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# Embroidery as Inscription in the Life of a Calabrian Immigrant Woman

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### Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of needlework, personal narrative, gender and artistic creativity in one immigrant woman's extraordinary life in two out of the way places (Calabria and Appalachia) over the course of nearly a century. Anna Guarascio Peluso excelled in embroidered whitewear, the mark of a cultured woman in nineteenth century Calabria. As an immigrant to West Virginia, the art in its traditional form was incompatible with the new culture and life Anna entered. At the end of Anna's life, narrative and needlework merged to produce one last project. A revival of the embroidery served as a vehicle for reminiscence and the process of life-integration. A lively close reading of one Italian woman artist's lived experience and self-representation through her artistic repertoire (lost and then revived) provides the perfect context to discuss change over time in the social and economic lives of Italian women and the communities in which they lived on both sides of the Atlantic. The paper raises larger concerns surrounding issues of women's role in the (re)production of culture, expands recent research on Italian and Italian immigrant women, and touches on the role of dialogue and reflexivity in the ethnographic process.

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