

Francesco Pepe, My Dutch Paisan

Joey Skee (May 25, 2008)



A digital tale of diasporic linkages between Old and New Amsterdams.

Francesco Pepe of the Netherlands and I (NYC) have been communicating for few years now about Italian vernacular culture after a chance encounter on the Net. Francesco, the son of immigrants from Pagani (Salerno province, Campania) was googling hip hop and came across my site italianrap.com [2]. He emailed me to ask what Italian Americans thought about black rappers using mafia references in their music. A flurry of emails traversed the planet as our conversation turned to various aspects of a transnational popular culture (to update a key Gramscian concept), from contemporary cinema to Neapolitan singer Mario Merola to tammurriata frame drumming during the



feast of the La Madonna delle Galline in his ancestral town.

Due to the nature of Dutch immigration, Pepe's friends hail from various parts of world. His wife is Turkish. As a result he is keenly aware of the historic and cultural relationship of the circum-Mediterranean.

Soon the packages started to arrive from Holland. Francesco sent CD mixes that juxtaposed Mediterranean roots music from Italy's Lina Sastri and Lino Cannavacciuolo, and Turkey's Sezen Aksu and Kardeş Türküler. He introduced me to a spate of feature and documentary films unknown and unavailable in the States that dealt with southern Italian culture, religion, and politics. I, in turn, sent him packages with similar items. I posted his father Vincenzo's 2006 Nativity presepio on my website. When I was in Italy last year, Francesco flew down and we met in Naples for the first time, traveling to Pagani for lunch with his relatives.

Francesco was both familiar with and knowledgeable about Italian-American life having not only seen the various cinematic exports from Scorsese, Lee, and others, but also read the classics of Italian American history, sociology, and literature. When new books were published, Francesco bought the book on line. It was through Italian-American history and culture, in part, that Francesco was able to get a better handle of his own experiences as the child of Italian immigrants.

Francesco is a community scholar of Italian diasporic history and culture. His enthusiasm has fueled artists and scholars alike. It was his idea that got directors Tonino Boniotti and Daniela Tacsá to make *De Spaghettiflat* (2007) a documentary film about the Italian community in Zaandam, where he lives.



His communication with historians Donna Gabaccia and Linda Reeder has initiated a research project investigating “honor killings” among Italian immigrants world wide. It was Francesco who made me aware of the upcoming Italian diaspora film festival in Australia, as well as a host of other cultural products.

From time to time, I'll be sharing Francesco's findings here on my blog, linking you to our paesan in Holland.

Related Links: <http://www.depers.nl/binnenland/76177/Little-Italy-in-Zaanse-Polder.html> [4]

<http://www.miramedia.nl/media/files/spaghettilat.wmv> [3]

<http://italianrap.com/italam/folklore/presepio/others/popups/01pepe.html> [5]

http://www.mediamrad.org/lang/meeting.php?renc_id=16&typrenc_id=3&lang=en [6]

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Links

[1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/1986francescopepe1211671955.jpg>

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