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Shift and Transformation in Salento: Investigating Change in the Polyphonic Structure and Performance Practice of *Canti Polivocali* in Southern Puglia[1]

ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on documenting change and transformation of polyphonic singing in the Salento region of lower Puglia (southern Italy), based on a comparative analysis of early field recordings and recently collected materials. Cantipolivocali ("multi-voiced songs"), the repertoire of vocal polyphony distinct to the Salento region, was once widely practiced throughout the region with subregional musical dialects and a rich repertory of local variants. This rich musical activity was captured in early field recordings by the first major wave of researchers in the field, notably between the mid-1950s to late 1960s by ethnomusicologists Diego Carpitella, Alan Lomax, Gianni Bosio, and Clara Longhini. After mass emigration and significant changes in traditional music's positioning in contemporary Italian culture, the tradition of this singing in Salento has shifted considerably in both its polyphonic structure and how it is situated in cultural spaces. By comparing recordings of the aforementioned early collections with field recordings recently collected by the author through analysis, this paper will aim to document these changes and identify the significant transformations of cantipolivocali in Salento.

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[1] This article is a reworking of a paper originally presented at the *8th International Symposium on Traditional Polyphony,* held September 26-30, 2016 in Tbilisi, Georgia

What is the *Salento* region? What is Salentine Polyphony?

The Salentine peninsula, often referred to as *Salento* locally, is a sub-peninsula that occupies the southern half of Puglia, located at the southernmost region of Italy's mainland. *Salento* is home to a rich musical culture, including trance rituals and related dance traditions, influence from the Greek and Albanian minorities of the region, archaic sacred chants and rural polyphonic singing.

Due to economic instability in the 20th century, and particularly after the Second World War, the region of Puglia (as well as most of southern Italy) experienced a mass exodus of its people to major cities in in northern Italy, Europe, and the new world. This history of migration greatly impacted the transmission of traditional music in Puglian rural life, which diminished immensely as these rural societies began to decline or disappear altogether. The transmission process of music to succeeding generations was significantly interrupted, as the carriers of traditional music left their homelands and assimilated into the countries they left for in search of a new life. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, Salento has witnessed a growing resurgence and reclaiming of its regional folk musics - most notably, the *pizzica*, a repertoire of folk dances with musical accompaniment rooted in ancient healing rituals that utilized rhythm and movement to induce therapeutic trance (Santoro 2009). As *pizzica* developed its own international audience, many local musicians became increasingly interested in the folk traditions of the region beyond the *pizzica,* and thusly these musicians set out to study, revive, and perform lesser-known regional musics. This included the music of local minorities, sacred songs, balladry, archaic stylings of love songs and serenades, and polyphonic singing. Notably, this has led to the animation of a folklore renaissance within the region, in which its folk culture is valued as an avatar of regional identity. This resulted in the creation of a local movement where these local styles and genres were performed and disseminated through media and young generations, which allowed researchers and scholars greater access to the traditions.

Salentine polyphonic song, often referred to locally as *canti polivocali* (Italian, 'multi-voiced songs') or *canti alla stissa* (Salentine dialect, literally 'songs sung in the same manner'), is the repertory of acapella multipart songs unique to the Salento region that is performed in many cultural contexts (social gatherings, work in the fields,

domestic spaces, harvesting, rituals). This genre of music is traditionally sung in three parts, and can be described as being fundamentally a musical dialogue between two melodic lines, supported by a choral drone as a bass line (either rhythmic or pedal). Two-part songs are also common, and are performed in the same manner but without the choral drone. Two-part songs are often melodically and rhythmically simpler, and typically less strict in the configuration of the voices (number of voices per part). Among contemporary singers, however, songs are not always in two or three parts, and can be performed with a variety of modifications to this foundational structure, with additional voices adding textural density by imitating the main melody with semi-improvised variants: this will be discussed with a selected example in the analysis section of this paper.

One of the most prolific collections of polyphonic singing in Salento was the result of research conducted by Alan Lomax and Diego Carpitella in 1954 (Lomax & Carpitella, 2002) as they traversed different regions of Italy collecting little-known traditional musics of that time. This work arguably initiated a wave of ethnomusicological interest in Salento, and consequently Italian researchers continued to collect and analyze locals musics in this region. In the fall of 2015, I began to conduct my own field research, eager to encounter and collect the polyphonic singing I had been studying from these early collections. Optimistically believing in the romanticized notion of a preserved musical heritage, I was attempting to identify polyphonies and performance practice akin to the findings of these early researchers. Instead, I discovered that multipart singing had transformed significantly, in both its polyphonic structure and the cultural contexts and spaces that it is practiced in. Through a comparative analysis of early materials and recently collected materials, one can identify a correspondence between how the song form has changed in practice and the cultural factors that lead to those changes, namely the societal spaces of gender, ritual, and work, and how the dissolution of those spaces dispersed these songs into other spheres of Salentine society that led to the reconfiguration of their polyphonic structure.

An Analytical Framework for Italian Polyphony, and its Regional Classification

When discussing regional practices of polyphonic singing, scholars sometimes use language models (Jordania, 2006; Shetuni, 2011) to deconstruct how local traditions

may belong to a wider family of similar local traditions. Theoretically, a specified musical language would generally retain defined musical characteristics that are shared within the dialects, and these can be identified as the core musical components (the fundamental structure) of a polyphonic singing tradition: the musical dialects, alternatively, would be the regional variations of the fundamental structure, often adding upon or modifying the characteristic polyphonic form.

Some issues arise, however, in the application of this type of model to Italian folk polyphonies. Scholars who utilize this language-dialect model often deal with folk traditions that fit very well within the confines of this method of analysis, and in fact the confines of identifying a common polyphonic structure of a musical culture enriches the investigation and analyses of the regional variations of that structure. This, however, is quite problematic when one attempts to identify a musical language framework that deconstructs musical dialects of Italian polyphonic song: the musical characteristics that unify all the regional dialects require significant further investigation, and any dialectology should be subject to frequent review and deeper research that considers the contemporary remodelings of traditional music in Italy. The most unifying musical element of Italian folk polyphony is, arguably, the tonal influence[2] of Western art music observable in many regional styles of singing (and, indeed, this is observable in Salento): however, even this is problematic, as it is a flawed concept that does not suitably encompass the underlying continuum of regional dialects in Italian folk polyphony.

For musical analysis, defined regional classifications may not necessarily consider the concept of 'transformation' in the transmission and performance practices of a singing tradition, relying on a certain stagnancy in a tradition's shaping over time that determines a regional musical character. This is due to the insinuation of classifying variations of polyphonic structures by region, in that those variations can be absolutely defined by their geographic situation. The shift and flux of those defined forms, thusly, can undermine the applied theory used for regional classification. This paper will look particularly at a prototype musical dialect map,

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[2] Italian vocal polyphonies can be described to have a tendency to use consonant and parallel harmonies (mostly thirds, sixths), with bass lines that predominantly centre on the tonic and dominant degrees.

devised by Alan Lomax and Diego Carpitella from their aforementioned collection, to describe regional variation in Italian polyphonic song. Components of that map act as a framework for comparative analysis between older and newer materials collected in Salento.

Notable Early Field Collections of Polyphonic Singing in the Salento Region: Identifying Musical Dialects

As previously mentioned, the Lomax and Carpitella collection was a significant contribution to the academic investigation of folk music in Italy. This collection was particularly important for two primary reasons: a) it had been conducted when there was still significant traditional music activity in particular regions of southern Italy immediately before major waves of post-World War II emigration; and b) it was one of the earliest and most influential large-scale survey collections that set foundational groundwork for future research in Italian ethnomusicology. Based on his research, Lomax devised a general regional framework of Italian folk music: he identified four major regional divisions, which have been recognized as musical dialects by later ethnomusicologists: Northern, Central, Southern (including Sicily), and Sardinia. There was an observed dichotomy of Northern and Southern folk musics, in which the south retained modes, performance practices, instrumentation, genres and vocal styles reflective of its history (influx of Balkan peoples throughout history, domination by Greeks and Arabs), while the north was musically closer to Italy's continental neighbours, and was musically more choral and more reliant on Western harmony. Central Italy was branded as a transitional zone between the polyphonic, tonal north and the monophonic, modal south. In my view, this mapping of Italian traditional music is a prototype for regional classification, offering a model to investigate and craft a dialectology through comparative analysis.

In the years following Lomax's expeditions, in-depth fieldwork was conducted throughout Italy. The region which this paper focuses on was a location of particular interest to Italian ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and anthropologists. Of particular note in regards to polyphonic singing, Gianni Bosio and Clara Longhini in 1968 (Bosio & Longhini, 2007) conducted an in-depth survey of the diversity of local musical traditions in the Salento region. This collection was an invaluable resource for studying polyphonic song in the region as it contains detailed data documented

in journals and field notes, proving to be an invaluable resource for analysis, and to inform ongoing research. Similar structural characteristics of Salentine polyphony can be observed between Bosio's and Longhini's collection and Lomax's collection, which will be detailed later in this paper through comparative analysis of select examples.

Although broadly defined regional classification can be simplistic and thus problematic for in-depth analysis due to its approximation (and the consequential inattention to exceptional local styles), it does provide a framework to understand how specific regions fit into a larger body of field collections. Supported by the materials of both Lomax's and Bosio's and Longhini's collections, Puglia, and Salento in particular fit broadly within Lomax's regional classification. These earlier materials provide evidence for several key musical characteristics attributed to the "southern" musical dialect: a leaning towards modal scales instead of tonal (western harmonic); a certain timbre and quality of the voice; the use of ornamentation and free rhythm; a cultural connection to specific spaces of ritual and performance practice; engendering of songs, which were performed and transmitted in strictly gendered spaces; and a certain strictness in performing a fixed configuration of vocal parts. These musical characteristics will act as criteria for comparative analysis between select sample materials further on in this paper.

The Three-Part Structure of Salentine Polyphony

The polyphonic style of Salentine polyphony can be typically described as a 3-part texture, in which the upper two voices engage in a musical dialogue of mostly parallel thirds (or move in similar motion, with occasional fourths or fifths), supported by a choral drone that can be sung rhythmically with the same text underlay or as a textless pedal drone.

The voices can be isolated within the polyphonic structure and detailed by their musical characteristics and melodic behaviour in the following chart:

Vocal Part	Translation	Musical Function and Behaviour
1. *La prima voce*	"First voice"	Solo voice which leads each verse Sings the main melody, within a limited range Highly ornamental Can be a solo voice, or several voices
2. *La seconda voce/ Contra voce*	"Second voice" / "Contrapuntal/counter voice" (lit. "*against the voice*")	Upper harmony, moving in parallel or similar motion to the *prima voce* Highly ornamental; this ornamentation is semi-improvised and could be (or not be) imitative of the first voice's ornamentation, or independent of it Traditionally one voice Can have more melodic freedom than the *prima voce*
3. *Il basso/ Bordone*	"Bass," or "Drone"	Drone part, sung with the most voices (typically, not always); the most strict of the three parts, no improvisation or variation Drone can be sung on the tonic throughout, or switch between the tonic and the dominant degrees When the drone switches between the tonic and dominant degrees, sliding is a characteristic dynamic Drone is sung in one of two ways; either with the text underlay of the words sung by the other two parts, or as a textless drone on the syllable "Ah." Songs of the latter type are usually free in rhythm and melodic form for the other two voices, while they are more rhythmically strict for the former

The following two transcriptions are two notable examples of 3-part polyphony in Salento, from the field collections of the aforementioned early research of Lomax, Carpitella, Bosio and Longhini, followed by some basic analysis. This analysis is meant to plainly illustrate the fundamental components of the traditional three-part structure of Salentine polyphonic song.

- Example 1, *La Carrozza è Già Arrivata* (**transc. & [audio ex. 1](#)**), recorded by Alan Lomax and Diego Carpitella in 1953 in Martano (Puglia):
    - Sung by women; high vocal production and timbre, ornamented with the use of vibrato in the *prima voce* and *seconda voce*
    - Most voices singing the *bordone*; no ornamentation, variation, melodic freedom, or use of vibrato. Drone switches between tonic and dominant degrees; characteristic slides in between these two pitches. Follows the upper voices, and supports the musical dialogue of the *prima voce* and *seconda voce*
    - Compound meter; rhythmically strict, simple text underlay
    - Typical altering of the fourth degree; switch between Lydian to Ionian modes
    - Final interval on the tonic and submediant degrees. The *bordone* and *prima voce* come together on the tonic at the end of each phrase.
    - Simple textural movement; brief instances of simple contrapuntal movement between the bordone and *prima voce/seconda voce* at resolution of phrases.

- The second example *Ci Dice ca Livornu non è Bella* (**transc. & [audio ex. 2](#)**), recorded by Gianni Bosio and Clara Longhini in Torrepaduli (Puglia), in Summer 1968:
    - Free rhythm, framed by short and long pulses lead by the *prima voce* and *seconda voce*
    - Highly ornamental melodic phrases in the solo voices (*prima* and *seconda*)
    - Sung by men; high register of the voice, open-throated timbre, use of vibrato in the solo voices (*prima* and *seconda*)

- Strict vocal configuration; two soloists with relative melodic and rhythmic freedom, being supported by a choral pedal drone; drone changes between tonic and dominant degrees, performing characteristic slides between these pitches
- Lydian mode; occasional alteration of the fourth degree
- Parallel and similar motion predominantly in thirds and fourths, with more independent movement at the resolutions of each phrase.
- More complex musical dialogue between the *prima voce* and *seconda voce*; antiphonal entries before the second verse, and imitative phrasing of the *prima voce* by the *seconda voce* at the resolutions.
- Textural movement is more elaborate in the upper voices; oblique motion against the choral pedal drone.

With these two sample materials, one can identify some notable key musical features and aspects of performance practice, that have been subject to change over time:

➔ **The engendering of song**: These songs, like many examples of earlier field recordings, had a practice of gendered performance, in that the men and women sang their own repertoires. While many core elements of the polyphonic vocal organization remain the same between men's and women's songs, some details in vocal quality, rhythmic gestures, and the themes sung in the texts are representation of the gendered space in which a repertory is situated.[3]

➔ **Modality**: Both examples (particularly Ex.2) demonstrate traditional modality in Salentine folk music, particularly the use of the Lydian mode, and/or alterations on the fourth degree between phrases, resulting in a typical modal modulation between the Ionian and Lydian modes (Ex. 1).

➔ **Rhythmic character**: The free-rhythm meter present in Ex. 2 is peculiar when compared to the simpler compound and duple meters that are traditional in most Italian folk musics (as in Ex. 1). The use of long and short

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[3] Despite the topic of song engendering linked to certain repertories, performance practices, and aesthetics is important, this is a large topic that is beyond the scope of this paper's analysis.

pulses, a flexibility of phrases, and pauses are common rhythmic characteristics.

→ **Elaborate ornamentation**: This is present and frequent throughout in all the voices except the bass, which is performed in a very straightforward manner without any variants.

→ **Stylistic vocal timbre**: The use of a controlled vibrato and an open chest voice is distinctive in these early field recordings. Singers, and especially the soloists, have technical prowess and control over their voices.

→ **Strict 3-part vocal configuration**: Singers are designated to sing their respective part, without any change or variants of those singers or parts. A certain aesthetic of movement and style is utilized for the execution of ornaments, and the addition of heterophonic variants or additional voices is not present.

Travelling to Nardò, the Expanded Polyphonic Structure, and Comparative Analysis

In the autumn of 2015, I went to the Salento region to investigate polyphonic singing in its current form. I perused archived documents and utilized older field recordings as a reference point for investigating specific locales that fit into my research interests. Most importantly, I perused a recently published work conducted by the local folklorist and musician Dario Muci (Muci, 2008), who collected and revitalized old songs sung by a group of sisters (referred in his work, and also by locals, as *le sorelle Gaballo,* transl.. 'the Gaballo sisters') from the musically active town of Nardò, some short distance to the South of the regional capital of Lecce. Muci's analysis of these sisters and their songs, and the subsequent recordings of their polyphonic singing, was so distinctly different from what I had investigated from the previously mentioned collections, that I felt compelled to seek them out. The quality of their voices, the multi-voiced structure of their polyphony, the performance practices and spaces these songs inhabited, the flexibility and fluidity of freedom in their interpretation of the Salentine song - all this struck me in the most remarkable way, enticing me to investigate their repertoire more deeply. I engaged in the recording of the Gaballo sisters, in hopes that after an intensive independent study and analysis I could muster some kind of cohesion between the Salentine polyphonic song I had

come to know through recordings, and the songs that I had been intensely experiencing in a very different Salento.

What I came to realize, instead, was that I needed to refrain from aligning the repertoire I was collecting with what I had anticipated I would find. Instead, it was imperative that I approach my fieldwork collection as an ongoing narrative of musical change in Salentine polyphonic song that is traceable to the local resurgence and reclamation of folk music in Salento, and the resultant renewed interest among Salentine people that thusly influences the transmission of these songs. The older rigid structure of the song had collapsed, along with the strictness of the cultural spaces to which that structure belonged – spaces of gender, rural work, and ritual. Without these cultural constraints to hold the tradition in place, the singing shifted beyond those spaces and thus rendered noteworthy shifts in performance practice. Analysis of recently collected material form Salento illustrates some of these changes in the polyphonic structure: frequent mixed chorus singing instead of gendered; the flexibility of interpretation for each part and improvisational treatment of those parts in place of strict voicing; and heterophonic variants of multiple singers singing melodic lines instead of soloists. In view of the fact that the singing is now less conservative in its contemporary form, there also exists a diverse array of vocal stylings and timbres of voices, and the density of the texture and movement of voices has changed as well.

- The following is an example *Quannu te Llai la Faccia la Matina*, (**transc. & audio ex. 3**), recorded by the author in Nardò in the autumn of 2015, illustrating some of these changes:
  - The presence of additional voices to the foundational 3-part structure; mixed chorus
  - A tenor voice providing spontaneous, semi-improvised ornamental variations of the main melody, highly ornamental, and intentionally joining different voices at specific musical phrases (*bordone, prima voce, seconda voce*), rendering uncharacteristic voice-crossing, and a high level of musical freedom and personal expression.
  - A bass voice below the bordone, which imitates the main melody (with variants, semi-improvised). Because of the strictness of the

drone and the melodic freedom of this bass line, this performance practice renders voice crossing and notable dissonances in the two bass parts.

Structurally, there are key components from this example we can extract that directly contrast with the previous example:

- Ungendered singing; diversity of vocal timbres; forward placement of the voice, performed with or without vibrato, that is open-throated or tightly projected
- Additional voices providing variants of the main melody, in both the upper and lower octaves where the melodic lines occur
- Remarkable level of melodic freedom in certain voices; expressive and semi-improvised variants, which enhance the musical interaction of each of the parts
- Voice crossing between the "additional" voices and the "traditional voices:" the variant of the main melody in the bass crosses with the *bordone*, while the variant of the main melody in the upper octave joins the *bordone*, *prima voce*, and *seconda voce* at various points, and these singers are compelled by spontaneous creativity and interpretation that changes with each verse
- Similar motion between the *prima voce* and *seconda voce*: the variant bass also sings similar and parallel movement against this musical dialogue as the lowest voice
- Dissonant intervals in various phrases, often as the multi-voiced result of the independent variants and voice-crossing of the "additional" voices

Concluding Thoughts

Based on comparative analyses of these select materials, one can see compelling musicological evidence of transformation in Salentine polyphonic singing. One can observe changes in both the polyphonic structure and performance practice, and the relationship of those changes to corresponding changes in the cultural spaces that

traditionally embodied this repertory. This is most evident in the fact that these songs are not sung in their original cultural contexts of work, ritual, and social gathering that would have traditionally been gendered in rural society. This has led to some noteworthy changes in performance practice that affect the sound and aesthetic of this singing. One can observe that contemporary singing contrasts significantly the singing documented from these cultural spaces of the past. In addition to the differentiation of vocal timbres between past singers and contemporary singers, the rules of social organization that affect the polyphonic structure have also changed, in particular with regards to the relationship between soloists (melodic lines) and chorus (drone, bass). I was able to identify such changes by deconstructing the examples consulted from Bosio's and Lomax's collections, identifying the social organization between the soloists and chorus, and then using the observations gleaned from the analysis to drawn comparisons with more contemporary renderings of the songs. A case in point is Ex. 3, where one can observe the absence of attention to the customary organization of soloists and chorus. The result is developments of a fascinating nature in the polyphonic structure. Most notable is an increased textual complexity, with the presence of heterophonic variants of the main melodic lines in different octaves, and the crossing of parts in the voices. The absence of attention to the customary organization of soloists and a chorus has lead to fascinating developments in the polyphonic structure. The developments include textural complexity, such as heterophonic variants of the main melodic lines in different octaves and voice crossing of parts. What this reveals is that the former strictness of the polyphonic song form has become flexible and open to change, patently because the contexts that preserved the traditional form and structure of the songs was dismantled. This dismantling thusly led to reconfigurations of the musical form. As such, one can argue that the Salentine polyphonic structure and performance practice has been remodeled and reinvented in contemporary cultural spaces. While this provides compelling comparative analysis, further investigation of more materials and deeper analysis is required to document this transformation, and the factors that contribute to that transformation.

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Muci, Dario. (2008). *Canti Polivocali del Salento, Nardò/Arneo.* (Multi-part songs of Salento, Nardò/Arneo.) (CD). Calimera: Edizioni Kurumuny

AUDIO EXAMPLES:

1.   Lomax, Alan. (1954) La Carrozza è Già Arrivata. (The carriage has arrived already.) Recorded in Martano, Italy. August 13, 1954. Cambridge, Mass.: Rounder Records.
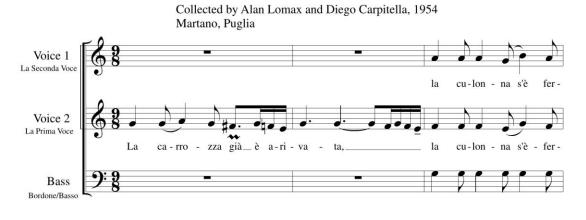
2.   Bosio, Gianni. (1968). Ci dice ca Livornu non è Bella? (Who says that Livorno isn't beautiful?) Recorded in Torrepaduli, Italy. August 15, 1968..Calimera: Edizioni Kurumuny.
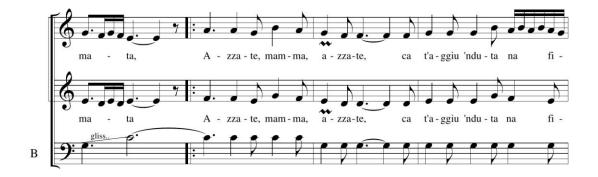
3.   Morello, Mario. (2015). Quannu te Llai la Faccia la Matina. (When you wash your face in the morning.) Recorded in Nardò, Italy. October 29, 2015. Toronto, Canada: Private Collection.
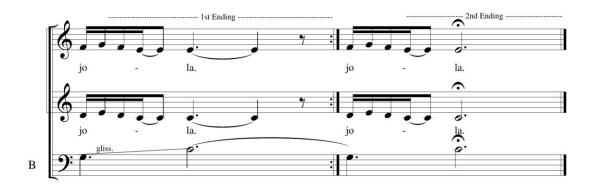
EXAMPLE 1. "La Carrozza è Già Arrivata" ("*The carriage has arrived already"*)

La Carrozza è Già Arrivata

Collected by Alan Lomax and Diego Carpitella, 1954
Martano, Puglia

Trans. Mario Morello 2016

Ci Dice ca Livornu non è Bella
Collected by Gianni Bosio, 1968
Torrepaduli, Puglia

Trans. Mario Morello. 2016

EXAMPLE 3. "Quannu Te Llai la Faccia la Mattina" (*"When you wash your face in the morning"*)

Quannu Te Llai la Faccia la Mattina

Collected by Mario Morello, 2015
Nardò, Puglia

Quannu Te Llai la Faccia la Mattina

ma nun l'hai mi - na - re Ni - nel - la mia, nun l'hai mi - na

mia nun l'hai mi - na - re Nin - nel - la mia, nun l'hai mi - na

mia nun l'hai mi - na - re Ni - nel - la mia nun l'hai mi - na

mia nun l'hai mi - na - re Ni - nel - la mia, nun l'hai mi - na

aa a - - re

aa, a - - re

aa a - - re

aa a re