

24. TEACHING IN ITALY, ROME, SIENA, AND FLORENCE, 1974-

I have been in Italy on a number of occasions from 1974 onward, usually to lecture on the mathematics of population. I remember the scene in the Department of Population of the University of Rome--I was backed up to the blackboard, facing the small group that included Antonio Golini, Antonella Pinelli, Carla Bielli, Cucci, Eugenio Sonnino, Graziella Caselli, and the Grand Dame of European demography, Professoressa Nora Federici who had spent her long life in teaching and writing on population. With Federici I had been in correspondence for some years, going back to my Ottawa days; the others were younger teachers of demography whom I got to know on my visits. And an alert group they are, themselves starting out in productive careers as teachers and researchers--my mistake I made at the blackboard was quickly pointed out.

In the 1970s most Italians, however advanced professionally, knew little or no English, and so I was compelled to give my lectures in Italian. My doing so was a kind of psychological experiment. I trained myself to think in Italian during the period of my stay. This was hard on Beatrice, but she collaborated loyally, realizing that there was no way I could deliver myself with any fluency. (I had done the same at the Université of Montreal--I plainly lacked the flexibility to go from one language to another the same day.).

The people to whom I lectured were colleagues rather than students. I enjoyed every minute of my stay in the Via Nomentana, and as it was coming to an end I wanted to show my appreciation, and the least I could do was to invite the group to dinner.

After consultation I settled on Fualde's. I don't think it was hiding from the police, but it certainly was not advertising its existence. It served great food at very low prices. After a dinner for some ten people--no menu, just a succession of the best Italian dishes prepared anywhere. After we had eaten our fill, I went to the back to ask for the bill. There was no bill, just the owner saying to me "50,000 lire". At the time the lire was trading at 1,000 to the dollar, so the price was absurdly low. I reached into my pocket, peeled off a 50,000 lire note, shook hands, and we diners filed out. No paper trail to give the authorities evidence of how the place was managed.

In somewhat the same way Massimo Livi-Bacci, who headed up a similar group in the University of Florence, invited me to come and give a series of lectures. I already knew Massimo through his writings--that include an unrivaled history of world population. As to the place itself, if ever there was a city that was a work of art, Florence, whose designers have made the most of its location on the Arno River, is it.

I also went to Siena more than once. It started with a phone call from Luciano Petrioli inviting Beatrice and myself to come up to Siena, a "Jewel of a city" as one friend called it. Siena was a

commercial rival of nearby Florence in the Middle Ages, and in the Renaissance Florence pulled ahead. The river of commerce flowed through Florence rather than Siena ever since, leaving Siena unchanged over the centuries. From my point of view an enormous advantage; Siena still has its mediaeval walls, built before the age of gunpowder, and now a highly valued attraction.

Petrioli himself is very much a man of Siena and our relation has been close over the years. He introduced the Sieneese style of painting (with lots of "brown sauce") to Beatrice and myself, had me give lectures in the University, introduced me to colleagues in mathematics and other Departments and finally arranged that I be given an Honorary Doctorate.

Social life was intense. A group around Luciano Petrioli, including his student Andrea Menchiari, gathered in the evenings to drink wine and discuss Italian politics, Italian writing, and Italian music. I remember a group gathering one evening and talking about Italy's perennial problem: national unity. A political party called itself the Lombard League wanted to split Italy somewhere between Rome and Naples, and then let the southern part fend for itself. .

Although Petrioli is most at home in Siena, he has gone abroad on government missions more than once. When he was in tropical Africa on one occasion he sent us a picture of the King of some small country, dressed in native royal costume--which means only half dressed. The picture includes the scholarly looking Petrioli, his wife Sylvana, very much a lady, wearing a hat and gloves even in the jungle. On one occasion I am told the King came to Siena to visit Petrioli, who took much pleasure in introducing him around the University.

When the time came to leave we bought tickets to Vienna, and were driven to the railway station by the Menchiaris. But it was a holiday, and the train was crowded. I mean crowded--people were hanging on to the steps--there was not a chance of reaching the seats that we had reserved. So the Menchiaris said they would drive us to Vienna, a distance of nearly three hundred miles. They made a phone call or two to arrange their affairs and then set out at about 8:00 o'clock in the evening. They had a heavy car, and we drove comfortably through much of the night. When we got to our rented home in Baden, at something like 2:00 a.m. We all went to sleep, we in our beds, they in our living room. The Menchiaris's had been trying to have a baby for some time without success, and they tell us that on that very night conception took place.

I made a number of visits to Rome, meeting the people in the Institute of Demography in the via Nomentana, later a Department of the University of Rome.

I went to Siena more than once. It started with a phone call from Luciano Petrioli inviting Beatrice and myself to come up to Siena, a "Jewel of a city" as one friend called it. Siena was a commercial rival of nearby Florence in the Middle Ages, and in the Renaissance Florence pulled ahead. The river of commerce flowed through Florence rather than Siena ever since, leaving

Siena as a backwater. From my point of view an enormous advantage; Siena still has its mediaeval walls, built before the age of gunpowder, and now a highly valued attraction.

Petrioli himself is very much a man of Siena and our relation has been close over the years. He introduced the Sieneese style of painting (with lots of "brown sauce") to us, had me give lectures in the University, and finally arranged that I be given an Honorary Doctorate.

During my stay in Austria I was invited for five successive winters (1985-9) to return to Indonesia to consult on its educational system. I am not sure how useful that consultation was- the archipelago was divided into 27 provinces, and each insisted on having its own university. Consolidation could have equipped and manned 5 or 6 institutions that could have fulfilled the functions of universities, however modestly, but the suggestion to that effect didn't go. On one occasion there was a meeting with some three speakers on the platform, and a distinguished audience that included the Minister of Education. The others made some vaguely complimentary remarks, and I now realize that that is what I should have done. Instead I presented 10 questions, each revolving about some function of a university, particularly raising the question of the faculty qualification. I did not dare to answer the questions, just to ask them, as a person might who was seeking information. The sorts of questions American students ask when trying to decide where to go for their undergraduate studies.

The Minister said angrily that I had no business asking such questions. Evidently I had been recruited, and paid in order that I might say how good was the Indonesian system of higher education. Nothing more.

So I turned from education to the study of village life, in particular the changes in the village of Balarjo over the 40 years that had passed since my first visit. A short account is given in a later section.