discussed the incidents further and decided that if the small Russian group continued this behaviour they would not be let in again. In situations of high tension and conflict between volunteers and recipients, the distinction between the volunteers, all secure in their own migration status as permanent residents in Italy, and recipients, many of whom were illegal migrants, could be starkly highlighted. But in times of peaceful interaction between volunteers and recipients, volunteers would normally downplay such differences, often referring to the recipients as 'newcomers to Italy, just like us'. The reflexive acknowledgement of difference briefly exposed in such acrimonious moments of tension illustrated the volunteers' awareness of the unequal influence, power and security givers

and recipients had within wider Florentine/Italian society, a difference that volunteers reserved as a tool for ensuring compliance and control.

The recipients did not just transgress the rules inside the food-bank space at the moment of giving, but also outside of it. It was recognized by all volunteers that some food-bank recipients took food and clothing to sell, as they had been seen doing so on the streets by some volunteers. Some recipients also discarded the free clothing on the pavement once around the corner. Not having had much time to look through the clothing, and wanting to take it before other recipients did, they often ended up leaving the food bank having hardly examined their items. The volunteers tended to shrug with a defeated sigh and reflect that they could not control what recipients did with the charity goods once they left the church. In doing so, the volunteers proclaimed the limits of their power to determine the outcome of their giving, and instead focused on the area that they did have firm control over – the site of the food bank – making sure that at least there recipients would conform to a charitable ethos.

As these examples show, the volunteers perceived power as a tussle, as never being entirely in their possession. Disinterested equality cannot be explained, therefore, simply with reference to the unequal exchange lying at the heart of charity. In the past, the previous patron–client relations of the food bank, which were decidedly unequal, were seen to produce less distance and more personable, stable interaction than when giver–recipient relationships became more open to negotiation. Mauss ([1924] 1990) argues that gift giving creates enduring ties, but only if the recipient accepts the gift. This represents the recipient's key moment of power in shaping the gift encounter. In this case study, the recipients tended to partially reject the material gifts offered, complaining that they were not enough. They also rejected the non-material gifts of sentiment that would have allowed givers to configure compassion theologically, and they subverted the volunteers' desired uses of charity goods. In such situations, volunteers felt unable to offer compassion as a type of paternal or fraternal love, and instead had to, in the midst of complicated exchanges and negotiations, realize compassion in other ways that did not rely upon reciprocated sentiment or stable relations.

Understanding Defiance

Defiance was not only understood by the volunteers in negative terms, such as arising from selfishness, ungratefulness and *furberia* (cunningness). In order to continue to provide a service, week in and week out with the same recipients, other justifications for this behaviour were often given. One volunteer explained to me, 'Don't ever expect people like this (the food-bank

recipients) to be grateful, they're never grateful. People like this can never be grateful because they are just so scared they will not get anything, and they are driven by that desperate fear.'

Understanding the recipients as motivated by a 'desperate fear' meant that volunteers saw this behaviour as belonging to recipients' circumstances, rather than their inner selves; the recipients were driven by blindly irrational emotion rather than by agency and stratagems. As a consequence, volunteers found it easier to respond to this 'behaviour of victimhood' without resentment, and a consistent approach towards the ideal needy and non-agentive food-bank recipients could be maintained.

Another explanation provided by volunteers both supported and contradicted the reason given above. Such defiant behaviour was seen as just 'business as usual' in Italy. The volunteers often complained that the public sphere in Italian society was dominated by rude and competitive behaviour, and that *furberia* was an essential trait to survive in Italy. Life was seen as tough in Italy and you have to be tough to survive it. This explanation simultaneously helped to justify the volunteers' own tough responses to the food-bank recipients and the recipients' demanding approach to them. Again it framed the recipients' actions as resulting from wider society rather than their own persons.

Understanding the defiance and the widespread rule breaking in these ways maintained the continuity of the food bank as a functioning space, and allowed all but the worst transgressions to continue and be shrugged off with mild annoyance. It also allowed the volunteers to reflexively understand the recipients' defiance as having little to do with the (in)adequacies of the services they provided. As a consequence, defiance did not challenge or change the volunteers' rules, or threaten the disinterested equality that governed the volunteers' action.

Reflections

It is tempting at this point to build an analysis at the level of broader social structure or ideology to account for the development of an impersonal ethos. Factors such as class, typologies of race, stereotypes of need, scales of interaction, systems of migration and illegality, and the unequal exchange inherent in charitable practices could all be further uncovered to expose the 'real' reason for such a mode of disinterest and distance. Constellations of these factors did have effects and have been alluded to throughout the chapter. Rather than centre these factors in my analysis, my goal has been to explicate how volunteers understood and experienced the development of impersonality, and to take their reflections as the springboard into new forms of knowledge of migrant charity work.⁶

At the American Church food bank, what at first appeared to be a lack of empathy from the volunteers – an ethos that was in stark contrast to their stated aims and goals for volunteering – was in fact a protective strategy to avoid destabilizing the continuity of already compromised charity action. This mode of interaction avoided enraging food-bank recipients and prevented the volunteers from entering into morally complex relationships with recipients that had no clear boundaries. Reflexive satisfaction was gained from the harmony of a job smoothly executed without the interruption of too many moments of disorder. On the ground, Christian compassion translated into being fair, and being fair meant being disinterested. Yet this case also demonstrates that the volunteers only partially controlled the frameworks of charity interactions. Even if volunteers desired to offer Christian compassion, recipients had ways, through rule breaking or open hostility, of rejecting the non-material gifts that volunteers could offer, such as intimacy.

One of the most widespread criticisms of bureaucracy is that its agents become so concerned with enforcing the rules that they forget what the organization aims to achieve. The discrepancy between a bureaucratic organization's mission statement and the treatment of its clients can be stark. This is often associated with the myriad levels of organizational complexity that distance planners from recipients (Herzfeld 1993; Scott 1998). In this case study, however, distance is created out of the complexities of charitable giving that are at once 'small-scale' and 'face-to-face'. It was, ironically, an ideology of Christian compassion demanding emotional engagement, which existed at a reflective distance from social interaction, that called for a lack of distance.

This chapter opens up a range of questions for the study of charity. Even for highly planned charity programmes where the end goals are writ large in the multiple levels of planning, implementation and assessment, how might practitioners develop new end goals out of the means of daily interaction that transform or contrast with the planned programme? Furthermore, how might we critically engage with the assumption that exists in charity and anthropological discourses, that the small-scale and the face-to-face will be less impersonal?

An ethos of disinterested equality acted to transform compassion through iterative action and interaction, and it enabled charity work to continue. The constant reflexive preoccupation with the smooth-running form of charity work had the effect of discouraging the volunteers from reflexively addressing their charity's ends and effects, and ultimately acted to depoliticise their understandings of and acts towards the needy. Being ethical and just in the moment of charity meant not attending to broader questions of justice and the politics of the gift. As women with limited time, energy, fortitude and resources, they felt they had to make imperfect choices and compromises.

Their method for encountering charity recipients acted to craft a persistent, patient and dignified charity persona. Here the frictions of charity provided volunteers with opportunities to demonstrate their continuing commitment to Florence and its needy residents (within certain carefully conscribed limits), to shape recipients' mode of charity engagement, and to demonstrate their social power and influence as Anglo-American migrants, vis-à-vis other migrant groups.

Chapter 6

COMPASSION AND EMPATHY WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING



ACG had attracted more women than normal to this monthly meeting, despite the spring chill. Around sixty women sat huddled in rows of seating, wearing tailored jackets, fur coats and cashmere cardigans. At the front of the meeting room two speakers were describing their international charity works. A willowy American woman in her fifties, Amelia, spoke of her aid work for a Christian charity in Afghanistan. She detailed how she had started a needlework project working with women who have 'psychological needs': 'One woman was sixteen and was married to a sixty-year-old heroin addict, and when we asked what she could think of in her life that made her feel happy, she couldn't come up with a single thing.' Another ACG speaker, an American migrant to Sweden aged in her sixties, described setting up a sponsorship programme called 'Grandmothers United' in Tanzania. The programme supported 'bibi' (grandmothers), who, due to the death of their children from AIDS, now cared for their grandchildren. 'You can sponsor them, adopt them; we match up grandmothers here with grandmothers there.'

Emotive, heroic and hope-filled charity narratives were a recurring focus in ACG. Through such stories members sought first to know and then attend to the suffering of needy others in local and global contexts. Such stories both elided and pronounced the differences between the lives of charity givers and recipients. While such stories proclaimed that givers and recipients were collectively women, wives and grandmothers, they were women, wives and grandmothers in unimaginably different contexts. This chapter engages with the tensions between understanding and failing to understand the lives of recipients within the charity exchange. I focus on 'empathy' and 'compassion' as the core processes that allowed charity givers to navigate the experiential and social distances between themselves and recipients, and which encouraged a motivation to give.

Creating narratives and testimonies about the needy that incited affect were important domains through which Anglo-American givers came to

trust recipients' needs (and their own judgement) and, as a consequence, felt morally compelled to offer assistance. If narratives of need were provided by recognized and trusted figures, and matched valued discourses of the deserving needy, then compassionate emotions were experienced as overwhelming and coercive, and as an impetus to act. They were understood as an important internal reflexive guide to the truth of claims made by unknown recipients.

Two affective concepts are important here: empathy and compassion. While I explain the historical and philosophical genealogies of both terms in more depth below, of note here is that they distinguish between two inter-linked but distinct processes. Empathy refers to a primary affective sense of resonance that connects people and their experiences, and allows one to see another's perspective. Compassion (and to some degree also sympathy), by contrast, denotes a more cognitive overlay, and refers to the emotions of concern for the suffering of another and the compulsion to relieve that suffering. Both processes are deeply imbricated in charity and both will be explored here. Philosophical approaches to empathy have commonly assumed the universal importance of imagination and transference (e.g. Husserl 1960; Stein 1989; Freud [1905] 1990; Hume [1739–40] 2000; Smith [1759] 2002), in which a person comes to understand the experiences of another. Empathy becomes sympathy through a process of visceral mimicry, when it is felt in one's mind and body as if it were one's own experience, and compassion is allowed to flow. Some cast such a process as universal and normative, as one of the most fundamental forms of human engagement, and as a social good: 'in Man's capacity for sympathy and compassion lies the basis for sanity and society' (Wispé 1978: 325–26).

Yet as Liisa Malkki (1996) demonstrates with regard to the global humanitarian response to refugees, the incitement of empathy and compassion can as easily be born out of the deployment of a thin but powerful signifier for humanity, which is anonymous, socially and historically decontextualized, and which does not allow any understanding or deep imagination of the refugee's lifeworld. Following Malkki's lead, I ask how specific cultural forms of both engagement and detachment are reflexively propagated and managed when compassion emerges. I examine the conscious creation and acknowledgement of intimacy and distance, showing how such processes were crucial for allowing charity givers to experience compassionate, empathic emotions towards the needy.

An Anthropology of Empathy

The notion of empathy poses provocative questions for anthropology. For example, what is the ideal nature of our relations with interlocutors? Some

anthropologists have argued that empathy should be the means by which human experience is methodologically captured. Writing from a reflexive stance aimed at uncovering the effects of the ethnographer's positionality, Renato Rosaldo (1989) demonstrates how his own experience of rage-fuelled grief allowed him an empathic bridge through which he could glimpse, understand and analyse Ilongot head-hunting practices. Correspondingly, in proposing an 'experience near anthropology', Unni Wikan (1992) utilizes the Balinese concept of 'feel-think' to argue that anthropologists might utilize their own feelings in order to create a space of resonance from which knowledge of another's world might be built. Other anthropologists have questioned the premise that shared experience should or can be the basis of ethnographic insight. Clifford Geertz (1983) argues that 'transcultural identification' (ibid.: 56) or 'swimming in the stream of [another's] experience' (ibid.: 58) is not the means by which culture might be understood. Rather, it is through attending to a set of 'readily observable symbolic forms', how 'people actually represent themselves to themselves and to others' (ibid.) that we might grasp another's cultural world. Empathy can be viewed as an aid or a hindrance to anthropological understanding.

Cross-culturally, anthropologists have questioned psychological and philosophical theories that purport to chart the universal empathic basis of human relationships and forms of intimacy (Hollan and Throop 2008). Academic discussions of empathy often assume that empathic engagement naturally creates or increases understanding, respect and harmonious relations. Yet as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1992) shows, empathic engagement and a violent desire to harm another are not mutually exclusive states. Among the Amazonian Araweté tribe, a unique empathic connection occurs as a result of warfare, between a killer and his victim. A killer will symbolically die after his killing, and over time the enemy victim's soul becomes linked to the killer's, transformed from a volatile threat to life, to a protector of its murder's life. This process allows a person to 'see oneself as an enemy' (ibid.: 249). Correspondingly, Rane Willerslev (2004) demonstrates that among the Yukaghirs, a Siberian indigenous people, hunting practices require a form of mimetic empathy, in which hunters attempt to temporarily take on the body of the animal they hunt. In a similar vein, Nils Bubandt's (2009) research in Indonesia reveals how people suspect that fake documents detailing religiously motivated conspiracies for power are created by those fearful of such conspiracies and aimed at inciting violence against rival religious groups. The crafting of such documents involved a 'leap of imagination ... to take the perspective of an enemy'. Like Viveiros de Castro, Bubandt argues that 'sometimes empathy is at the heart of violence' (ibid.: 557). These examples demonstrate that empathy can emerge between those who have done, or seek to do, each other harm, and that intersubjective understanding

can be used in order to go against the will of another with whom union was temporarily sought.

Anthropologists have not only challenged the connection between relational solidarity and empathy, but also that empathic connection is indeed always central to communicative engagement. The scholarship of C. Jason Throop (2010: 155) describes a form of ‘communicative opacity’ culturally prevalent on the island of Yap in Micronesia. Such a verbal and physical mode of communication ‘keep[s] interlocutors in a state of uncertainty and not knowing when it comes to any given speaker’s intentions, motives, thoughts and feelings’ (see also Robbins and Rumsey 2008). This work persuasively destabilized empathy as either a necessary social good or a necessary component of ongoing relational entanglement.

Following these scholars’ lead, I also question the core qualities that philosophical and psychological approaches have attributed to a universal empathic impulse. I thus ask: how much value do charity actors place on empathic connections, and which particular relationships and forms of engagement does charitable empathy enable and preclude? What makes empathy a necessary precursor to compassion and giving, and what are the political consequences of this affective focus and requirement in charity? Importantly, what stories have to be told about need in order for experiences of compassion to feel safe and a trustworthy guide for action? In charity, emotions of empathic compassion are often underpinned by cultural notions of deservedness, and filtered through systems of assessment aimed to identify recipients worthy of compassion, as well as those for whom compassion is not warranted. What other ethical values must compassion contend with in such processes of assessment?

The Tensions of Compassion

Charitable actors commonly describe compassion as a force that buttresses their motivations to offer support and alleviate suffering. At the same time, charity actors often believe that unbridled compassion can dangerously threaten the success of their gifts’ transformative power. As Bornstein (2009) shows, the spontaneous will to attend to human suffering is often tempered by its regulation. The desire to make charitable giving an enduring solution to need often requires taming the impulse of charity through reason: ‘to coerce the impulse to give in to rational accountability is to obliterate its freedom; to render giving into a pure impulse is to reinforce social inequality’ (ibid.: 643). Omri Elisha’s (2011) research on U.S. Evangelical outreach demonstrates how the moral work of charity entailed facing and working through the ‘productive paradox’ (ibid.: 156) of both compassion

and accountability. 'While compassion is understood as unconditional, accountability is all about conditions and expectations that are deemed critical for compassion to work' (ibid.: 163). Elisha's work demonstrates how expressions of compassion and accountability become intertwined in the face-to-face engagements between givers and recipients. He examines 'the conditions under which a conceptually manageable paradox becomes practically unmanageable for religious actors who uphold it' (ibid.: 155). Evangelicals romanticized compassion and emphasized the unconditional gift, beliefs that were in friction with theological and neoliberal ideas that stress empowerment and personal responsibility.

But in charity contexts where compassion and accountability both motivate giving, are they always dialogically entangled? When exactly is compassion asserted, and when does accountability come to the fore? For ACG women, action towards charity recipients could contain within it distinct and demarcated processes of accountability and compassion, and that compassion, furthermore, could be separated into two distinct experiences. Rather than try to resolve the paradox between these values, as did Elisha's interlocutors, ACG women delineated accountability and compassion into separate spheres of time and space. They performed the careful work of audit 'backstage' and before charity events. They then publicly foregrounded the power and spectacle of empathic compassion as an act of communion and solidarity with recipients, which created an 'overwhelming urge to take action' (Elisha 2008: 170). Afterwards, as they worked to continue supporting a charity group, they experienced compassion based on a non-empathic sense of difference and a failure of understanding.

Delineating such shifting moral arenas opens new conceptual possibilities for an anthropology of ethics. Jarrett Zigon's (2007) formulation of morality sees ethics emerge from moments of 'moral breakdown', in which a mode of being in the world is no longer self-evident, when a taken-for-granted moral code is challenged, or an alternative is offered. He argues that 'the need to consciously consider or reason about what one must do only arises in moments that shake one out of the everydayness of being moral' (ibid.: 133). Zigon focuses attention on the 'moment of problematization' which he labels as 'the ethical moment' (ibid.: 137). In this vein I also examine ethics as an aspect of subject formation in which moral dilemmas and competing sensibilities are reflected upon and worked through. Rather than focusing on these moments of tension as forms of moral 'breakdown' or even 'torment' (Robbins 2007), however, I am interested in how actors develop complex ethical selves as they learn to switch between different moral logics, and try to reconcile or live with conflicting moral impulses (Lambek 2010: 9; Trnka and Trundle 2014).

In ACG and the American Church, the first moral register to emerge in charitable action centred on notions of accountability was aimed at tracing

the flow of charity money. Each year ACG donated around €45,000 in grants to Florentine charity groups, which volunteers had raised at their annual fundraising bazaar. The American Church donated around €25,000 to charity groups, and officials told me that they aimed, in the ‘spirit of tithing generosity’, to increase this to 10 per cent of the church’s income. Recipient groups increasingly had to be recognized as ‘legitimate’ charity groups. As Kimberly, the head of ACG’s ‘donation research’ explained to me, charities had to ask for funding for:

a reasonable project that we can now get receipts, for the *commercialista* (chartered accountant). When [we] started you could say, ‘I know a lady down the street who really needs a new wheelchair’ – that kind of thing we can no longer do because the club has gone legal and for the club to be legal, it is my job ... we have to go to each of these charities and see if what they want is valid.

Kimberly explained that, like the American Church, ACG preferred to sponsor ONLUS (state-registered) charities, ‘because we know that they are going to be fiscally responsible’. Yet even if a charity had this status, volunteers still held doubts that correct accountable spending would be followed. Kimberly reflected on the two previous annual rounds of grants and discussed some of the problems that she had faced in tracing charitable money.

The volleyball ladies [a team of breast-cancer survivors] has been a bit of a *polemica* [controversy], as they submitted to buy vests [but] they didn’t; they went to Venice [for a game] and now we are hoping they are going to buy the vests, so we need to give in a receipt to our *commercialista* [accountant] that is not a trip to Venice ... [And] one [charity] had applied the year before and [they applied again] and we went out there and it was the same request [as] for the year before. This meant they hadn’t spent the money [on what they should have] – that’s why we’ve gotten so *fiscale* [finically accountable], about having the project specified. They’re supposed to be visited and they are meant to turn in receipts for our *commercialista*.

Nearly all ACG women suspected that the Italian non-profit sector was sometimes connected to organized crime, and at a more benign level, was disorganized and wasteful of donated money. This fitted in with many ACG women’s contrastive maps of American versus Italian public and political life, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

The American Church rector explained that the church’s funds went mainly to local groups, such as a women’s refuge and a children’s orphanage. The charity projects supported were usually run by people personally known to church officials, and several were even run by parishioners themselves. ‘We have supported Malawi’, he explained, ‘with one of our terrific,

wonderful parishioners here who works as an evangelist in his village; we supported putting wells in his village.’ Trust was therefore achieved by working through institutional assurances (the ONLUS status) and interpersonal networks (known individuals). When I asked what types of projects they supported, the rector explained that ‘it has to be something that encourages people to be independent of support or intervention, because we tend to give the grant and then the next year it’s reduced, and then reduced and reduced, and so that eventually...’ As with ACG, which funded stand-alone and definable projects or items, charitable giving aimed not to create continuing dependence between givers and receivers. The rector reiterated this to me further through the rhetoric of ‘empowerment’.¹ When I asked what type of feedback the church received, the rector explained:

We get photos, we get letters written from the village with [the Malawian evangelist parishioner] when he comes back from visiting his family ... with a report on where it has been spent, like [the orphanage founder], we got him to come and speak to the congregation about his group, so yes we get reports back ... but in a way we don’t expect a report back, we don’t want to hang on to the purse strings with the money, we just want to make the grant and let them decide how they’ll spend it, because that is up to them to make the mistakes that we all make with money.

In such circumstances, accountability was desirable only to the point where it was compatible with creating independent, empowered, responsible and financially savvy charity recipients.

These systems of accountability framed charitable giving as trustworthy, yet on their own did not enable giving in these instances. While an essential first step, it was next narratively back-staged in favour of an emphasis on the spontaneous force of empathic compassion. Compassion is a powerful and enduring ideal underpinning modern humanitarian thought (e.g. Rawls 1971, 1993). Hannah Arendt (1963) and Norman Fiering (1976) show that political and literary ideals of ‘irresistible compassion’ – a valued emotional force that compels one to be moved by the suffering of a stranger – began to flourish in the eighteenth century within liberal political and human rights discourses (see also Wilson and Brown 2009). Ideas of compassion as a force that would oblige one to ease the suffering of a stranger ‘contributed to the spread of humanitarianism by establishing an image or an idea of human nature that made humanitarian feelings insistently “natural”’ (Fiering 1976: 196).² Today the affective dimension of compassion continues to play a central ideological role in humanitarian, philanthropic and charitable ideologies in a range of settings (Fassin 2010).

Yet the work of compassion is never a neutral impulse. It can act to socially and politically exclude just as it creates new relations of responsibility. Calls

to compassionate engagement foreclose other forms of ethical relatedness. As Muehlebach (2012) shows in her study of volunteering in Northern Italy, the recent burgeoning of compassionate volunteering in Italy reveals transforming ideals of citizenship in a neoliberal era. Rather than citizenship ensuring collective and equal social and political rights, it increasingly indexes a new type of compassionate communal life. This is one based on spontaneously and voluntarily experienced affect and morality, which necessarily relies upon the making of inequalities between those offering and those receiving compassion. Furthermore, compassion is a sentiment that, depending on social context and ideological configurations, hierarchically distinguishes certain lives that can be risked, saved or sacrificed (Fassin 2007). Within ACG, compassion was culturally constituted within givers' moral imaginations as a powerful type of emotional labour, which worked to highlight social distance, and legitimize certain needy and deserving recipients over others.

Stitch Therapy

As Christmas approached, the community services officer of ACG, Jacky, decided to organize a special event for the members. Jacky had heard about an ONLUS called 'Stitch Therapy',³ and thought that ACG members might respond well to such a group. She decided to organize an afternoon tea that brought Anglo-American women together with the charity's workers and recipients. I asked her why she was having the event, and she explained that the problem with most ACG events was that they did not allow members to 'know' people in need or gain a sense of the struggles they faced. 'You've got to get face-to-face', she said, adding that Anglo-American women 'are so much more willing to help if they meet them, talk to them ... hear about their lives'.

Twenty-five ACG members came to the afternoon tea organized by Jacky. It was held in the American Church undercroft. Each member brought a plate of cake slices or sandwiches to share. Two Stitch Therapy workers were present, Salvatore and Maria, and two recipients, Grace, a Nigerian woman in her thirties, and Clara, an Italian woman in her forties. Before the event's formal beginning, Grace and Clara looked nervous and awkward, standing as spectators on the side of the room. Despite Jacky and Sarah's attempts at introductions, ACG women looked equally uncomfortable about approaching the two unknown women.

The members sat sipping their tea. Salvatore was a clear and eloquent speaker. He stood before the women with a confident but humble posture,

gesturing with his hands calmly as he spoke in Italian and English. He explained that he was retired and now worked with and advocated for *detenuti* (inmates), both in prison and after their release 'in the period of social reintegration'. He explained that he wanted to make the club women aware of what it is like for the eighty women and the dozen young children living in the female section of Florence's Sollicciano prison, where the sewing project was carried out.

In the next ten minutes, Salvatore painted a vivid picture of prison life. He gave little detail that would permit his audience to visualize the material realities of prison life – what the cells or meals were like – but instead focused on the subjective, experiential element of what it was like to be locked away from the world. Half the female inmates, he said, were *straniere*, or foreigners. For these women, life in prison was particularly hard. They had very little contact with the outside world as few people could come to visit them. There were also very few volunteers working in the prison. The inmates' days were passed almost entirely in their cells, often up to twenty-two hours a day, during which they would spend most of their time lying on their beds sleeping or watching TV. There was an outside exercise area of a reasonable size that inmates were allowed to utilize for a few hours a day. But it was a lifeless and joyless space, and consequently underused. They were women largely alone in their world, without basic daily human contact. In this situation, he said, the women received almost no stimulation for their minds. This resulted in many purposefully cutting their own skin, inhaling the gas from the gas bottles in the cells to get high, and requesting pharmaceutical drugs from the prison's doctors in order to relax or sleep. Not only did the anti-social, solitary environment numb their minds, but legal and illegal drug-taking stupefied their bodies.

Beyond being socially, emotionally and psychologically reduced, the women were also economically in need, Salvatore explained. In the prison they had to pay for stamps, writing paper, pens and phonecards to communicate with the outside world. Few of the *straniere* prisoners received financial support from any external source, and therefore had no money. Prisoners had to pay for soap, toothpaste, tampons and shampoo, and those without access to money went without these basic hygiene goods. What was worse, he added, the prison clearly broke the law in the pricing of these products. Despite a legal requirement to charge for basic and essential items only the price of the nearest supermarket, the prison shop charged about 20 per cent more.

The ACG women's facial expressions bore outrage and pity. When he spoke of the illegal pricing of basic goods, a friend glanced at me, rolled her eyes in disgust and threw up her hands slightly. 'Unbelievable', she muttered under her

breath. Salvatore then introduced his colleague, Maria, who was a volunteer in the prison and helped to run the sewing workshops.

Maria was a Florentine woman of around forty, with a wide smile. She spoke confidently, full of enthusiasm for the process she described. She held a simple sewn product to her chest as she spoke. The *ragazze detenue* (female inmates) had to volunteer to join the project, she said, and the programme now had a constant stream of requests to take part. The programme of sewing utilized the Waldorf method, based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner that involved using only natural materials such as wool and cotton. Maria explained that the *detenute* usually arrived at the first workshop lesson closed, mute and lacking any confidence. Slowly, in the process of constructing their item, the inmates experienced something akin to a therapeutic rebirth. As they worked alongside one another, the women began to smile and to talk, gradually coming out of their shells. For the first time in many months, the women were creating something that was beautiful and their own, and made with their previously idle hands. They were now expressing themselves. While following precise construction rules, the products were all unique and personal as the women picked the colours of the fabric to reflect their own personalities.

Next to speak was one of the women employed in the charity shop. Grace stood up and blushed deeply, pulling her right arm across her body, as if to try and hide herself. Behind her Clara stood silently. Clara was painfully thin, her skin deeply aged and sunken beyond her years. Grace began to speak in Italian, but only managed to get out a few awkward phrases before losing her nerve. 'Speak in English if it's easier', one of the nearby club ladies whispered to her. Grace began again in English, her voice quiet. She struggled through her brief story. A few years back, she began, she had come with her husband from Nigeria. They had no money and could not find work. He became involved with 'bad people' who got him involved in selling drugs. Soon they were asking her to partake in the illicit trade. One evening the police caught them, separated Grace and her husband, and sent them both to jail. Her husband was still in jail, and she missed him very much. She ended by saying, 'Sewing is a new beginning for me'. Finally she added, 'Life is very hard for us, life in prison, but now it's better...' Her voice wobbled and trailed off. Tears began to slide down her cheeks and her voice rose with emotion. 'You have to support us, you *have* to help us...' The room was quiet and many ACG women had tears sliding down their cheeks, spellbound and horrified by Grace's story.

Afterwards, Jacky deemed the event a success. ACG members had been 'deeply moved' by the charity's work and its recipients' experiences, she concluded. Many women bought sewn items that day, and several reported

continuing to buy them in the months that followed at the charity's shop. Stitch Therapy was given a free table to sell their wares at the American Church craft fair. They also received a grant of several thousand euros in the next annual round of ACG charitable grants, a selection process that required ACG members to vote for an array of charities proposed by different members. Compassion had been established and became the basis of significant ongoing support.

Compassion's enactment often requires bodies to demonstrate legitimate forms of suffering within established hierarchies and scripts. As Ashby Wilson and Richard Brown (2009: 23) observe, 'For humanitarian sympathies to be elicited, it seems imperative that the narrative of suffering strongly testifies to the innocence of the sufferer' (see also Beim and Fine 2007). Miriam Ticktin (2006: 43) shows that humanitarian 'compassion depends on circulating narratives, images and histories, and often on maintaining an unequal power relation ... distinctions that are already heavily gendered and racialized. To be accepted ... on the basis of compassion, one must be accepted as plausible; and images of the Other inform the legitimacy of one's performance.'

This ACG event reflected wider themes in Italian charity practice and ideology. Muehlebach (2013: 150) demonstrates that compassionate volunteering in contemporary Italy relies upon 'conspicuous affective practice' imbued with Catholic ideals which foreground witnessing, listening and co-suffering. In Italy, public discourses portraying Nigerian female migrants as legitimated victims and needy Others merge the motifs of gendered oppression, drugs, imprisonment, slavery, sexual exploitation, and criminality (Angel-Ajani 2002; Cole 2006; Giordano 2008). In 2006, 33 per cent of prisoners in Italy were non-European citizens (Poole 2007: 150). Some Nigerian female migrants in Italy work as prostitutes, and many charities aid Nigerians who, the charities report, are compelled into sex work through the debt bondage of human trafficking. One avenue for undocumented Nigerian sex workers to claim legal migrant status is to agree to pursue criminal charges against their traffickers, and to undergo rehabilitation, often with Christian charities. Their 'denunciation' of traffickers draws on the logic and aesthetics of Catholic confession and salvation (Giordano 2008; Crowhurst 2012: 497). Grace's story, despite its brevity and while not one of prostitution, contained the motifs of male exploitation, criminality, drugs, testimony and rehabilitation through the charity sphere. Her story was legitimate for ACG women in part because it spoke to a familiar Italian narrative of race, confession, suffering, victimhood and innocence to which charity offered redemption.

From a linguistic perspective the stories told by Salvatore, Grace and Jacky were complex and multilayered. Here I wish to focus only on several narrative and framing devices and effects. According to Erving Goffman (1974: 12), a 'frame' is a 'schemata of interpretation' which 'allows its user to

locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms'. Frames operate as structures of expectation that offer interpretive options, meaningfully organize experience, identify overarching themes in a scenario, and guide action (Gumperz 1982; Benford and Snow 2000). A focus on frames calls attention to how actors publicly utilize carefully chosen narrative devices at key moments to influence others' interpretive options, how wider societal narratives shape the meanings attributed to small, daily events, and how talk circulates dynamically within social settings to expose recurring narrative themes and create spaces for meaning to be contested.

In introducing and summing up the charity and those whom it supported, Jacky framed the group in terms of the similarities existing between potential givers and potential recipients. They were women, and they were migrants, albeit from the other end of the migrant spectrum. Jacky reminded the audience that, 'We're all newcomers to this city ... We all know what it's like to arrive and not have any support. This can be a closed city'. Jacky called on the ACG women to remember their own struggles when new to Florence, and their enduring sense of migrant alienation. Such talk aimed to draw links with the women's everyday lives and those in need, and to expand 'the conventional limits of causal perception and moral responsibility' (Haskell 1985: 563).⁴

The theme of a lack of female agency in Salvatore and Grace's narratives resonated within Anglo-American women's groups. In public and private spheres, the ACG women commonly expressed frustration regarding their lack of power and social recognition as migrant women in Italy. Public narratives of constrained social networks, unhappy marriages, and employment discrimination circulated within the American community, building solidarity and expressing hardships that were specific to gender and migrant roles. Despite being financially secure and sometimes wealthy, these women often did not feel like engaged actors in local life, as detailed in Chapter 2.

At a broader level, universal womanhood was also invoked. The ACG event organizers referred to the charity recipients as their 'sisters' throughout the event. This gendered frame involved casting the inmates as both the victims of men and uniquely morally virtuous due to their gender. The charities that ACG supported in Florence and abroad were nearly always female-focused, and cast women and girls as both those who suffered most in society and the most likely social category that could be empowered to resolve such suffering (whether it was, for example, victims of domestic violence, grandmothers of HIV/AIDS sufferers, or breast cancer survivors). Victimhood and virtue were twin characteristics of universal sisterhood, a gendered philanthropic trope dating back, in large part, to the era of Victorian charity and the suffrage movement (Rosner 1982; Lowske and Fawcett 1995).

Narratively, categories of migration and gender acted as approximate frames bridging significant social distance. In what might appear to be deeply ironic and against all odds, volunteers cast compassion as built on similarity.

Engagement based on perceived connections has been the dominant model of sympathy in philosophical thought. David Hume ([1739–40] 2000) was a founding figure of this model. He used the term sympathy to characterize an empathic process that, like compassion, enables one to not only feel another's experiences, but also be affected by them.⁵ He argued that because another person's body is similar to the self in resemblance and contiguity, the self becomes a reference point to make sense of another's feelings. In doing so, because of the vividness of one's own sense of self, one can actually experience the other's emotions, 'by the force of imagination' (ibid.: 2.3.6.8; see also Husserl 1960; Stein 1989; Stueber 2006; Kirmayer 2008).⁶ According to this perspective, it is the ability to imagine suffering in one's own life that makes empathic compassion possible.

For ACG women, after the ideal of accountability had first set the scene of legitimate need, the next frame utilized to experience charitable giving was a Humean sense of sympathy and experiential connection. Ritually, this affective manoeuvre was important in creating a momentary sense of solidarity in which the givers' openness to need could be celebrated (in contrast to the sceptical and instrumental auditing of charities beforehand that determined deservedness), and emotions of intimacy could be expressed and trusted. In this ritualized moment, an ideal humanitarian version of compassion, as a spontaneous emotional desire to find a common humanity (Ticktin 2006: 39), was valued. By carefully separating out the work of audit to a distinct and distanced process, compassion could here be foregrounded and experienced as an overwhelming, unadulterated 'kindly desire to end misery and suffering' (Bornstein 2009: 632) among fellow humans. Humanitarian compassion helped bolster the narratives of legitimacy that processes of audit had already partially created.

The Power of Emotion

In creating trust and humanitarian compassion, affective experiences had to be understood in a particular way. When I subsequently asked ACG members what they had experienced in the event, most described being 'overwhelmed'. 'I found it incredibly moving; I can't put it into words', one member commented. Another participant described being 'deeply shocked', while another gestured to her heart and said, 'It jars you, stories like that – right here'. In this case study, most members experienced the event at an emotional level in three ways: as an affective and involuntary 'excess', as a

form of revelation, and as a powerful imperative to act. All three levels were important to the event's success in engendering compassionate action.

In Western societies, Catherine Lutz (1986: 292) argues, 'emotion' is a key cultural category contrasted with 'thought'. 'Emotion is conceptualized as something wild and uncontrollable, something that occurs involuntarily. In everyday discourse we speak of being swept away by emotions, of those whose emotions get the better of them, and of being under the influence of one's emotions'. Jean-Paul Sartre (1948: 79), in his exploration of emotions, notes their 'magical' and 'excessive' quality: within emotions, 'consciousness ... perceives it in objects; the objects are captivating, enchaining; they seize upon consciousness'. In this way, ACG volunteers regarded empathic emotions as disordering normal life (cf. Hillman 1960: 207; Lutz 1986: 291).

The ability for emotions to disorder priorities, foci and attention, and bring the needy into view, links to the second means by which emotions acted to encourage charity. Captivating emotions were also experienced as an 'uncovering' of what was previously obscure, a type of revelation of the 'true' state of human suffering in the world. This idea has Christian roots and is linked to St Thomas Aquinas's notion of charity. As humanity returns to Godly perfection, Aquinas argues, so things become discernable as they truly are through a perfection of the senses: 'the perfection of the Christian life consists radically in charity ... The perfection of the human senses would seem to consist chiefly in their concurring together in the unity of truth ... Now this is effected by charity which operates consent in us men. Wherefore even the perfection of the senses consists radically in the perfection of charity' ([1265–74] 1989 SS, Q 184, art. 1). Scott Davis (1996: 19) shows that within Aquinas's proposition, 'in good Aristotelian fashion, there is a continuity in the perceptions, emotions, and habits that incline us to act, so when charity reshapes the senses, it allows them to grasp what was previously obscured. At the same time emotions are brought into line and virtues transformed so that the truly good may be seen and done'. For ACG, while stories and narratives exposed 'need', it was the right overwhelming collective emotional response that was revelatory, stripping all obfuscating, distracting thoughts and feelings away to make volunteers focus on such need, and consequently perceive it with clarity. It was empathic emotion that opened volunteers up, they explained, to seeing 'true' and uncomplicated reality. Empathic emotion was experienced as an 'intuition of the absolute' (Sartre 1948: 81).

Thirdly, captivating, revelatory emotions were understood to contain within them a strong impulse to act. Referring to modern ideas of emotion, Patricia Clough (2007: 2) notes that 'affect refers generally to bodily capacities to affect and be affected, or the augmentation or diminution of a body's capacity to act, to engage, and to connect'. Ducey (2007: 201), drawing on

Spinoza, defines it as ‘a bundle of energy, a force ... the power to act’. In a similar vein, for Sartre (1948: 32) emotion is ‘an organized system of means aiming at an end, and this system is called upon to mask, substitute for and reject behaviour that one cannot or does not want to maintain’. Emotions, in this view, enable change. Lutz (1986: 290) argues that emotions are cast in Western thought as the antithesis of estrangement and disengagement, and as a force motivating action towards others. Emotions for ACG women were often experienced this way, as a feeling of compulsion, one that encouraged them to act decisively and without doubt. While in certain circumstances emotions are seen in Western thought to absolve one from responsibility (for example ideas of irrational passion), in this case, emotions are seen to incite responsibility and an inner agency. Compassionate emotions, therefore, were reflexively interpreted and treated as powerful internal cues from which women could judge recipients’ deservingness. Yet while these emotions were experienced as necessarily spontaneous, powerful and captivating, they were encouraged within a well-prepared arena, through stories of suffering and the demonstration of need by ‘victims’ and ‘experts’. Compassionate emotions required culturally elaborated safe spaces for their full fruition.

Compassion and Failed Understanding

After Stitch Therapy’s presentation, compassion took on another form that, while still focused on an ‘unconditional benevolence’ (Elisha 2008: 156), relied less on a search for communion and similarity between givers and recipients. The ACG women sipped their tea and reflected on the female inmates’ experience of prison. I heard many of the women whisper to each other, ‘I can’t even begin to imagine’. ‘It’s another world,’ Edith said to me, ‘I still can’t comprehend what it must be really like in there.’ Despite being spellbound by Salvatore’s evocative speech and Grace’s desperate plea at the time, the women described drawing an imaginative blank afterwards.

ACG women reflected on the trouble of viscerally imagining need in a range of charity acts. I spoke with an American woman, Belinda, about this issue in regard to a weekly food bank that she helped to run.

They come through week after week to get their bag [of food]. And you get to know them a tiny [amount] ... and sometimes you find out something really tough, not much ... if they can speak some [Italian]. You just get a few words. Like their children have died, or someone in their family was stabbed ... [or] they are all living in one filthy room that [they can be] kicked out of any time ... And you just get a glimpse, for a second ... and you feel really rather unequipped to understand.

Insights into need were cast as shallow and fleeting. Another American woman, Joy, reflected on this issue after an awareness-raising meeting about a local women's refuge for victims of domestic violence.

And then you go home and make lasagne for the kids, and you feel schizophrenic! I have my husband ... who, you know we have our issues, like everyone, but, nothing, nothing, not even comparable, a totally [different] league, like what we heard, violence, prostitution ... It's *so* heartbreaking, [and it makes you] want to do something, but then you come home and you have this big house and this pretty great life ... I know some of us complain a lot (laughs), but actually [we have], like, a totally different universe!

For many ACG women the experience of encountering the real and imaginatively evoked charity recipient resulted in them emerging from such events with a firmer sense of their own alienation from such worlds. This resulted in a realization of both their own social power and its limitations, and the boundaries of their own social group. One American woman in her sixties, Marjory, spoke to me in the tea break after the Stitch Therapy event. 'Golly, these women need so much help, but when you realize the extent of the problem, how much work there is to be done, you feel a little helpless. What can we do, this little American ladies' group?' Another woman, an ACG board member, said to a group of women, 'I mean we are in a position to help, we are lucky, so lucky to have what we have and to be able to raise money and things ... we've got to do something for these women'. Through such an encounter with charity recipients and their plea for action, the women gained a keener sense of the class-defined nature of their migrant group and, more importantly, what social role they could ideally assume in Italy. It was at its borders, at its limits as exposed by the needy Other, that the privileged migrant charitable self could most starkly express itself and find a place in Italian public life. As Lauren Berlant (2004: 4) reveals, 'compassion is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is *over there*. You, the compassionate one, have a resource that would alleviate someone else's suffering' [emphasis in original].

According to Hume, the failure of mental evocation leads to a failure of sympathy and thus to the failure of full compassion. For American women, however, their inability to subsume the charity recipients' experiences within their own subjective experiences was crucial in creating the distinction between those who should give charity, and those who should receive it. It invoked a set of binary roles that inhered within the cultural framework of a ladies' charity group. At one level it affirmed to the women that they were fortunate in their lives and were privileged in their own social status. Simultaneously, it also defined their charity guests as unlucky, underprivileged and 'in need'. Empathy did not lead to compassion but, counter-intuitively perhaps, a lack of Humean empathy – disconnection

– enabled a culturally specific form of compassion to become fully fledged. A moment of empathic emotional transference did not mark the beginning of increased intersubjective understanding, but rather, it was the cue for a cultural script to emerge that defined social differences as inherent within the charity encounter, and the basis of further engagement, support and giving (cf. Laidlaw 2002b). At the base of this phase of charity engagement was a crucial expectation of different experiences that felt insurmountable.

One of Adam Smith's important contributions to early conceptions of sympathy was his acknowledgment that such visceral communication ultimately failed.

the emotions of the spectator will still be very apt to fall short of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer ... The imaginary change of situation, upon which their sympathy is founded, is but momentary. The thought of their own safety, the thought that they themselves are not really the sufferer, continually intrudes itself upon them; and though it does not hinder them from conceiving a passion somewhat analogous to what is felt by the sufferer, hinders them from conceiving anything that approaches to the same degree of violence. (Smith [1759] 2002: 26–27, 1.1.4.7)

Smith shows that an important lasting effect of sympathetic relations is a recognition of the distance and disconnection that ultimately underpins these ties. For ACG women, their 'newcomer' experiences were ironically opposed to those with whom they sought communion. And in contradistinction to the above-mentioned public assertions of sisterhood, ACG women's ability to feel empathic engagement came to rest on the recognition that financially secure white Anglo-American women such as themselves could not in any way really understand what life was like for these women, and that their gendered assertions of suffering and migrant marginality were of a different degree and order to those in need.

The Virtue of Failed Imagination

For ACG women, collectively reflecting on failed imagination was a morally virtuous means of expressing a compassionate charity ethos that endured beyond the spontaneous, affective sense of communion within charity rituals. But can disengagement really be the basis for a compassionate relational ethic? A useful starting point for conceptualizing such an ethic can be found in the work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1990). Levinas offered a radical break from the philosophical logic of sympathy and empathy, and from what he perceived to be a deep flaw in the tradition of Western thought: philosophy had, he argued, been an intellectual response to the shock of

Otherness, whereby the object was always assimilated within the subject. Levinas's critique prompts a re-evaluation of the notion that compassion (as mimicry and transference) is a form of engagement; communion with others ends up being a return to the self.

[T]he other is in no way another myself, participating with me in a common existence. The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion or a sympathy through which we can put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize them as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery. (Levinas 1990: 63)

The essential ethical nature of the encounter with the other, Levinas argues, is that the other makes the self realize it does not possess the world; it calls into question one's own power and freedom to consume the world at will. 'The Other gives my freedom meaning because I am confronted with real choices between responsibility and obligation towards the Other, or hatred and violent repudiation' (Colin Davis 1996: 49). This encounter, he argues, calls forth an involuntary 'radical generosity', as the Other holds one hostage and makes demands to be respected purely with her presence.

Levinas's normative model draws our attention to the ways in which relationships might be based upon an ethical sense of separation and the unknown. It was because of profound experiential differences and a lifeworld only glimpse obliquely, that ACG women felt an enduring commitment to give. It was in this distinction that they located the binary roles of giver and recipient of charity, and felt compelled by the obligations such roles entailed. In the process, the nature and limits of ACG women's own freedom and agency took shape. For Levinas, the ideal and abstract ethical moment of confusion acts as a relational bridge. When located in specific cultural contexts, however, it can just as easily act to increase societal divisions at the same time that it creates spaces for continuing obligations. The moment of vulnerability, openness and confusion that Levinas charts in the encounter with the Other is always situated within forms of inequality, and enacted within relational roles and the politics of exchange.

While anthropologists have carefully unpacked a priori connections between empathy and social proximity, and empathy and compassion (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1992; Willerslev 2004; Bubandt 2009), in this chapter I have taken their provocation further, showing how forms of empathy are enabled when uncoupled from not just social connection, but also from understandings of another's point of view. As Throop (2010: 274) shows of the Levinasian perspective, empathy involves remaining 'vulnerable to disturbance, to suffer repeated failures of our expectations in confronting a world that outsmarts our attempts at encompassment through understanding'. In order to understand such disturbances anthropologically, they must

be placed within specific cultural frames that make strategic use of such failures – not necessarily in order to build understanding, but, in this case, to turn a lack of understanding into action. A charity ethos, after all, requires actions aimed at immediate and enduring material and moral improvement, and not necessarily increased social connection.

Reflections

While some scholars have noted that empathy can be enabled *despite* the failure of understanding (Halpern 2001; Kirmayer 2003), in this case study, empathy is not enabled despite a lack of understanding, nor should this state of affairs be seen as a ‘failure’. Rather, it was precisely the ability to evoke this lack of understanding which allowed charitable empathy and compassion to endure.⁷ Anglo-American women drew upon the historically constituted roles of the charity giver and recipient, which configured compassion as a means of engaging and asserting connection with another, whilst also distancing the reality of another’s lifeworld. Furthermore, compassion did not emerge spontaneously, but required careful, quiet preparation, as audit processes established trustworthy spaces for affective exchange and release.

For Anglo-American volunteers, humanitarian compassion was ritually significant in bolstering the legitimacy of givers’ emotional responses to recipients’ neediness. While spontaneous affect was essential for prompting charity action, the sense of shared experience that givers asserted here was momentary. It gave way to another mode of compassion that formed the backbone of ongoing giving, and which relied upon acknowledging insurmountable differences. This case study helps to widen our conceptualizations of charitable empathy and compassion to account for moral practices that necessarily negate understanding and social intimacy. I have focused on the volunteers’ troubling reflections as they sought to overcome the limits of relational distance, and then, using the cultural logic of witness and confession, to forge ethical detachment and compassion out of fleeting but powerful emotional experiences. While these techniques of compassion allowed Anglo-American women to be momentarily shaken from the comfortable rhythm of safe and privileged lives, and to reach across social divides, ultimately they enabled and constrained volunteers to inhabit particular socio-economic worlds, charity roles, and migrant spheres in Florence. As Muehlebach (2013) argues, such positions reflect the emergent politics of ethical citizenship in Italian society, with affective voluntary labour now a powerful avenue to claim belonging and social membership within the neoliberal state, but which requires its proponents to make and remake the contours of social inequality as they assume compassionate roles.

Chapter 7

ACCOUNTABILITY, CYNICISM AND HOPE



To enable giving, charity actors can rely upon institutional legitimization, humanitarian ideals, and testimonial witnessing. These techniques commonly aim to bolster trust and foster intense compassionate affect, as the previous chapter explored. But what if trust cannot be established between giver and receiver? In this chapter I consider situations of charitable giving in which efforts to gain information, build legitimacy and enact witness were circumscribed and indeed often failed. In such contexts compassion was muted; cynicism, realism and hope became the underlying responses to requests for support. Here, emotions of compassion and sympathy were not trusted as an internal cue to an external reality, as discussed in Chapter 6. Charity givers can have uneasy relationships with their emotions as guiding forces for action, a paradox that mirrors wider currents in Western evaluations of emotional life. As Catherine Lutz (1986: 289) shows, 'emotion stands in ... contrast relationship to two somewhat contradictory notions; it is opposed, on the one hand, to the positively evaluated process of thought and, on the other, to a negatively valued estrangement from the world'. In the previous chapter I discussed how emotions both overcame social distance through momentary intimacy and expressed a sense of troubling disconnection. By contrast, in the situations described in this chapter, compassionate emotions could at times be viewed as the negative counterpart to careful reason, as well as dangerous internal reference points that drew forth the more detached feelings of hope, cynicism and mistrust. Building on the last chapter's insights regarding detachment, I focus on the range of contradictory emotions that enable giving, the plurality of which challenges the role, ideal and coherence of compassion as charity's guiding force.

The Giver's Discretion

The American Church rector received around three hundred euros a month from the church budget for a 'discretionary fund' to give to those whom he deemed 'in need'. The parish administrators, Lilly and Kate, were the first people to deal with their requests for help, and would 'filter' what seemed genuine needy stories from false ones. Those whose stories were considered reasonable were then able to put their case to the rector. Lilly told me that she saw about three people a week who would come and stand before her desk in the office and tell her a 'hard luck story' as to why they needed help. They were usually male, and commonly Sri Lankan, Albanian, Moroccan, East European or 'Rom', she said. Most told the administrator that they had been in Italy and Florence for only a short time, and were staying with friends or families, and looking for a livelihood. Their very basic Italian language skills often seemed to support their assertions of a newcomer status. As Kate told me,

We have that problem because sometimes we just have an enormous communication barrier, because they don't speak English or Italian – they speak Romanian or Hungarian... There was one guy who came a few times in the winter, I don't think we ever figured out where he was from; we just really couldn't communicate with him at all, [but] we gave him food parcels.

These recipients were nearly always complete strangers to the church. They came alone and, unlike the ACG cases detailed in the previous chapter, could not gain legitimacy from any trusted institutional sphere. In establishing ad hoc trust, givers had to rely entirely on recipients' narratives of need, a situation made complicated by some recipients' inability to communicate. This was not easy work. People who came asking for support were usually never seen again, and only in very few instances could the rector or administrator gain any sense of how their giving had helped the recipients' lives. 'For the most part you don't hear what happens to them', Kate told me. A judgement of deservedness had to occur in this pressured moment of negotiation that unfolded in the church office, and was ultimately underpinned by a leap of 'faith' and a lack of ongoing accountability.

When volunteering in the office, I sometimes observed such encounters and requests. One day, as I sat folding pew bulletins, I witnessed the negotiations that surround the discretionary fund.

It was late spring, and the sun's heat was beginning to emanate from the stone surfaces of Florence's streets. I was relieved to be sitting in the cool office of the church undercroft. Kate, a church administrator, was busy preparing the

annual budget spreadsheet, and would often swivel her chair towards me to chat, offering a regular flow of conversation to punctuate my volunteer work, which she told me apologetically would be 'a bit boring'. The intercom bell for the locked gate sounded, and Kate answered. A crackling voice replied. She strained to make it out, asking first in Italian and then in English for the visitor to repeat himself. 'I can't understand a word, what language is he speaking?' Kate puzzled, not feeling confident to buzz him in. Rising from her desk, she headed up the stairs. When she returned with the visitor they had established that English was the best language to converse in, although the man struggled to find his words. Kate sat back in her chair and gestured for him to sit down on the other side of her desk. Their engagement now resembled a formal interview.

The man was small with a barrel chest, and wore a worn black leather jacket and faded jeans. His skin was tanned and creased, his hair greying. Rom, I guessed, drawing upon the ethnic typologies I was learning from the geographic distributions and markings of peoples in public Florentine life, augmented by local political discourses and racial stereotypes. Kate listened, a compassionate smile sometimes giving way to an expression of strained concentration. 'Work?' he asked. 'We don't have jobs here', Kate replied calmly. 'I can offer you some food if you need it.' She pronounced every syllable slowly. 'I need money', he asked, placing his hands, palms upwards, on the desk. 'What is your situation? What do you need right now?' Kate asked, tilting her head in a gesture of attentive listening. For a moment he looked tired. In stilted sentences, he told a story of having moved recently to Italy from Hungary. He lived with his family in Florence. His mother had come and wasn't well. He wanted to find work. He had worked before in Hungary. He wanted money to help to find work. Kate pressed him gently for more details on why exactly he needed the money to find work, and he repeated simply that he needed it. She rose and said she would get him some food for his family and would make sure it was a good amount. She couldn't give him money. I offered to go to the food-bank storeroom, and collected a large bag of goods for him: tinned food, cheese, pasta and crackers. He took it and nodded to me, thanked Kate and left quietly. Kate stretched her shoulders, relieving the tension in them, let out a long breath, and returned to her spreadsheet. After a moment she reflected, 'If I can work out exactly what they need then I get the rector, if it's reasonable. That was a bit vague – difficult one'.

Later that day, as I moved on to another volunteer job in the office, the buzzer sounded again. This time the voice was Italian, speaking quickly, asking to talk with the rector. Kate asked why. He replied briskly. I struggled to catch his words. They were rich with a dialect unfamiliar to me. Kate buzzed him in.

He arrived in the office and did not sit down, beginning his story immediately, standing before the desk, his words tumbling out at speed. Again I struggled to understand him, piecing his narrative together using the snippets of his story that I had understood and Kate's later summary. He had just been released from jail. He needed to get home, to Basilicata – his family was there. A relative had promised him a job. He wanted to get back on his feet, to avoid crime. He just needed a train ticket home. Kate seemed satisfied and called the rector. Together the three of them spoke further in the rector's office. The rector agreed to buy the man a train ticket south. The man appreciatively grasped the rector's hand, shook it vigorously, then left. Kate looked pleased and relieved, and returned to her spreadsheet.

In these improvised interactions, recipients had to provide a convincing, circumscribed narrative that fitted within the American Church's ideas of an appropriate gift and a trustworthy recipient. These expectations were unstated and informal, and in the brief moments of stranger sociality, potential recipients had to spontaneously, intuitively grasp them. Yet many recipients did seem to understand the importance of articulating a particular story of need when approaching a Christian church or charity in Italy, and arrived at the American Church with an already crafted story of deservedness.

Localized and transnational charity scripts of neediness offered a flexible template within which both recipient and giver could find meaning and common ground. The worthy 'charity character' within discourses of the 'deserving needy' is a historically enduring and shifting ideal in both Italian and Anglo-American Christian contexts. While the Christian principle of hospitality to strangers in need (as discussed in Chapter 4) is a broad guiding theological ideal, in practice Christian charity has always presented givers with a tricky ethical problem: how does one balance undifferentiated hospitality with limited resources and the resultant imperative to target aid towards the most needy? Categorizing recipients into deserving and undeserving groups has been an enduring feature of Christian charity since the early modern period, revealing the moral logics of different historical and social contexts.

John Henderson (1994) has noted that in Italy notions of charity deservedness are traceable back to medieval and early modern Florentine charity works. Christian confraternity charities defined virtuous vulnerable groups as orphans, widows, the sick, the elderly, pilgrims (who emulated Christ's wanderings and religious journeys), those incarcerated for unpaid debts, and the professional religious poor who ran monasteries and religious hospitals. The 'respectable poor' also received significant support, a category that represented nuclear family groups in which the household breadwinner had become 'temporarily indisposed through sickness, unemployment, or

simply was no longer able to support a large young family with his meagre wages' (Henderson 1994: 257). The undeserving, by contrast, constituted a group that was threatening to social and moral order, such as prostitutes, lepers, beggars and vagrants.¹ In contemporary Italian society, Catholic ideas of charity recipient deservedness are complexly varied. Nancy Davis and Robert Robinson (1999) chart a spectrum where, at one end, religiously 'orthodox' Italians place great importance on the centrality of wide-reaching and spiritually underpinned social obligations, duties and interdependencies between society and various groups of vulnerable needy – typically the sick, poor, homeless, imprisoned and aged. At the other end of the spectrum, 'modernist' Christians are, both theologically and economically, more deeply individualistic (cf. Zanotto 2005). While still leaving room for benevolence for the incapacitated, modernists are less supportive of charity for the 'able-bodied poor', and their position

entails little community or government obligation to the poor and unemployed. The solution to problems of poverty, inequality, and joblessness, in the eyes of economic individualists, is not greater taxation of the rich, government jobs programs to provide work for the unemployed, or private charity, but rather greater individual effort by the poor and jobless to help themselves. (Davis and Robinson 1999: 342)

Ideas of the deserving and undeserving charity recipient are also well documented in the historical development of English and American charity and philanthropy (e.g. Rosner 1982; Beito 1993; Lowske and Fawcett 1995). The Elizabethan Poor Laws, which shaped charitable welfare systems in seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain, drew upon a Christian doctrine, which taught that

those able to give alms to the poor should do so, as a spiritual obligation. For anything beyond casual, small-scale gifts ... [Christians] accepted a distinction between the worthy and the undeserving poor among lay members of society. Those who were incapable of working for their own support (for example, young orphans, the elderly, and physically or mentally handicapped people) were seen as deserving of help from those around them. Anyone who was physically able to work but refused to do so was labelled idle and excluded from formal assistance. (McIntosh 2005: 461)

Poor Laws thus aimed to support the 'incapacitated, helpless and victims of misfortune', variously defined as the 'impotent' and the 'worthy poor' (Bartkowski and Regis 2003: 28). The able-bodied poor were deserving if they desired to work, and workhouses and apprenticeships were set up to provide labour opportunities. In colonial America, systems of support

followed the logic of British Poor Laws, and charitable provisions were based upon ‘distinguishing between “pauperism” – an unwillingness to work among the able bodied – and genuine poverty and misfortune’ (ibid.: 30). Following a Puritan sensibility in which ‘Calvanism lauded the intrinsic virtue of productive labor, the Christian’s unswerving commitment to productive labor was a practical, this-worldly demonstration of religious devotion’ (ibid.: 31).

With the rise of laissez-faire economics in the nineteenth-century United States, the principle that society was held together by a Christian and patron-based sense of duty and responsibility between the privileged and the poor gave way to a more individualist ethos. Charity actors now increasingly believed that society was governed by contractual relationships of self-interest and rights, and that spiritual and material well-being was ultimately an individual’s own responsibility. While the sick, aged, disabled and insane were still categories deserving of alms, the able-bodied poor were taught industrious habits through ‘respectable forms of labor such as farmwork, weaving, and small-scale industry’ (Bartkowski and Regis 2003: 37) aimed at reforming their moral character. While charity and welfare systems and the logics underpinning them continued to transform throughout the twentieth century, many of these distinctions, assumptions and deservedness have persisted through to today, albeit in new guises.

Potential recipients of the rector’s discretionary fund provided stories that resonated with these historically evolving and enduring themes of deservedness, with varying degrees of success. For immigrants, these stories would include descriptions of their family members and, importantly, dependants, with particular reference to women, children and infirm elderly relatives; they stressed the needs of the vulnerable. Potential recipients talked about their difficulties in finding work in Italy, and their desire to work. Neediness involved demonstrating a ‘biography of labour activity’ (Lowske and Fawcett 1995: 67) that had been disrupted by life circumstance, and which could be restored through charity.

Furthermore, for the church, these stories also had to provide a concrete and bounded notion of how a person’s present neediness could be fulfilled. Kate explained to me that, ‘they have to have some sort of particular, request ... we don’t just give someone some money, like, just because they are poor. If they are hungry we give them food, but if they come here for something in particular, like a trip or an operation, or something, we help’. The church expected recipients to present their need as contained within a clear-cut time frame. The unpredictable circumstances of a vulnerable life needed to have affected potential recipients in such a way that their present situation could be defined as ‘unlucky’, temporary and ideally not their own fault. They would, if given the opportunity, be able to improve their situation. In this

way, charity was part of restoring previously self-sufficient lives, rather than dealing systematically with the chronically poor.

Charity of this type does not aim to foster dependence. This was in part rationalized within a discourse of fairness, equality and limited means. 'We can't continue to give money to the same person, because unfortunately the supply is finite', Kate explained. It would not be fair, Lilly the other church administrator rationalized, to give one person a lot of support if, instead, many people could be helped. 'We try and share it around.' Dealing with questions of fairness as they related to the limited resources of charity work is a topic already elaborated upon in Chapter 5.

The Value and Danger of Money

On one occasion during fieldwork, while I volunteered at the church, I spoke to a man while the administrator was busy. He offered me a narrative of need and asked for help. He was called Peter. His wife was still in his country of origin, Sri Lanka, and he was sending her money home. He normally worked as a pizza maker. He had a job promised to him by a friend that was due to start in two weeks. In the meantime he was looking for work. He rented a small room in a building that housed many immigrants. He needed to pay the rent today or he would be forced out onto the street. He did not have any money to pay the rent, or anyone to ask. The landlord did not care about what happened to him and was cruel. He normally had work, but he was just in a really bad situation this month. He just needed a bit of help to get him to the next job. He could pay back any money once he started work. He spoke politely, without becoming upset, angry or demanding.

Peter's narrative was detailed and specific; it exhibited an essential biography of labour activity, and it circumscribed need into an object that charity could transformatively affect, all of which helped to classify him as a deserving, needy recipient. Peter did not, however, receive support from the church because he had asked for cash. Above all else, recipients of the discretionary fund needed to request the right type of gift. The non-monetary gift was an object always aimed at a specific and limited action. It sought to confine recipients' agency to the self-redemptive strategies and promises that they articulated in their charity narratives. Ultimately, these types of gifts signified a lack of trust on the part of the givers in the stories that would-be recipients told, and an awareness of the potential for the monetary gift to be subverted towards undesirable ends.

During my research at the American Church, money was rarely given as a charity gift to strangers. This had not always been the case, the rector informed me. Before his arrival the discretionary fund had been used to give

out sums of money to people ‘off the street’. Soon after he took up his position, the rector explained, he had an experience that changed the way the fund would be used in the future.

One day I followed a man after I had given him money, and he went straight to a betting shop and put it on a horse or something. So after that I said we are not giving out money anymore. I said we will go with someone to buy a train ticket, we will go to a chemist – today we went to a chemist to buy baby formula, for a Sri Lankan lady who doesn’t have anything to feed her baby, so we bought formula for two months for her. That’s what we do now, we don’t give them money. We give them what they need or we give them food from the food bank.

On another occasion, Kate told me that the rector had gone to a pharmacy to buy medicine for a man. Moments later the rector saw the man back outside the pharmacy. ‘[He was] trying to sell the stuff, since [the rector] would not give him cash . . . the man was trying to sell the medicine that [the rector] had just given him, because what he really wanted was just money.’ The rector had come to the American Church with a desire to improve its financial transparency and accountability and to make giving more carefully directed. He believed that taking control of the discretionary fund was needed to audit its efficacy – to question recipients’ stories and the trust previous church officials had shown. His initial experiences of deception and betrayal underpinned an emergent logic of charity mistrust and the creation of systems of rational, circumscribed giving.

Generous Abundance

On one occasion I personally subverted the logic of gift giving to strangers, and in the process, came to better understand these social rules. After listening to Peter, the Sri Lankan pizza worker, and his story of need, I gave him a gift of my own money. His story had moved me and, face-to-face with his need, I felt compelled to help him. On later reflection as to why I had done this, I realized that I had found him believable, and trusted my instincts that he needed help. In the face of daily charity work, I had also been more consciously considering my own fortunate financial security, and my obligations to those less fortunate. The rector’s recent Sunday sermons had, I realized, encouraged my own internalization of a Christian attitude to money.

Dunn (1998: 73) argues that trust is a sensibility and a mode of action for dealing with the freedom of others. Trust ‘presupposes a situation of risk’ (Luhmann 1988: 97). It involves the possibility of disappointment, of not being able to control another’s actions. In this vein, giving money away involved a leap of faith, we were taught in church sermons. The ability of

parishioners to 'let go' of controlling their lives single-handedly and to trust God's ultimate freedom to determine the future was crucial in their moral attitudes and practices towards money and giving (see also Harding 1992).

In a sermon on giving, the rector explained that 'I know many of you will think that is risky, but surprisingly it works and something happens inside you that changes for good, for God'. Giving entailed taking a risk and allowed parishioners to 'both demonstrate and deepen trust in God to provide whatever we really need in the future'. Trust in God represented an acknowledgement that material possessions could not be considered the sole property of a person, just as worldly success could not be attributed to the singular agency of the individual. It expressed the idea that 'God was in charge'. In his sermon, the rector explained:

It is the commitment of your whole person to Jesus Christ. This whole process begins with the recognition that we don't own anything. All we have and are belongs to God. What we say is *ours* or *mine* is held in trust for a very short time. This concept only becomes real for us when it suddenly dawns upon us that God cares – not only cares but loves us; loves us so much that, in Jesus, he went to a cross and died to show us that love. He did this for all humanity, for the whole creation, not just for Christians or for those who think that they are good, but for all. In the depth of our selfishness Christ died for us.

A visiting rector explained that, 'the word miser shares the same root as misery, and people who hold money to them, who clutch it close, are never happy'. He then told a story about an unnamed parish trying to raise more money. The vestry had decided to approach the richest man in the parish. Upon arriving at his home they asked him if he would triple his pledge. He replied,

Well, you don't know what you ask me, because, while I am the wealthiest man in the church, I also have an old mother in an old person's home which costs \$25,000 (U.S.) a year. And I have an unemployed son who has a family who is very in need at the moment. And I have a daughter who is a recovering drug addict and she needs rehabilitation. And so if I don't give them a cent why would I give anything to the church?

The congregation laughed loudly. The moral lesson from such a story was, however, deeply serious: the miser's life will be filled with dysfunctional relationships and a lack of social connectedness; acquiring money does not bring happiness. Only through giving it away could spiritually meaningful and morally correct social relations be constituted. The visiting preacher proclaimed that God was not careful with his love and gifts, and was, by contrast 'abundant' and even 'reckless'. He encouraged parishioners to view

their own money and wealth as abundant and flowing out of ‘open hands’ rather than ‘clenched fists’, and asked them to be ‘risky’ in their giving. Quoting the Bible, he recited Corinthians: ‘Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should give what he has decided to give in his heart, not reluctantly, or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Corinthians 9: 6–7).

My gift to Peter then was an active (if subconscious) attempt to enact a more generous, less possessive and selfish mode of personhood through the material realm – a type of personhood highly valued in my field site, and which I was being socialized to exhibit in daily life. Yet my gift to Peter made me realize that this Christian ethic of generosity and abundance towards money was for my participants situationally realized and often qualified. It was most elaborately articulated in relation to tithing, when the American Church asked for donations to help to cover its running costs, including the discretionary fund. By contrast, in giving to unknown charity recipients, money was not simply an earthly manifestation of God’s generosity, a type of ‘sacrificial economy’ (Harding 1992: 42), but more concretely a potential enabler of dangerous suffering, of immoral and un-Christian lifestyles and practices.² Giving had to be accountable not just for its motivations, but also for its effects. A generous Christian attitude to gifting money thus presupposed the existence of a prior field of trustworthy, accountable and deserving recipients.

Accountability

A fiscally accountable attitude to money undergirded parishioners’ trust in the church and their Christian practices of generosity. ‘Accountability’ is a powerful and seductive modern ideology that suggests both ‘economic efficiency and good practice’; in it, the ‘financial and the moral meet’ (Strathern 2000: 1). Yet an ideology of accountability at the American Church was relatively new, and paralleled the recent development of a more circumscribed, transparent rector’s discretionary fund. Many volunteers told me that in the past the church had been badly managed financially, and as one woman phrased it, ‘money was just leaking out of the place’. When the rector first arrived, two years before I started my fieldwork, the church had been eighty thousand euros in debt. The previous sources of monetary support, a system that had endured for over fifty years, had in the past twenty years withered away, forcing the church to find new means to finance itself. Three parishioners told me that in the past there was a small group of wealthy local Americans actively engaged in the running of the church.

One parishioner explained, 'When a power bill came in, one of them would reach into his pocket and pull out his chequebook and just write out the amount. Now the church doesn't have any more wealthy parishioners'. Three months after I began my fieldwork, at the annual financial meeting, the newly formed finance committee had, they proudly affirmed, managed to 'balance the books'. In two years of 'new management', the church's debts had disappeared.

The rector told me that the creation of the debt had been due to inefficient and morally dubious practices. When he arrived, he explained, the accounts were hand-written into a large leather book. He described the system as 'completely antiquarian', not to mention inconsistent. 'Some things, like buying flowers, would be put in one column one week and in another the next week.' Soon after he arrived, he hired a certified Italian accountant who could speak English fluently. His appointment was for many parishioners a crucial turning point. His credibility came from his objective outsiderhood and his lack of entanglement with church relationships of obligation and exchange. Tania, an active volunteer, told me that in the 'old times', money would just go missing from the church accounts, creating widespread mistrust and suspicion. On one occasion, seven hundred euros had been placed in the food-bank box and by the next day it had disappeared.

The financial system introduced by the new rector, the new accountant, and the new financial committee had far-reaching effects. Untraceable flows were replaced by increasingly limited and 'transparent' avenues through which money could travel. When I arrived in Florence, the American Church parish administrator, Kate, had recently become the only person allowed to pay for services rendered to the church or costs incurred by parishioners. Parishioners now had to provide a receipt and fill out a form, signed by the claimant and the administrator, which would be placed in careful order within a folder for the accountant to cross-check against the kitty account. This change partly reflected the church's new ONLUS status (state certification), gained in 2006, and the wider legislative shifts to regularize the non-profit sector in Italy since the 1990s. These neoliberal reforms aimed to encourage wider financial support of non-profit organizations in Italy, and as a result, parishioners could now designate a portion of their taxes to be given to the American Church, and their donations to the church were now tax free. Part of the impetus to 'clean up the books' was, beyond the rector's moral convictions about accountability and transparency, a need to meet the standards of audit to which ONLUS-accredited organizations were subject.³

In attempting to 'balance the books', a range of 'cost-cutting measures' were also put in place. The production of a clear budget statement, which laid bare all of the costs to the church, created a new process through which the finance committee and vestry could see their activities in terms of 'costs'

and thereby find categories to 'make cuts'. The rector informed several full-time staff that regrettably the church could no longer afford to employ them. The rector told me he felt 'terrible' for having to lay off staff, but the numbers did not 'add up'. New parish employees hired in their place had to operate in a new flexible employment environment that was part-time and short-term.

In a further reflection of accountability, the church spreadsheets of spending were also publicly displayed. They were pinned to the parish noticeboard regularly, and parishioners were encouraged to read through them and ask questions. As the pledging pamphlet explained:

According to the Episcopal tradition, only pledging members are eligible to serve on the Vestry (the parish's governing body or 'Board of Directors') or to vote at the annual Parish Meeting when the budget is approved. As 'shareholders', pledging members are presumably more likely to hold the Church accountable for its financial management decisions. They are both entitled and encouraged to participate fully in the decision-making process ... If you would like to learn more about the finances and decision-making process in the American Church, we invite you to review the Vestry meetings' minutes posted at the foot of the stairs by the church office door. This is your place: you have a right to know.

Here, using the financial language of the market, the connection between the right type of giving and the right type of spending were explicitly articulated into one rational, moral and spiritual system of accountability.

At the annual parish meeting, pledging parishioners were presented with four different versions of the church accounts. One 'cashflow' sheet compared monthly outgoings with incomings, while another contrasted the 2006 budget with the projected budget for 2007. Yet another was a detailed list of the church's annual 'balance sheet', and the final one showed the annual 'profits and losses'. Together these accounts aimed to transparently reveal the movement of money in and out of the church within and across a range of time frames. Parishioners were handed copies of the budgets and they were discussed, with the accountant and a member of the finance committee answering a few questions of legibility. Financial terms were explained as parishioners were taught how to read the new technical and numerical explanation of money (cf. Harper 2000: 33). Most people were, however, happy to trust the complicated, confusing and unfamiliar documents. 'This is all *very* professional', one older woman whispered to me as she leafed through the documents with a confused expression. Part of the documents' strength resided in their use as a tool of mystification: they created an auditing realm of expertise that existed above common knowledge and language. They made the movement of money both more visible and less visible at the same moment.

The budget was approved unanimously and without amendment. It bore testament to the trust parishioners now felt towards the neutrally rendered accounts. This important ‘ritual of verification’ (Power 1997: 1) validated the model of relations that the new accountability system produced, defining the system itself as trustworthy, effective and truthful in the process. And it affirmed to the parishioners that the church would continue to survive financially in the year ahead. Moreover, it consolidated the leadership of the rector and his appointed ‘money-men’, legitimizing them as the gatekeepers through which all money had to flow. The rector’s encouragement to parishioners to be reckless and risky with their money when donating to the church in fact meant enacting a disciplined, constrained recklessness. Accountability made this type of abundant giving safe and knowable.

In returning to my gift of money to Peter, it became clear to me that a Christian attitude to money involved navigating the tensions between reckless abundance and accountable scarcity.⁴ In giving to Peter and by focusing on one end of this spectrum – a more unconditional openness to giving – I was free from the constraints of troubling mistrust and accountability. This was in part because my giving was a spontaneous, one-off and idealized act free from consequences or social entanglements. I was left simply with the feeling of having expressed the benevolent virtue of generous compassion, and found myself emotively imagining the transformative power of my gift on Peter’s life. If Peter had returned asking for more, or if he had sent his friend to make similar requests, I would likely not have given so freely again, nor relied so unconditionally upon my emotions as a guiding force. The pragmatics of my gift’s end points would have intruded upon my focus on an interior emotional intentionality. The rector’s and Kate’s management of the discretionary fund had to devise a systematic approach to deal with multiple requests that would easily outstrip the fund. Ultimately, as the discretionary fund originated from parishioners’ tithes, giving in its name remained a traceable process, and had to demonstrate a responsible, reasoned approach that could be justified in a parish meeting if questions were asked. Accountability thus creates a form of surveillance and reflexive prudence. Actors are responsabilized as they anticipate the public records that will track and evaluate their actions in light of specific goals, targets or ideals.

Cynicism, Realism and Hope

When I admitted to several other volunteers about my gift of money to Peter they looked uncertain. They cautiously commended my generosity and intent to help someone in need. But they were troubled by my gift. ‘He probably just made up the story’, one woman said. ‘But you don’t know

him', another added. 'I just believed him, I trusted him', I explained. They shrugged their shoulders and looked concerned. 'They're good at telling stories, they prey on people's compassion', one woman replied. As a new member of the church and as a young woman, these established volunteers sought to educate my idealism, to teach me to check my emotions with an ethic of suspicion. Back in the office, Lilly told me that potential recipients 'get angry with me. I tell them, "I don't have money [that] I can give you and I don't have the power to help you" ... they don't believe you, or are very insistent that you're able to help'. Mistrust was high on both sides. The key to dealing with these situations, Lilly, Kate and the rector told me, was to stay calm, and not get emotionally caught up in their stories. 'You have to be objective – what do they need, what are they asking for?' Lilly explained. Givers' emotions had to be reflexively and socially monitored. Like potential recipients' 'hard luck stories', these feelings could 'trick' givers, cloud their vision and leave them vulnerable to manipulation. Givers instead had to perform a rational process of assessment, woven through with mistrust. In these circumstances, cynicism, realism and hope became the guiding forces used to respond to need.

In his work on totalitarianism and modern power, Peter Sloterdijk (1988: 7) defines cynicism as a form of 'unhappy consciousness' or 'self cognizant accommodation' of undesired circumstances, and as acting 'against better knowledge' (ibid.: 6).

Psychologically, present day cynics can be understood as borderline melancholics, who can keep their symptoms of depression under control and remain more or less able to work: indeed this is the essential point of modern cynicism – the ability of its bearers to work – in spite of anything that might happen, and especially, after anything that might happen. (ibid.: 5)

Drawing together Lacan, Marx and Sloterdijk, Slavoj Žižek defines cynicism as a type of reason that allows one to critique and understand power while carrying on 'as if' one did not understand:

The ruling ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally ... The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but nonetheless still insists on the mask ... Cynical reason is no longer naïve, but is a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it. (Žižek 1995: 28–29, quoted in Navaro-Yashin 2002: 160)

As Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002: 159) points out, such theories counter notions of resistance that suggest irony and cynicism are destabilizing 'weapons of

the weak' (Scott 1985), and instead show how cynicism can support and reinforce power. Cynicism stems from mistrust, and often becomes self-fulfilling, the critiqued circumstances and structures becoming a way of life in the process (Ibelema 2008: 50).

All these discussions deal with those in weaker positions of power vis-à-vis the power structure towards which they direct cynicism. Are these theories, then, of use when discussing the cynicism of charity givers, who as the arbiters of need are in a powerful position vis-à-vis recipients? I argue that, yes indeed they are. Cynicism both cemented unequal power structures in place and exposed the fragility and complexity of power relations. In church charitable giving, cynicism operated as a form of reflexive affect that acknowledged both the limited power that the church wielded to enable poverty reduction, and the lack of a sense of control that church volunteers felt towards giving. It illustrated the complicated dynamic of power involved that did not flow in one simple direction. If an important dynamic of power is the ability 'to structure the possible field of action of others' (Foucault 1984: 428), then givers felt acutely restricted in their charitable works by recipients' agency. Using a charity model that prioritized bounded support and recipient independence, church leaders could not completely control recipients' intent, truthfulness or the ends to which they put charity goods. Each party felt degrees of helplessness to act.

For church volunteers, cynicism was based on bitterly experienced 'deceptions' from past recipients. These experiences compelled parishioners to devise responses to charity acts that accommodated and 'made do' with thwarted power. It was, above all, a realization that charity work was compromised work, often not leading towards intended results. Cynicism in this context did contain within it a reflected-upon blind spot because it involved carrying on 'as if' charity could and did work as desired, while understanding that some of the time it did little to alleviate suffering.

Cynicism, Richard Stivers (1994: 13) argues, makes 'permanent the current condition, leaving us with no hope of transcending it'. Through cynicism, the unequal nature of the charity exchange could be reinforced. This was partly achieved because charity volunteers cease to be affected by critiques of charity, as charity's 'falseness is already reflexively buffered' (Sloterdijk 1988: 5). Navaro-Yashin (2002: 170) argues, however, in her study of everyday forms of cynicism, that cynicism can coexist with hope and a desire for change. Cynical charitable action in the American Church did express a sense of helplessness and fantasy, but alongside was a desire to continue trying to make charity work, to 'do the best we can do', as the rector often phrased it. Volunteers regarded giving money to poor people un-cynically and with full trust (like I had) as a type of idealism that refused to confront reality – a type of fantasy, or 'bad conscience' (Stivers 1994:

13). Being an untrusting realist by contrast involved recognizing one's limited, compromised power and then, as Stivers describes realism, 'one must discover a source of hope to impose upon reality in order to make it allude meaning' (ibid.). Hope in this context was expressed quite literally by volunteers, in Italian phrases such as '*speriamo*' (let's hope so), or '*speriamo bene*' (let's hope for the best), after support was given and recipients had disappeared. In a cynical realm of mistrust, therefore, hope became a reflexive method of crafting meaning, of reclaiming some power, of 'carrying on', which refused to bow entirely to cynical reason.

Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004) argues that hope can be understood not just as an affective object, but as a method that reorients the temporal direction of knowledge. In a discussion of Christian gift-giving practices in Fiji, he shows that church rituals involved participants' placing their agency in abeyance, to each other and ultimately to God. This iterative process was a form of hope because it involved a temporal focus on the 'not yet' of future acts and the inability of participants to 'control the effects of their own actions' (ibid.: 86). For Anglo-American women, cynicism was temporally oriented towards the past, towards reflexive contemplation of failures that became expectations of the present. Hope, by contrast, directed action towards an unfulfilled and not yet closed future over which the volunteers had only limited control. Yet like cynicism, hope also allowed the situation to stay the same. By focusing on the illusive 'not yet' moment in charity, volunteers displaced the possibility of the ultimate failure of their works in favour of possible future successes, and could therefore continue performing their charity methods without a crisis of meaning.

Money, Trust and Disappointment

There were rare circumstances when the rector gave out money and ongoing support. One recipient was Carlo, a homeless and physically disabled Florentine man who was being admitted to hospital for an operation. His need was not only visibly tangible on his disfigured and suffering body, but he had a social service advocate who came and spent time in the office explaining Carlo's situation in great detail. When I asked the administrator about him, she told me immediately that he was 'legit'. She knew his name, and when he arrived she would warmly tell him to 'come on in' to her office. Through 'evidence' and accumulated information gained through other trusted figures, he was deemed trustworthy. Emotions of clear compassion were allowed to flow in this situation. The rector gave him money to help to buy coffee and other items while he was in hospital for six months.

Anthropologists often regard money as engendering diffuse, impersonal exchange relations in Western settings (Parry 1985). Money is commonly seen as an unsuitable gift to express close and affective ties. It may be transformed, in a Lévi-Straussian sense, into an appropriate symbolic form of affective relations (e.g. Carsten 1989), but it is rarely the truest medium of personal sociality. In the context of charity giver–recipient relations, however, money can become the symbol par excellence of trust and close ties. In the American Church money, as a gift, was too potently dangerous to give to strangers whose trust was yet to be proven. In a realm of clear expectations regarding correct recipient behaviour, it offered too much freedom to the receiver and signified a deep level of trust, hope and ‘agency in abeyance’. Only those such as Carlo were given money and, by extension, freedom and trust. The anthropologist Keith Hart (2000) argues that money stores information and memory about our place in a social network. It is ‘an act of remembering, a way of keeping track of some of the exchanges we enter into with the rest of humanity’ (ibid.: 234). For this reason, Hart argues, ‘money is an index of our relations with society; it measures, to an important degree, the viability of our social connections’ (ibid.: 241).

Sometimes parishioners would also give financial support to fellow parishioners. This would not be in the form of charity ‘hand-outs’, but disguised as dignified paid work. Several poor Sri Lankan and African immigrants who attended the church were, after a period of regular attendance, offered a small amount of paid work. Halfway through my fieldwork, during the post-Mass coffee time, a parishioner spoke to a Sri Lankan man, Mark, who was about fifty years old. Mark explained to her in broken English that he did not have a job, and was in desperate need of one. His parents had just died in Sri Lanka, and he needed to send money back to support his family to pay for a funeral. She told Mark to go and speak to the rector during the week and see if he had any work for him. She then spoke to the rector privately and said she would give the church one hundred euros to pay for Mark to do some work. Here a charitable gift between members of the same parishioner community – a community with a strong ethos of egalitarianism (as discussed in Chapter 4) – had to be transformed into a more equal and dignified form of exchange that did not suggest dependence. While I explained earlier how the gift of money was the ultimate exemplar of trusted relationality, the case of Mark also shows that such ‘trust’ was held in tension with ideals of equality and exchange. Gifted money could signify dependence, and the method of gifting money was often disguised in order to emphasize independence.

Mark soon began to fold the pew bulletin every Friday and to do odd jobs at the church. Once he had earned his one hundred euros, as discreetly donated by the parishioner, the church kept him on. He was a quiet man,

who would barely meet another's eyes if he spoke, despite people's efforts to make conversation with him. Yet, like the discretionary fund, charitable giving between members of the same community could disappoint and cause deep cynicism. One day, after six months of casual work, Lilly informed me that he had

showed up really, really drunk – he kept folding the bulletins the wrong way, and I went out and showed him how to do it three times and I realized, and [a volunteer] was around and she got near him and smelt it on his breath, and he was just not acting [right] ... I think he must have a drinking problem, because he came in and he was really upset and his English was not great and he doesn't speak Italian, and he was trying to explain, and ... he found some little part-time job and kept saying that another guy he worked with ... 'told the boss that I was drunk, and it was not true', and he wanted [the rector] to call his boss and tell him that we know this guy and we are sure he wasn't drunk ... and [the rector] did get [an Italian volunteer] to call and say we don't know what happened, but we do know Mark and he does come and do volunteer work with us. And then later on that day is when he was drunk.

Lilly described the situation as 'really, really unfortunate' and a 'hard experience'. The parishioner's and the rector's trust in Mark had been broken and they both felt disappointed. Their support had not, in the end, helped Mark to build a better life. Charity once again was reflected upon as a fragile and paradoxical system of support. I asked if Mark had been back working for the church after this incident. Lilly replied with a sad, long sigh. No, he had not been invited back. These experiences reflexively reiterated to volunteers that compassion and hope were often untrustworthy, and were 'dangerous because they push against the restraints of the socialized, cognitive self' (Lutz 1986: 293) formed through multiple experiences of disappointment and cynical reflection. Hope and mistrust existed in an uneasy dialogical tension, as the emancipatory ideal fundamental to charity was tempered by the failure of recipients to be transformed by the volunteers' gifts.

Reflections

This chapter has shown the different risky social contexts that allowed compassion and material gifts to flow from givers to recipients when trust and legitimation had been difficult to establish. Affect was diversely experienced depending on the narrative context established when stories of need were told. These experiences and assessments relied upon established charity tropes regarding moral worthiness. Affect was a troubling force if narratives of need could not demonstrate trustworthiness. In a domain of increasingly

accountable money and actions, compassion became a dangerous and misleading response that had to be countered with reflexive rationalism. In such circumstances, cynicism often became a way of dealing with stories of need, of carrying on 'as if' charity work had not been challenged by numerous experiences of failure. Cynicism, realism and hope were all forms of reflective acknowledgement that Anglo-American givers did not control the charity process entirely, and could not control recipients' intent, motivations, actions or desires.

These experiences of disappointment and cynicism did not, however, exist separately from other diverse experiences of charity outlined in previous chapters. On a weekly basis as they interacted with charity recipients, volunteers could shift between experiences of overwhelming compassion, familiar and disinterested routine, and distrustful confrontation. The art of being a charitable giver involved shifting moral registers without too much complaint, and reflexively negotiating the tensions between these disjunctive domains. The volunteers' sense of satisfaction and agency that resulted from encounters with grateful, trustworthy recipients was always short lived, overridden and negated by recipients who refused to fulfil their designated roles. The frictions of such oscillating and unstable experiences created a realm within which ultimate success was never possible, and moral personhood could be tested, perfected and found wanting.

Epilogue

CHARITY, REFLEXIVITY, BELONGING



Charitable Reflection, Migrant Belonging

Early in my fieldwork a Swiss member of ACG, Ina, organized a club community service event. Drawing upon her training as a dance therapist, she arranged an event at a local ‘old folks home’. She explained to the volunteers that ‘Most of the residents there are just parked in front of the TV and then left there for the whole day. They have forgotten about joy and really being in the moment. What we’re there to do is reawaken their sense of having a body and being able to move ... There’s a real need for what we’re going to do’. As a newcomer to these community events, to my ears Ina’s pep talk sounded idealistic and charged. I was uncertain what we as untrained volunteers could really offer in a one-off, hour-long session to alter the mundane rhythms of rest-home life. The event, however, revealed the potency of not only Ina’s intentions, but also the powerful effects of some charitable works.

The nursing home was housed in a sturdy 1950s apartment block. We took the lift to the top floor, to the state-funded Alzheimer’s ward. We arrived in a clean, hospital-like environment, with sparkling linoleum. A Florentine nurse, Federica, showed us to the gym room. The nurses brought in the elderly residents who stiffly lowered themselves into plastic chairs. As Ina began to introduce herself in Italian, a resident who was sitting at the edge of the circle, Raffaella, butted in, saying that it wasn’t fair for Ina to talk to the others and not her, and that it made her jealous. Ina smiled, kneeled by the old lady and apologized with light-hearted sincerity. Ina explained that we all could, if the residents agreed, do some dancing to music, but that dancing didn’t have to be with our legs. ‘It could be just with fingers and arms’, she said wiggling a few fingers in the air. One of the ladies interjected sceptically, ‘What if we don’t like the music?’ Ina smiled. ‘Just tell me and I will change it.’ She put a CD into a portable player and sultry Cuban music filled the room. Ina began moving around the room

gently interacting with the residents, trying to draw movement from them. When Ina danced past Raffaella, she got up out of her seat and took Ina's hands, drawing her into a formal waltz. Ina danced with her, meeting her gaze. Raffaella looked regal, her previously listing frame now upright and poised. They glided past a lady who was wearing an elegant, expensive evening dress over old track-pants. She explained to us that she had once worked in high fashion. She was staring at the hem of Ina's dress and soon plucked a stray thread from it. Ina thanked her, and the lady looked pleased with herself, standing up to dance.

The ACG volunteers rose to begin moving rhythmically with the residents. I turned to a woman beside me who did not speak and could not stand. I gently touched her hands and she wrapped her fingers around mine and our hands swayed together. She kept her eyes squarely on me, and I realized I had not had such an intense, tactile experience with an Italian since moving to Florence. It felt awkward and precious. After several songs, I loosened my grip, and my dance partner nodded, smiling, indicating that it was the right time to let go and that she had enjoyed it. Around us a few of the residents and volunteers were beginning to giggle. They were having fun.

As the music ended a thin, stooping man began to sing very softly. His voice quavered with melody, increasing in volume and confidence as everyone in the room turned to listen. He sang an old Florentine folk song about love and longing. When the lyrics referred to a kiss, Ina dramatically kissed her hand, blowing the singer a kiss. As his voice faded, everyone in the room clapped. The nurse Federica was beaming. He had once been a professional singer, she explained, and had sung opera and performed with some big names in Florence's vibrant professional operatic scene. 'This is the first time he has ever sung publicly in the rest home', Federica said. 'Occasionally he hums to himself, but he told me he couldn't sing anymore.' Ina and the volunteers glanced at each other, deeply moved. The residents thanked us with a round of applause and said that they hoped we would come back soon. As we said our goodbyes outside the building, one volunteer, Samantha, who had lived in Florence for eight years, remarked that it was the most worthwhile thing she had done since moving to Florence.

In a range of contexts charity can create moments of unexpected and intense intimacy for volunteers and recipients alike. Volunteers often experience these moments as unmediated and untouched by the contradictions, tensions and disjunctions inherent within daily charity work, as a 'pure' human connection that lives up to the transformative potential of the charity ideal. For Anglo-American volunteers, these rare experiences punctuated

the frictions of charity and migrant belonging with a singular sense of purpose and fulfilment, and made volunteers' ongoing efforts and challenges worthwhile.

Throughout this book I have described the contradictions and paradoxes of charity as the 'grip' out of which migrant belonging is made. But these experiences were ultimately meaningful only if the volunteers found resolution in rare, fleeting moments to charity's contradictions and paradoxes; if they knew that it was not a worthless cause or an unwinnable endeavour, and that, despite its difficulties, there could be moments of success. The frictions of charity induced reflexivity, which provided Anglo-American women with a form of traction in local life. By contrast, moments of success were largely unreflexive, volunteers did not need to contemplate them in order to find a way towards resolution, and they did not need to talk much about them together, or to figure them out. They simply experienced them as a type of 'flow'. In defining a sense of flow, Victor Turner notes that

there is no dualism in 'flow'; while an actor may be aware of what he is doing, he cannot be aware that he is aware – if he is, there is a rhythmic behavioral or cognitive break – self-consciousness makes him stumble, and 'flow', perceived from the 'outside' becomes non-'flow' or anti-'flow'. Pleasure gives way to problem, to worry, to anxiety ... This merging of action and awareness is made possible by a centering of attention on a limited stimulus field. Consciousness must be narrowed, intensified, beamed in on a limited focus of attention. 'Past and future must be given up' – only *now* matters ... Here the conditions that normally prevail must be 'simplified' by some definition of situational relevance. (Turner 1974: 87)

Dealing with the paradoxes of charity is not easy work. A sense of unreflexive flow in charity volunteering provided Anglo-American women with occasions when the effortful became effortless, when they could forget about being a migrant with an uneasy sense of belonging, and simply 'be' with others. Yet this sense of flow is never outside of culture. Ideas of charity success, notions of a 'pure' relationship, and the social arrangements that make charity encounters possible are of course culturally construed. But in ceasing to reflect upon these complexities at certain moments, the volunteers crafted important realms of action within which reflexivity was necessarily curtailed. In order to theorize migrant belonging, therefore, it is essential to consider not just the productive role of reflexivity in ethical selfhood, but also how actors seek to escape from reflective action in order to feel in place. Yet for Anglo-American women in Florence, this desired sense of flow was rare, making reflexivity and friction the norms of daily work.

Charity is a provocative object of study, offering insights into diverse practices, ideologies and relations. Robert Payton (1996: ix) is right to observe

that charity is a 'mare's nest of ambiguity', for charity variously emerges as 'a virtue, as a religious value, as voluntary and obligatory, as religious and secular, as justice, social behaviour, irrationality ... mutual aid ... and of course, as always problematic'. Charity exposes the twin imperatives within an ethic of benevolent improvement. Charity is linked to justice in that it seeks to materially counter poverty and deprivation out in the world. At the same time, charity reveals a preoccupation with the moral and ethical dimensions of personhood and action, or presents an opportunity for spiritual growth (Schneewind 1996: 54). Charity can encourage an inner or an outer focus, depending on its ideological, political and social configurations.

For Anglo-American women in Florence, the frictions of charity interconnected with the paradoxes of migration. As for many affluent migrants seeking a new life, 'ambivalence ... emerge[d] from the mismatch between lived experiences and ambiguous expectations, and from the uncertainty as to how these might be reconciled' (Benson 2011: 157). In a setting where participants often felt socially peripheral, charity provided Anglo-American women with a means to emplace themselves visibly within wider relational realms and public spheres. Volunteering allowed migrant women in Florence an opportunity to enter private and public city spaces normally inaccessible to them, where they came into close contact with fellow Florentine residents. In their role as benevolent charity givers, Anglo-American women came to know themselves as a particular type of migrant citizen: one who had agency, did good deeds, worked hard, and who was invested in Florence's social problems. Unlike the conspicuous American tourists taking photos of Florence's cathedral (*Il Duomo*), volunteers defined themselves as necessary actors in, rather than spectators of, their vibrant cityscape.

Reflexivity as Method

Parallels can be drawn between migrant belonging and the productive lens offered to anthropologists by the dislocating fieldwork experiences of 'culture shock' and outsiderhood: both offer paradoxical friction between distinct cultural worlds through which new knowledge can be reflexively constituted. Thus one of the effects of anthropological knowledge of the Other has been to destabilize the naturalness of Western knowledge (Marcus and Fisher 1989). It is through the 'grip' between the two (even if at times the dichotomy is a simplification or a fiction) that reflexive friction can be created.

Despite the productive trick this offers us, reflexivity as an anthropological method is often conflated with solipsism and self-absorption (Salzman 2002). But as Barbara Myerhoff and Jay Ruby (1982) argue, reflexivity does

not rely upon turning inwards, but outwards. 'Reflexiveness does not leave the subject lost in its own concerns; it pulls one towards the Other and away from isolated attentiveness towards oneself. Reflexivity requires subject and object, breaking the thrall of self-concern by its drive towards self-knowledge that inevitably takes into account a surrounding world of events, people, and places' (ibid.: 5). According to George Marcus (1998: 193), reflexivity is both a form of self-critique and a type of empathic connection. By reflecting back upon the self and its positionality – by inserting the self into research and ethnographic text – the researcher can attempt to create a dialogic relationship between researcher and researched, and between author and reader (Marcus 1994: 45). Yet reflexivity involves both engagement and withdrawal, and closeness and distance, because in order to create such empathic dialogic relations one must first step back to examine the self as an object in situ. It is a 'bending back to thought process itself' (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982: 2). Reflexivity is itself paradoxical. As such, it creates paradoxical forms of empathy and connection to the Other – in this case study, Italians and charity recipients who were both necessarily essential and exterior to Anglo-American volunteer life.

A further critique of reflexive anthropological methods is that, despite arguing against universal truth claims, proponents purport that their method creates better (read 'truer') knowledge than unreflexive 'objective' versions of knowledge. This claim relies upon an essentialized and psychologized version of an 'inner self' that can be uncovered through introspection and self-knowledge (Salzman 2002). Even if the 'self' that is uncovered is a 'cultural self', the process of uncovering remains largely outside of the realm of cultural critique. As Geertz's (1973) study of the Balinese cockfight shows, it is not the 'true' cultural self that is uncovered through reflexive rituals, but a particular cultural self that is made through culturally specific processes of being reflexive. Instead of seeing reflexivity as a cognitive process by which representations of reality become visible, the methods of reflexivity are substantive cultural processes in their own right, generative of particular modes of personhood (Alexander 1996).

Reflexivity does not inherently produce better, wiser or more self-aware actors. In different ethnographic contexts, cultural modes of reflexivity will value varied ways of knowing and reflecting. These could include, as for my participants, rationalism, accountability, emotion or autonomous self-discovery. Practices of reflexivity also engender particular relations of power and struggles for authority. For Anglo-American women, certain forms of reflexivity (like cynical and hopeful reflections on charity giving) allowed the status quo to stay the same, while other forms of reflection (like 'democratic' demands) ruptured and challenged the ethics of charity engagement. Some expressions of reflexivity (such as a preoccupation with form) prevented

certain elements of charity (its effects on recipients' lives) from being reflexively considered. Moreover, reflexivity was a means of everyday striving that ultimately aimed to reach unreflexive flow. Yet even a sense of flow is not neutral or simple. Through a sense of flow and an emphasis on unguarded emotional experience, compassion could get detached from the range of social forces and political realities in which it was implicated, or compartmentalized from the systems of audit that regulated it.

The volunteers' practices of reflexivity could obscure or make visible the lifeworlds of charity recipients. According to biblical scripture, the worthy recipient is universal and largely undefined (Redfield and Bornstein 2010: 10), rendering visible a wide field of need, but one in which the particulars of need are not so important or distinct. This vision emphasizes the value of an inner compassionate comportment. But such an approach was in tension with the volunteers' efforts to make charity effective and efficient. Here, the needy took on particular roles, as suspect or deserving, and the volunteers were compelled to engage as much as they could with recipients' stories, and had to rely upon wider Italian systems of accountability and legitimation, as well as cultural notions of victimhood.

Reflexivity induces not just action, but also inertia. The volunteers recognized that their agency was often limited by recipients' strategies and aims. Sometimes, in being resigned to this fact, volunteers felt discouraged from attempting to modify their charity systems in order to improve them, which acted to leave unchallenged the imbalanced relationality of charitable exchanges. As Tsing (2005: 6) argues, 'Friction is not a synonym for resistance. Hegemony is made as well as unmade with friction'. This insight compels us to question anew the emancipatory epistemological potential of reflexivity, and encourages us to ethnographically and analytically interrogate reflexivities in a range of contexts in order to show the diverse ends to which reflexive practices are put.

Throughout this book I have focused on charity's role in migrants' reflexive enactments of belonging and emplacement, and the creation of moral personhood. To explicate these themes, I have necessarily examined participants' hopes for attenuating suffering, and the planned and unintended effects of their charity works. Perhaps surprisingly, this book's last fieldwork vignette of a dance therapy event downplayed collective Anglo-American reflexivity, and instead detailed the impact that charity has on alleviating forms of marginalization and need. I have ended on this ethnographic image in order to caution against seeing reflexivity as a self-contained practice, and in order to stress that the explicit goals of charity are usually outwards into the world, in 'doing good'; and no matter whatever else charity achieves for the giver, these outward goals should not be underestimated. They do, after all, provide the impetus and rationale for ongoing reflexive efforts. Charity's

ability to effect change and enable transformation – even if only problematic and momentary change – explains why, as a form of collective action, charity has endured through centuries of transformation, and why, despite all critiques levelled its way, charity’s utopian vision retains a persuasive promise for a better world.

NOTES



Introduction

- 1 These are pseudonyms. These groups did not request to be represented confidentially, nor did I promise them this. However, in writing this book I decided to not refer to their specific names in order to provide a basic public level of confidentiality. Because of the small number of Anglo-American institutions in Florence, however, this confidentiality is difficult to achieve, especially for those familiar with Florence or these groups. To have robustly ensured the confidentiality of the groups I would have had to alter their most basic features in my text, making my study inaccurate and less contextualized, which I decided was undesirable. I have, however, worked to ensure a much more stringent level of confidentiality for individual participants. I did assure participants that their life history interview data would be used confidentially, and throughout the text I have assigned pseudonyms to participants and avoided describing identifying features of interviewees' lives when I recount their personal stories.
- 2 These interviews include twenty-nine core volunteers (those who volunteered at least once a week), one Italian divorce lawyer, one American husband of a core volunteer, and one American college student who attended the American Church Mass and student dinners.
- 3 Interviews were open ended and in-depth, lasting between one and two hours. I recorded them and later transcribed them.
- 4 For examples of this emphasis, see Sergi (1986), Campani (1993), Cole (1997), Maciotti and Pugliese (1998), Andall (1999), Mingione and Quassoli (2000). While in Laura Maritano's extensive bibliography of *Immigration, Racism and Multi-culturalism in Italy* (2002) there are around thirty sources cited on Senegalese migrants, no literature on contemporary American migration to Italy was cited, despite both migrant groups being of near equal size (Caritas 2004: 4). More broadly, the phenomenon of American emigration in general is also largely unexplored. Dashefshy et al. show that 'the ratio of studies of emigration to immigration in recent American social science literature has been about 1:7, whereas the proportion of actual emigration to immigration in the twentieth century in the United States has been more than twice as great at about 1:3' (1992: vi). For exceptions to this, see Onyx and Leonard (2005), Sunil, Rojas and Bradley (2007), Hoey (2008).

- 5 The only survey of Anglo-American migrants in Tuscany was carried out in the 1990s by a group of geographers (King, Warnes and Williams 2000). The results were taken from 118 postal questionnaires and a smaller sample of 40 follow-up interviews, which surveyed British citizens over the age of fifty. Of the respondents, 62 per cent were male and 76.9 per cent were married, nearly all to fellow Britons, while the remainder lived alone. As a study of retirement migrants, most respondents had come to Tuscany later in life. Such a study reinforces basic trends established in my own research regarding the participants' affluent backgrounds and globally mobile lifestyles. Being based entirely on survey methods, this study does not describe how Anglo-American migrants constituted migrant identity through daily practices and group activities, and by framing the research in relation to the category of retirees, it further does not cover the substantial group of British women married to Italian men in Tuscany.
- 6 While studies of migration have overwhelmingly favoured attention to economically vulnerable migrants from developing nations, recent scholarly attention to affluent migration has begun to address this imbalance, and devise such terms as 'counter-urbanization', 'transnational expatriates' and 'transnational elites' to capture these emerging trends (see for example Buller and Hoggart 1994, Guarnizoa 1997, Warnes et al. 1999, Williams et al. 2000, Willis and Yeoh 2002, Willis, Yeoh and Fakhri 2002, Beaverstock 2002, Casado-Díaz, Kaiser and Warnes 2004, Fechter 2007a). Focusing on broader macro trends and/or questions of mobility in a transnational world, these studies have tended to downplay the localized daily practices of migrants and their ongoing projects of emplacement and belonging, which scholars have recently realized are still important domains of experience for mobile migrants. See Glick Schiller, Çağlar and Guldbrandsen (2006), Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009) and Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle (2010) for more discussion of the reassertion of 'locality' in migration studies.
- 7 Information on the size of other Anglo groups such as Australians, New Zealanders, Irish and Canadians was not available from official sources due to their small numbers.
- 8 At the time of my study, all foreigners staying in Italy for more than eight days are required to register with the provincial police station to gain a temporary permit to stay. In reality, many tourists and temporary migrants do not do this, largely because of the lax and inconsistent regulation of this rule, and the inconvenient lengthy process of acquiring such a permit from a police station.
- 9 All foreigners who settle in Italy have to register with the local municipality if they wish to buy a car, own property or gain insurance.
- 10 Figures of permits to stay for Britons were not present in 2006 data, suggesting that the numbers had dropped from the previous year to the extent that U.K. no longer featured in the table of the top twenty-five migrant nationalities.
- 11 Estimates for the number of Americans are difficult to obtain. ISTAT, the Italian national statistics body, only included data in their 2004 annual reports for the largest nineteen migrant groups – and Britons and Americans were not included.
- 12 The British Institute is detailed in Chapter 1 on page 34.
- 13 For example, while Scott (2004) notes the existence of British expatriate associations in Paris, including women's associations and Anglican churches, his main set of analytic questions remains focused on participants' discourses of transnationalism rather than the daily practices of building networks at the local setting. Fechter (2007b), in perhaps one

of the most detailed ethnographies of expatriate women's groups, acknowledges that the main *raison d'être* of these groups in Jakarta was to perform charity, noting their Christmas bazaars and fundraisers. However she concludes that 'it remains underdetermined to what extent charity work is undertaken with genuine conviction, or whether it mainly keeps women occupied, such that they would abandon these activities as soon as their circumstances changed' (ibid.: 31). One of the few passages in her book to describe charity practices illustrates this perspective.

Another way to escape the limitations of the 'golden cage' is to take up charity work. A considerable number of women support Indonesian orphanages, medical centres, youth projects or similar initiatives. While the management of these programmes and their real benefits for Indonesians might be questionable, they provide expatriate women the opportunity for agency. For example, Tania, a trained therapist, became involved with a street children's project, which aided the transition of these children from life on the streets to a regular house. While Tania was active in the planning and conducting of many activities, which she found satisfying, they mostly took place within the framework of Western expertise. For example, she told me rather triumphantly that to pacify street children, she had played Mozart to them. And 'it immediately calmed them down. This is how it has to be done.' It seemed that Western civilization had won over Indonesian chaos again. (Fechter 2007b: 50)

Like Fechter, I seek to explore how charitable work offers migrant women agency and a chance to fill free time. Yet, in doing so, I take seriously these activities as domains for building moral personhood, forms of social citizenship, and migrant belonging. For a rare exception in which migration scholars have focused on charity and volunteering, see Richard Kiy and Anne McEnany (2010) for a study of American retirees in Mexico. They illustrate the prevalence of volunteering among these migrants: 'Among those U.S. coastal retirees surveyed, nearly sixty per cent volunteer their time to a charitable cause in Mexico and over twenty-nine per cent volunteer at least once a week or on a regular basis' (ibid.: 5).

- 14 This desire for migrants to engage in civic life can be seen more broadly within immigrant groups in Italy. Recent work on migrant associationalism in Italy has placed migrant association building in the wider context of civic and political participation, examining the legal structures that enable migrant groups to participate in and inform public consultation processes and migrant support services (e.g. Mantovan 2007; see also Colombo, Domaneschi and Marchetti 2009 for ideas about citizenship across migrant generations). Italian anthropologists have also begun to research associations of migrants from 'developing nations' in Tuscany, noting their role in performing charity for their own communities (Baldisserrri 2008; Gori 2008). For example, Margherita Baldisserrri's doctoral research of Peruvian associations in Siena noted that such associations fundraised for disasters throughout Peru, and for needy Peruvian families locally. See Mantovan (2007) for case studies of Bangladeshi and Senegalese associations in Veneto, which demonstrate how these associations bring group structures and leadership styles from the home country to Italy. Broadening the scope of these studies, I seek to understand how the charitable works performed by a wealthy migrant group constituted modes of moral engagement, civic involvement and social influence for migrants.

- 15 A vast body of literature explores Florentine charitable practices from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, focusing on hospitals for children and the poor (see for example Passerini 1853; Gavitt 1990; Levin 1996; Henderson 2001), confraternities and guilds that carried out many charitable and welfare activities (see for example Orioli 1984; Weissman 1988; Diana 1999), and the secularization of certain charitable practices during the rise of humanist thought (see for example Henderson 1994).
- 16 Decision 396 of the Constitutional Court in 1988, the Act on Voluntary Organizations 266/1991 and the Act on Social Cooperatives 381/1991 (see Borzaga 2004: 54–55).
- 17 American attitudes to the state and its role as welfare provider have not been static. In the nineteenth century local religious initiatives governed welfare provisions according to an ideology of ‘rational’ and ‘scientific’ charity. The Progressive Era and the New Deal from the 1920s to the 1960s saw expanding federal welfare programmes rolled out, aimed at wide structural reform to alleviate poverty. Throughout this period, however, charity and private non-profit groups continued to be an integral ‘partner’ to the state in addressing social need. The 1980s marked the beginning of the post-welfare era in the United States, in which private–public partnerships were increasingly encouraged, and the ‘war on welfare’ significantly scaled back federal welfare programmes (Bartkowski and Regis 2003: 27–59). While many of my participants were growing up in the United States during the heyday of the New Deal, this period was still one in which charitable initiatives were seen as a necessary and noble social good, and a prestigious act, especially in the upper class milieu within which they were socialized (Morris 2009).
- 18 See Bartkowski and Regis (2003: 27–59) for a discussion of the changing meanings of the terms ‘charity’ and ‘philanthropy’ over time in the United States. Furthermore, the linguist Sabrina Fusari (2007) makes clear that these terms have distinct connotations in English and Italian:

In Italian ... the word ‘filantropia’ has radically different connotations from its English (apparently literal) equivalent. In the language of American nonprofits, ‘philanthropy’ may be described as an umbrella term, indicating the whole charitable sector, the patterns of donation, the ethics (or ‘stewardship’) of gift management, as well as the attitudes surrounding the action of giving. American philanthropists are people who practice philanthropy at various levels, from giving and volunteering to other activities within foundations and charities. A typical philanthropist is a well-off person who decides to share a part of his/her resources with the community, for religious, moral or other reasons. In Italy, by contrast, there is still a widespread notion that giving is an act of compassion towards the needy, and if a donor gives, s/he is assumed to do so out of piety and good heart, and not really because it is her/his social, moral or personal duty to do so, even less so because s/he may receive some (tax or other) benefits ... this is why, in economic contexts, the English ‘philanthropy’ tends to be translated as ‘non-profit’ or other terms currently used in economics which are devoid of the idea of ‘alms-giving’ in Italian.

... in Italian, ‘carità’ ... mainly stands for the theological [*sic*] virtue of ‘charity’, the third and greatest of the divine virtues enumerated by Paul in Corinthians XIII:13, and corresponding to love for God in Christian theology. In Italian, ‘carità’ can take other, non-religious senses, especially that of an undifferentiated love for all human beings, in partial overlap with the notion of ‘filantropia’.

- 19 My broader emphasis on attitudes of giving reflects a central historical feature of charity. In Christian thought the idea of charity has historically referred to a type of neighbourly love, or *agape* (Jackson 2003) and to a 'divinely inspired spirit of helpfulness rather than material relief' (Leiby 1984: 527) or alms.
- 20 In *The Gift*, Mauss compares a range of gift-giving practices in several non-Western societies such as the Maori and Kwakiutl. He examines the ways in which gift giving intersects with religious, economic, political, moral and legal systems, operating as a 'total social fact'. Mauss demonstrates how gift-giving practices in these societies are not simply altruistic or egoistic, but can operate on a range of levels to connect people in ongoing relationships of dependence, obligation, debt and retribution.
- 21 By 'moral community' I mean a social group that defines itself and its purpose in large part with reference to a set of moral values and moral practices. By 'morality' I prefer to use the erudite definition provided by Caroline Humphrey as a starting point: 'the evaluation of conduct in relation to esteemed or despised human qualities' (1997: 25). As Humphrey recognizes, morality cannot be limited to a Durkheimian exposition of rules imposed on persons by society, as duties and obligations, or 'oughts' (see Durkheim [1912] 1995). By looking at choice and uncertainty (Humphrey 1997; Laidlaw 2002a) as well as desire (Foucault 1986, Archetti 1997), morality begins to appear as less stable terrain. The ethnographer's challenge, then, is to capture the dynamism of morality, as a process in action, and with particular actors in play. Thus, '[i]f we accept a perspective on morality that holds open the possibility of considering the construction of meanings as not completely given, as containing choices for the actors, our ethnographic account must deal with the types of arguments used, how discourses are expressed and accepted, and how ambivalence and pluralism are tackled' (Archetti 1997: 101).
- 22 Reflexivity has been critiqued for being too introspective and experimental, for in fact seeking truth in a purer guise, and for being an 'un-rigorous' method for assessing the rigour of ethnographic research. See Salzman (2002) for an extended critique.

Chapter 1

- 1 The Grand Tour was preceded by English Christian pilgrimages to Italy and the Near East in the Medieval period. The itinerary of the Grand Tour was therefore influenced by well-worn trails and the infrastructure of inns, coaches and guides that grew up around such holy sites (Adler 1989:1373).
- 2 However the journeys by coach between cities could take some time and were usually recounted as memorable and often difficult, with the flea-ridden state of the inns being the main topic recounted in travel books, letters and journals (see for example Edward Lear, quoted in Montgomery 2005:17).
- 3 Many parents worried, however, that in a foreign society and away from parental oversight, young men could become morally corrupted towards their 'base nature' (Baker 1964: 44) and would engage in sex, gambling and drinking. To counter such possibilities, a Grand Tourist was often accompanied by a classically trained tutor, governor or clergyman, who would focus the young man's energies towards the educational purposes of such tours.

- 4 Italy and the Continent also provided a model of grandeur for Americans that was, importantly, not linked to Britain. As Erik Amfitheatrof argues,

At the time of the American Revolution, and for a period following, the idea of imitating the forms of ancient Greece and republican Rome held a very important place in the thinking of the men who had fought the War of Independence against King George III. To a certain extent, too, Americans were reacting to influences from the Continent, and particularly from France where neo-classical style seemed befitting to the grand empire, so reminiscent of ancient Rome, or Napoleon Bonaparte. Yet Americans had another motivation for their veneration of classical models. For obvious reasons they felt an aversion to the English heritage of their fathers, and it seemed to many of them that the new Republic in the new world should look for inspiration in the democracies of the ancient world and to the republican period of the early renaissance, which found its apogee in Florence. (Amfitheatrof 1980:101)

- 5 By 1858 almost two thousand Americans were visiting Florence every year. By the end of the nineteenth century Rome was experiencing an annual influx of around thirty thousand American tourists (Baker 1964: 3). In the early 1840s there were approximately eleven thousand visitors to Florence, half of them English (Withey 1997: 59).
- 6 Of Mark Twain, who often visited and lived in Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Raffaele Simboli wrote in *The Critic*:

Florence is the city especially affected by the Americans and English, who flock there in great numbers every year. The most important personage in the group is Mark Twain, as the villa of his selection is the most sumptuous of them all. The Villa di Quarto lies in a charmingly picturesque spot not far from Florence. It has sheltered the most illustrious people, and all of them have admired its beauty, both natural and artificial – its magnificent grounds with broad avenues, fountains, and smiling gardens. An idea of its size – the circumference of the park is over two miles – may be given by saying that at one time a Russian princess lived there with a suite of one hundred persons. Victor Emanuel II visited it frequently, as it is close to the royal country seat of La Petraia. (Simboli 1904)

- 7 See, for example, Dickens (1846) 1946 James (1909) 2010; and Lawrence (1916) 1997.
- 8 See, for example, the popular British series on Channel 4, *A Place in the Sun* (www.aplaceinthesun.com), including *A Place in the Sun: 20 Best Places to Make Money* (shown 5 Jan 2006).
- 9 I chose the American Church for this study because at the time of my fieldwork it had a larger and more active congregation than St Mark's, and also because St Mark's did not actively perform charity works within Florence, in contrast to the weekly events at the American Church.
- 10 These included other Anglo migrants, as well as Nigerians, Malawians, Kenyans and Sri Lankans.
- 11 I calculated this number by counting, over a two-month period, the number of new church attendees who stood when asked to do so each week by the church 'Development Office', in order to receive a welcome applause from parishioners.

Chapter 2

- 1 *Ciancia* (2008) – *Italian-American Conversation Club Website*.
- 2 I attempted to gauge the accuracy of such data largely by listening for consistencies between the women's representations of the past. I also listened for stories that concretely demonstrated particular trends. While this does not create 'objective' knowledge of the past, I argue that it does offer a useful broad picture of historical shifts in the Anglo-American community. I take such interview narratives with a certain level of good faith with regard to my participants' desire to tell me about their lives accurately. More research remains to be conducted further exploring the veracity of such stories, which was beyond the scope of this study. A useful contrast could be made between these women's stories and the memories of the Italian people who appear in them.
- 3 For a useful discussion of how 'self stories' create coherence out of the flux of memory, see McAdams (1991: 138–40).
- 4 Correspondence, American Consulate, Florence, 8 Sep 2007.
- 5 The desire for authenticity is however not new. Grand Tourists complained of the vulgarity of the new middle-class tourists in the nineteenth century, describing Italy as increasingly 'stage-like' (Buzard 2002).
- 6 Liminality refers to the phase of being 'betwixt and between' social roles and identities, such as the middle stage of a rite of passage or initiation (Turner [1969] 2008).
- 7 Nicola Mai's (2001) research on Albanian television representations of Italy also shows how such imaginings are not confined to Anglo-American countries, but have wider global purchase and take on diverse forms depending on the cultural context.
- 8 The Uffizi Gallery (*Galleria degli Uffizi*) is a popular and famous art gallery and museum in Florence, housing the most important collection of Renaissance masterpieces in Italy. The building was originally built as offices (*uffizi*) by the Medici family in 1581, hence the name.
- 9 See Waldren (1998: 41) for a discussion of the 'mysterious Mediterranean' stereotype – 'exotic, masculine, passionate, emotional, sexy' – that has gained global purchase.
- 10 It also suggests that Francesca built up her own stereotypes of American wives and southern Italian men to categorize the wider Anglo-American community.
- 11 Several women acknowledged, however, that love did not conquer all boundaries. As one wealthy American woman noted, when she first arrived in Florence even men working at market stalls would impress her with their knowledge of art and history. She soon realized, however, 'that was not enough' and was pleased to report that she married an Italian man from a 'good family', wealthy enough to satisfy her mother. Another American woman reported that her mother came to visit her fiancé and his family before giving her blessing, while her father-in-law-to-be, a Rotarian, rang a Rotarian from her home town in the United States to discuss her reputation and social standing. Nearly all women married class-appropriately, and most husbands worked in such professions as law, medicine, academia, architecture and journalism. Several ran established large-scale family firms.
- 12 For Anglo-American women, trying to gain control over domestic spaces and food rituals in new Florentine lives was particularly important, because such spaces were key domains to enact gendered forms of power. Despite entering into waged labour, urban middle-class Florentine women still control the 'domestic realm of reproduction and nurturance'

(Counihan 1988: 51; Counihan 2004). Guiseppe Barile and Lorenza Zanuso (1980) show that contemporary Italian women remain the primary managers of domestic spaces, and Esping-Andersen (1999: 63) notes that between 1985 and 1990, Italian women spent on average ten hours more per week performing household work than women of other European countries such as France, Germany and Sweden. Furthermore, Rossella Palomba (1997: 166) shows that within Italian conjugal units during the 1990s, women carried out nearly all shopping for household goods and housework. For Anglo-American women who felt disempowered due to their newcomer status, asserting control in a sphere within which it was socially acceptable to do so, was a common strategy to help overcome a sense of marginality and disconnection.

- 13 In Italian, the noun *suocera* can be used as an insult to mean that a person is nagging and interfering. That Anglo-American women used this term in their English conversations meant it could be loaded with more implicit meaning than the English equivalent. It also indicates that their own stereotype of Italian mothers-in-law was linked in to a broader Italian stereotype.
- 14 Many Anglo-American women overcame the limited employment opportunities by running their own businesses. Most of these businesses served the Anglo-American community, and included food catering, real estate and property management, and entertainment/travel services for students, all of which could be flexibly tailored to suit women's family roles.
- 15 Scholars of migration to Italy have noted this perception more widely. Zana Vathi (2012), in her study of Albanian migrant experiences in Florence, notes that '[a] feeling of localism was reflected in the strong emphasis on tourism and the transformation of Florence into a "Mecca" for foreigners, to the resentment of the ordinary inhabitants of the city' (ibid.: 62).

Chapter 3

- 1 For example, early-twentieth-century Italian 'peasant food' consisted largely of porridges made from maize, rice and chestnut (Camporesi [1989] 1993; Pilcher 2006: 70). Dishes using industrially produced and cheap olive oil, processed tomato sauces and cheese may have been 'invented' in the United States by Italian immigrants who had access to cheaper foodstuffs (Teti 1992; Pilcher 2006). The *osterie* restaurants that participants believed to be the preserve of the rural family in fact emerged in urban areas to feed single male workers. The social and political imperative to 'preserve the past' developed during the Italian tourism boom from the 1960s onwards (Pilcher 2006: 70).
- 2 For example, during its emergence, Slow Food became associated with the Italian Communist movement and left-wing political ideology. Slow Food proponents criticized market-oriented food businesses for reducing food to a 'pure commodity' (Parasecoli 2003) and European Union food standards for threatening small-scale artisanal food production (Leitch 2003). Slow Food is also tied to the 'green' environmental movement in Italy (Miele and Murdoch 2002). Leitch (2003: 440) points out that Slow Food is also economically motivated, and promotes a lucrative Slow Food tourism industry.

- 3 These nostalgic discourses not only drew upon local representations of rural living and food, but were connected to wider seductive global mediascapes cultivated by Italian tourism campaigns, a rich history of literature, and more recently films, as well as global and local food heritage movements, all evoking ideal Tuscan life. Examples of such narratives can be seen in the popular settler memoirs published from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, which recount how Anglo-American migrants forged new lives for themselves in rural Tuscany. Such books are highly regularized by style and content conventions that venerate rurality, tradition and simplicity. In memoirs from the nineteenth century, 'the typical Anglo-Florentine scenario entails falling in love with Tuscan culture, discovering a neglected villa, [and] restoring it to Renaissance splendour despite incompetent workers and interfering bureaucrats' (Campbell 2011: 261). In recent best-selling memoirs, these narratives follow similar plots, albeit according to more expressive, therapeutic ideals, often involving the rebuilding of personal lives that parallel the physical rebuilding of dilapidated farmhouses, overcoming a closed community's suspicion of the author's outsiderhood, and the discovery of an authentic mode of existing in tune with nature's rhythms, often expressed through seasonal recipes and tales of foraging. These contemporary memoirs are set in a timeless past in which old people predominate over young characters. There is a conspicuous absence of any social comment on crime, politics or national debates, marking them as locally bounded. See, for example, *A Thousand Days in Tuscany* (di Blasey 2005), *The Reluctant Tuscan* (Doran 2005), and *Under the Tuscan Sun* (Mayes 1996).
- 4 It should be noted that participants largely spoke standard Italian. Villages in rural Tuscany each have specific localized language variations and forms of slang, and the Florentine aspirated C is highly pronounced in some areas. Yet the women spoke a 'modern' middle-class version of Florentine Italian that was not inflected by such rural identity. In trying to mimic 'peasant' food rituals, the women were *not* trying to claim 'peasant' identities.
- 5 In talking to Anglo-American migrants and Florentines alike, I was told that eating pasta with a fork and spoon was considered to be both uncultured and bad manners. This illustrates that while upper-class Anglo-American women venerated the food and relationality of Italian 'peasant cultures', they wished also to express an upper-class and 'cultured' idea of Italian-ness in their food habits.

Chapter 4

- 1 Scholars have also noted that this attitude is widespread in U.S. society. Robert Wuthnow (1991: 19–20) shows that a majority of Americans surveyed since the 1970s believe that people in the United States have become more self-interested and less caring for the needy.
- 2 By 1991, a study found that 12 per cent of adult Italians reported doing volunteer work, comparatively lower than the 20 per cent of Americans reported in the same period (Ranci 2001: 75). These figures are, however, notoriously difficult to ascertain, and vary from study to study, and in the Italian case, are likely to underestimate volunteer numbers (ibid.). This is in part because of the potentially wide ranging nature of volunteering. For example, Wuthnow (1991: 6) cites a study by Independent Sector which reports that around 45 per cent of those over eighteen volunteer in the U.S., while Ugo Ascoli and Ram

Cnaan (1997) report that over half of adults in the U.S. volunteered compared to 13 per cent of Italian adults, indicating that what is included in volunteering can be difficult to define. From 1995 to 2005 the number of registered voluntary organizations in Italy rose by 153 per cent, and the number of registered volunteers within such organizations also increased by 71 per cent (Rapizza 2006). For just over 50 per cent of these organizations, their main area of involvement was health care and social assistance (*ibid.*), domains that, in an Anglo-American frame, were easily recognizable as charity through their emphasis on social well-being.

- 3 Kiy and McEnany (2010: 7) similarly note that U.S. retirees in Mexico believed that volunteering provided a positive example of civic society in a social context that lacked such an ethos.
- 4 This reflects a wider conceptual dichotomy underpinning academic understandings of the emergence of modernity. According to Cavalli (2001: 121), 'Dichotomous categories ... contrast that informs Italy's "amoral familism" paradigm, has had considerable success in the history of the social sciences. From Toennies to Durkheim, and from Maine to Parsons, there has been a long series of conceptual dichotomies that have shown themselves to be of great utility in describing the difference between traditional and modern societies: community versus society, mechanical solidarity versus organic solidarity, status versus contract, particularism versus universalism.'
- 5 For example, research suggests that while Italians are increasingly developing trust in fellow citizens (interpersonal trust), they show low levels of trust in impersonal state and market institutions, reflecting increasing concerns regarding political corruption and the importance of political patronage for social and economic advancement in contemporary Italy (Cavalli 2001). A long string of public scandals in postwar Italy, regarding political and bureaucratic corruption and clientelism, have shaken public faith in the political domain (Dickie 2001: 27–28). Furthermore, as Jane and Peter Schneider (2003) demonstrate in their study of anti-Mafia movements in Palermo, civic engagement in contemporary Italian society is robustly visible in the realm of social movements, which is not the type of associationalism that Anglo-American women typically relate to the voluntary sphere. See also Ranci (2001).
- 6 According to Mark Warren (2001), the belief that associationalism underpins democracy is a widely held assumption in U.S. society, and a central principle in political theories about democracy.
- 7 Theoretically, Habermas is often taken as a starting point in attempts to think through such tensions. In detailing ideal normative models of 'deliberative democracy' and 'the public sphere', Habermas distinguishes between the two components of constitutional democracy, arguing that both constitutionalism (the rule of law) and democracy (popular decision-making processes) need to be balanced in order for democracy to function inclusively. For Habermas, democracy must entail public spaces within which all those affected by constitutional rule can debate rationally the laws affecting them. These spaces should allow all participants to engage equally when all aspects of debates are occurring, including when the problems of society are being defined, and when the terms of reference used to debate such problems are being negotiated. 'Rationality' in this sense stands for a universal speech act that implicitly aims to build consensus through validity claims and counter claims (see Habermas 1984). While in his key works on democracy ([1962] 1989;

- 1996) Habermas builds a normative model, he moves away from this in later works. He shifts from arguing that deliberative democracy is empirically impossible, but normatively possible at a universal level, to more plural notions of public spheres and multiple models of democratic deliberation and 'rationality' (see Thomassen 2008 for a full discussion).
- 8 Susan Curtis outlines the development of a protestant valorization of work in American culture. 'From Puritans in the seventeenth century, with their dictum of hard work to glorify God, to revivalists of the Second Great Awakening, with their admonitions against sloth and unrestraint, Protestants in America placed heavy emphasis on industry and achievement' (Curtis 2001: 18).

Chapter 5

- 1 This attitude of 'Christian love' and support for the poor and needy is commonplace within American Christian churches, with most offering outreach programmes for the vulnerable (Cnaan et al. 2002).
- 2 In making such an argument, I am not suggesting that I did not observe any self-interested or altruistic motivations within the food bank volunteers' actions. Self-interested motivations could be detected in the volunteers' desires to meet new friends through charity or through attempts to create an expatriate public charity space that allowed them positions of influence. Altruistic motivations were present in some of the volunteers' descriptions of a Christian ethos of compassion that compelled them to give food to 'the needy'. What I seek to show beyond this, however, is that during the performance of charity, as the volunteers became entangled in the processes of giving, their objectives can best be understood outside of the altruism/self-interest paradigm.
- 3 Italy experienced two 'Albanian emergencies'. In 1991, tens of thousands of Albanians fled to neighbouring states as the country's economic and communist political systems collapsed, leading to mass shortages of food. In 1997 an Albanian government-endorsed fraudulent pyramid finance scheme (*Ponzi*) collapsed – a scheme in which two-thirds of Albanian citizens had invested. This led to civil unrest and violence, and insurgents soon overthrew the government and destroyed the judicial system: all prisons were torched and judicial files burned. As a consequence tens of thousands of Albanians fled to Italy seeking refugee status (Pettifer and Vickers 2007: 1–36). While the Italian state and general population did in many ways welcome some Albanian refugees with material support and migration permits, many others faced expulsion, detention and racial discrimination (Campani 1993: 526–28; Vasta 1994: 84–85). The Albanian food-bank recipients' more 'demanding attitude' likely reflected their sense of fear and vulnerability as illegal and unrecognized migrants, and a real level of deprivation and need that the food bank's offerings were not meeting.
- 4 Other services included at least seven *mense dei poveri* (soup kitchens) in the province of Florence, the most frequented of which were in the city centre, run by Caritas or Franciscan orders. They offered free sit-down lunches and dinners throughout the week, and catered mainly to *extracomunitari* and homeless people. Some also offered showers and clothing.
- 5 Two volunteers carried out a monthly pick-up at the 'Banco Alimentare della Toscana', where they would collect approximately 300 kg of food. This organization gained 62

per cent of its food from an Italian government body, 'L'Agenzia per le Erogazioni in Agricoltura' [AGEA, The Agency for Agricultural Supply]. The rest of its food was donated mainly by Italian businesses (18 per cent) and an annual national collection campaign at major supermarkets (13 per cent) at which many of the American Church food bank workers also volunteered. AGEA gained agricultural surplus products from other EU member states through a programme run by the European Commission. AGEA then packaged these foodstuffs or turned them into processed goods, such as pasta or biscuits. For example, for 2006, AGEA was assigned 631 tonnes of butter from Spain and 115,253 tonnes of cereal from France. The pathways that food travelled to reach the food-bank recipients were entangled with European agricultural quotas and surpluses (European Union 2005: 5).

- 6 This is suggestive of the different types of knowledge that are engendered when we locate meaning in the stable level of 'structure' rather than the contingent and fragile associations that emerge in and over particular moments of time (Latour 2005).

Chapter 6

- 1 See Henkel and Stirrat (2001) and Cruikshank (1999) for descriptions of the charitable and developmental discourses of empowerment. Both employ Foucauldian notions of power as 'subjection' to explain the hegemonic effects of empowerment. Henkel and Stirrat also connect empowerment to Protestant conceptions of the enactment of faith.
- 2 Romantic thought, and a subsequent more benevolent interpretation of God's nature, also bolstered this ideal of compassion. Its development can be seen in the works of Henry More, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Benjamin Franklin and Francis Hutcheson (Fiering 1976).
- 3 This is a pseudonym.
- 4 In his discussion of the rise of humanitarian sensibility and the abolition of slavery, Haskell (1985) argues that capitalism caused a shift in cognitive style that made people more conscious of the wide-reaching and long-term results of their actions and contractual obligations to others. Humanitarian values, he argues, were part of expanding the cultural limits of causal perception and of moral responsibility.
- 5 For many scholars the classic Humean model of sympathetic engagement does not accurately map experience and presents ethical concerns. For example, Halpern's (2001) work on physician and patient interaction argues that sympathy implies that the physician will be affected in a similar way by what the patient experiences and will involve projection, merging and identification, or 'direct emotional attunement' (ibid.: 70). By contrast, Halpern argues that physicians must learn to develop *empathy*, which relies upon a separation of self and other, and the subtle creation of resonance based on imagination that creates an 'interpretive context' (77) that enables levels of understanding to develop. For my analysis, however, this distinction still relies upon inciting imagination and understanding, which were not vital to the later phase of ACG compassionate giving. For other useful analyses of the distinctions scholars have drawn between sympathy and empathy, see Wispé (1986, 1991); Jahoda (2005); and Bornstein (2012: 145–46).
- 6 Hume and Smith's ideas are problematic for anthropology and empirically based social sciences. While Hume acknowledges that one is likely to feel more 'sympathy' for those

with whom one finds more 'resemblances' (family, friends, compatriots), history is replete with examples of basic human similarity being denied (zero sympathy): genocide, of which the Holocaust is the exemplar par excellence, slavery and Social Darwinism are all key examples. Conversely (and often in response to such tragedies), it is possible to see how human rights discourse and humanitarianism espouse a diffuse and general 'global sympathy', whereby one experiences the suffering of far-off unknown Others due to a 'common humanity'. In such cases, how similar to us we consider a close or distant Other to be is not as simple as 'resemblance and contiguity', and has always been influenced by historical, political and cultural factors.

- 7 This theorization of empathy might appear to threaten the coherence of the concept: without 'understanding', what is left of empathy? I argue that an ability to sense resonance or connection with another (that may or may not lead to feelings of concern for or responsibility towards another) remains, but that understanding another is not an essential enduring component.

Chapter 7

- 1 It is important to note here that ideas of the deserving and less deserving within Florentine confraternities were categories that were continually debated, refined and transformed over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as Henderson meticulously demonstrates. This reflects shifts in emphasis and interpretation of Christian doctrine, but also changing economic times, such as periods in which poverty was endemic and economic hardships widespread (Henderson 1994: 241–410). See also Nicolas Terpstra (1994).
- 2 This sense of money's morally suspect nature, Parry and Bloch (1989: 2) point out, stems from a particularly Western mistrust of money that is not culturally universal, traced from Aristotle to Christian doctrines of the Middle Ages, most notably those promoted by St. Thomas of Aquinas, through to Marx. This attitude, however, also sits alongside Western beliefs that money can act as an expression of positive values, such as discipline, work and prudence, demonstrating the complex multivalent nature of money.
- 3 The need to be accountable in the American Church not only reflected an increasingly audited Italian non-profit realm, but broader trends in voluntary organizations internationally (Bornstein 2012: 59). As Diana Leat (1990) outlines, the increasing use of accountability systems in a wide range of countries reflects three themes, which are also relevant to Italy. First, Leat charts the rise of 'planned pluralism', the relationships between state and voluntary organizations in the provisioning of social services, in which services are 'outsourced' to non-state organizations, and then monitored by the state (see also Milligan and Conradson 2006). Secondly, Leat notes the rise of professionalism and managerialism; and thirdly, the rise of consumerism, and client accountability.
- 4 Specifically Christian attitudes to money are complex and historically transforming, ranging from the idea that wealth indexes salvation, to a deep distrust of the spiritually corrupting influence of money. See, for example, Weber ([1905] 1958); Hollinger (1991); Harding (1992); McDannell (1995); Hamilton (2000); Smith (2000); Hudnut-Beumler (2007); and Bielo (2007).

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