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Coluccio Salutati

Caro Diario,

Be it fault of Italian philosophy or geography of the land, the sole amount of time it takes to reach any Sicilian city donates an automatic air of secrecy and illusiveness. The Sicilian landscape is like a Cezanne painting: seemingly fragmented so that you see mountains to all sides even when in the bowels of a valley. Towns appear and disappear with a turn around another hairpin curve. We drove two hours weaving our way around the floods that had invaded the low-lying coastal plain, only stopping at a roadside bar that had definitely passed it's prime. I nodded in and out of an art history-induced coma until we arrived in Corleone. Who said "you do not see the real Italy until you have seen Sicily"? They were right. I feel like it is similar to the South of the United States. It is the most guttural, authentic, representation of a people. Sicilians have a different, local pride and have all been here for ages.

It was a sluggish assembly at 7 A.M. the next morning. Corleone was sleeping and we were on our way to Cinisi, back up the only road that seemed to lead out of town. It is hard to imagine that the hotbed of a globally reaching criminal organization is nestled so quaintly against a mountainside. Our professors had told us on the bus ride from the airport that wherever we went, people would know we were coming. To me this sounded like the tagline from a horribly written horror film, but here big brother is not just a foreign reality show. Stepping off of the bus and walking into the building I felt stares burning through the back of my head. The man at the tabacchi, the women carrying their shopping bags home, the duo playing checkers, all wanted to see who was declaring themselves in solidarity with their own town martyr.

This was not a museum. This was the Impastato home. Peppino Impastato had walked in and out of this door countless times until his father decided he was compromising the safety of the family. Peppino's brother Giovanni was there, hosting Italian and foreign students who want to be a part of the anti-mafia movement in Sicily. "It is interesting that in this form of dictatorship you don't have to leave your home and see tanks lining the streets.... all you have to do is turn on your television" he said referring to the governmental control of the Italian media. The stares were the tanks, the community, the batallion, all held by a tentacle of the commanding force, the Mafia. "Legality is respect for human dignity," said Giovanni, a dignity that the silent tabacchi man, women, and checker players all deserve.

We set off again into the Cezanne painting, this time to Portella Della Ginestra, the site of the May Day Massacre over 60 years past. These three men were all young when they watched their fathers, mothers, cousins, aunts, and uncles fall to the bullets of gunman hiding just over a neighboring ridge. It is an experience that no one would wish for but it is one that constructs much wisdom. As one survivor said: "Learn. Knowledge you can keep. Put it in your head and no one can take it away from you. Money will come and fly away but you will always have knowledge."

Sunday morning we met Salvatore and the other farmers outside of Corleone. On the cooperative farms, a rose is planted at the end of each row of grapes to absorb those diseases, which would affect the crop. To the farmers in the cooperatives these roses are not just utilitarian, but a symbol of how a little bit of good can absorb what is plaguing a community and a nation. What they would be too modest to admit though, is that they too are like the roses, as are the Impastato brothers. They have realized that it only takes one rose to save thousands of grapes.

-As taken and inspired from my travel journal