

MAMME, MAMMANE, MATRIGNE, AND MADRINE:
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN RITUAL KINSHIP IN
CENTRAL LUCANIA

Maria G. Miller

Texas Woman's University

Roy A. Miller

North Texas State University

The village of Terrone lies near the center of the region of Basilicata (formerly Lucania) which itself is situated in the "in-step" of the Italian "boot". Given this location, it is not surprising that in many ways the culture of the village still exhibits responses to *la miseria*, crushing poverty, that was for so long the dominant condition of life throughout southern Italy. As yet no one has written an ethnography of a community in this part of Lucania, but Carlo Levi's famous *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* (1946) and, more recently, two books by Cornelisen (1969, 1976) superbly evoke both the culture and the conditions once found there. Levi's Gagliano, in fact, lies within sight of Terrone. When we lived in Terrone between 1965 and 1967, it was just beginning to emerge from *la miseria*. Brief return visits to the village in the 1970s and 80s indicated that there has been continued economic improvement and, consequently, increased upward mobility. The last census (ISTAT 1984) indicates that in 1981 the village had only 657 residents. This is about one half of the residents that it had in 1966. The vast majority (about 80 percent) of its employed inhabitants are engaged in agriculture. However, only about one quarter of all its inhabitants are employed (ISTAT 1984: 16, 18-19). The principal sources of income today, as well as when we lived there, are government pensions and remittances from emigrants.

The culture of Terrone has also undergone great change. Today one can see in the main square what was unconceivable or unthinkable in the mid-60s, namely older women sitting in the benches and young men and women conversing openly with each other. When we lived in Terrone, sex segregation was still very

much the rule. The culture then was also dominated, on one side, by devotion to the reputation and welfare of the domestic family and, on the other, by mistrust and suspicion of what others might do in behalf of the welfare of their own families.

It was in this "familistic" and "atomistic" social context that we conducted a study of ritual coparenthood in the early 70s. What we tried to show in our publication based on that study (Miller & Miller 1978) was that both the characteristics of the coparent bond and the distribution of these bonds within the community provide the means for relatively strong and durable links between households. In view of the great apprehension, not to say anxiety, that the Terronesi have about those who live outside their doors, we concluded that this was a gift of inestimable value.

In the present paper we will provide a general overview of some aspects of ritual kinship in Terrone that were not presented in our previous paper, and we will focus on a long-term change in the selection of baptismal sponsors there (1). Specifically we will try to answer two questions: 1) why is it that formerly the Terronesi chose only one baptismal sponsor, but presently choose two? and 2) why is that when they chose only one sponsor, the sponsor was always a woman? Since these are questions about social relationships, we will try to answer them primarily in sociological terms.

Terminology

The Terronesi like to describe their village as «one big family». They say that «if you are not a relative of someone, you are certainly his *compare* or *comare* (ritual coparent)». While this conception of the village is not borne out in all interpersonal behavior, it is reflected in the way in which the villagers address one another. Whether or not relationships of kinship or ritual kinship exist, they call all older villagers *zio* and *zia* ('uncle' and 'aunt') and they address fellow villagers in their parents' or in their own generation as *compare* or *comare*. In both cases the terms are followed by the person's first name. When questioned about the widespread use of the terms for ritual coparents, the villagers say that «because the village is small, almost all of us are *compari* by baptism, confirmation or marriage». Because relationships of San Giovanni (ritual coparenthood) are supposed to last for seven gen-

erations, even if they are not renewed, many of the people addressed as ritual coparents could in fact be distantly related by this bond, but at least some of those who are addressed this way may not. They might be called "fictive" ritual kin. Outsiders, however, are never called *zii* or *compari* unless they are actually related to the Terronesi by traceable ties of kinship or ritual kinship.

"True" ritual kin can be differentiated from fictive ritual kin by the terms of address used among the former. First, godchildren address their godparents with *nunn* and are addressed by them with *cumparill*. Second, godparents and godchildren reciprocally address one another with *assegnerei* (literally 'your lordship, your ladyship') and with the verb in the second person singular, as is done otherwise only with the intimate *tu* form of address. This term and verb form are also used reciprocally between godparents and their relatives and the parents and relatives of their godchild. Children also address their parents with *assegnerei* and the verb in the second person singular, but their parents address them with *tu*. *Voi*, with the verb in the second person plural and without *assegnerei*, is instead the respect form of address used by the villagers for fellow villagers or outsiders who are social superiors by virtue of age or social class. (The standard Italian third person singular pronoun, *lei*, is not used in the village.) Thus *assegnerei* denotes both respect and intimacy and its reciprocal use signals a relationship of ritual kinship without regard for the ritual occasion that gave rise to the bond.

Ritual occasions

When discussing rituals that produce social relationships, the Terronesi distinguish between those that produce permanent relationships between family units and those that produce ephemeral relationships between two individuals. They call the first type *cose serie*, 'serious matters', and the second *giochi*, 'games'. One of the latter is, in fact, a child's game. When young girls play *comari di bambole*, they stage the ritual of baptism with dolls and they call each other *comare* for the duration of the game. Another ritual in the latter category is performed by two adolescents of the same sex, usually females, who wish to strengthen their relationship by promising lasting and faithful friendship in the name of San Giovanni. The girls cross the little fingers of their right hand

around an olive leaf and recite one of two rhymes. One is used exclusively by females as they exchanged flowers: «*Comare* do accept this flower; the flower is small but our affection and friendship is great. We are *comari* of San Giovanni». The other is «San Giovanni, San Giovanni, let's divide our clothes. Our clothes have been divided and San Giovanni has entered». This last rhyme could have been recited by boys, but none of our male informants remembered it, or even that they ever had a *compare* of this type. Unlike other communities in Lucania for which a similar custom has been reported (Bronzini 1964: 169-170), in Terrone this ritual was not performed in a religious setting or on set days of the year, such as San Giovanni's day itself. (On this day, instead, villagers played games whose purpose was to forecast their future.) Even though participation in this ritual entitled the two friends to call each other *comare* or *compare* and, if they chose, to address each other with *assegnerei* rather than *tu*, the duration of the relationship depended more on their desire to remain faithful and trusted friends than on a prescription to preserve the relationship despite any disagreement that might arise between them. The use of the terms *comare* or *compare* was limited to the friends rather than extended to members of their families. It is, in fact, just these two features – the prescription of permanency and the extension of relationships beyond the dyad that participated in the ritual – that set those relationships that the Terronesi call serious matters apart from those that they consider to be *cose poco serie* (2).

However, we should not allow the Terronesi's characterization of the latter ritual to obscure its important role in the socialization process. Terronese adolescents learn much from it. In fact, the typology itself is instructive. It teaches them that, due to the possibility of a change of heart, friendship is not only fragile but dangerous; that ritual is required to make this relationship more durable and secure; but, even so, that this ritual is not good enough to do this because relationships between members of two different families can only be made safe and lasting when the ritual is sacred and when the friendship does not threaten the families with the possibility that the total loyalty and commitment that families expect may be diluted. This goal itself cannot be achieved without a sacred ritual that 1) prescribes amity, duties, and indissolubility; 2) proscribes bad feelings (even if they can be justified); and 3) unites all members of the two units (3).

As for serious rituals, the Terronesi list four: the first trimming of an infant's nails, baptism, confirmation, and marriage. Of

these four only the last three, those that are initiated in church, have survived the passage of time.

A *cummare re l'onghe* is the term the Terronesi use to name the woman who trimmed the infant's nails for the first time before the child was baptized. For this role the mother would choose a woman with whom she had a relationship of intimacy (*confidenza*), for this insured that she would be readily available to the mother in times of need. As is the case for baptismal godmothers, *la comare d'unghie* could have been a relative, but a non-relative was preferred. She was seldom the same person who was asked to serve as the child's baptismal godmother, but she was addressed by her godchild with the same term, *nunn*, that the child uses to address both his baptismal and confirmation godmothers. The respect form of address *assegnerei* and the terms *comare* or *compare* were used when members of the households would meet one another. Unlike sacramental coparents, the two women joined by this bond were not expected to exchange gifts of meat, homemade pies or cookies, and wine or liquors at Christmas and Easter. Instead, exchanges of favors or food between them occurred as the need, opportunity, and the ability to give arose (4).

Of the other three occasions, the practice of having two *compari d'anello* who also acted as the required marriage witnesses appears to have been initiated in Terrone sometime in the last century. When questioned about this in 1966, very old Terronesi stated that this custom did not exist at the time of their great grandparents.

The groom and the bride, with the advice of their parents, choose the marriage *compari* from their circle of friend and acquaintances. If a disagreement between the parents and the spouses should arise over the choice of the marriage *compari*, it is understood that the preference of the spouses should prevail over that of their parents. Because the *compari d'anello* are expected to act as baptismal godparents to the couple's first child and as trusted advisors, persons from the spouses' own generation are preferred. But while the groom's *compare* may be as much as five years older than the groom (but never younger), the *comare* should be about the same age as the bride. The Terronesi explain the preference for age-peers as a condition that favors the establishment and maintenance of warm relationships of friendship between marriage *compari*. The age difference between the groom and his own *compare* is considered an asset because it is assumed that an older *compare* will be more qualified to give what all *com-*

pari d'anello are expected to give to the head of a newly formed family, sound advice in extra-domestic matters. The closer similarity of age between the bride and the *comare*, instead, is thought to facilitate both the expected relationship of *confidenza* between the two women and the *comare's* involvement in the care and supervision of the couple's future children. Persons who are neither related to each other nor to the couple are preferred as marriage sponsors. It is also desirable to reinforce existing relations of respect and esteem by choosing as marriage sponsors persons who are already related to the spouses' families by ties of *comparatico*. There is no prohibition preventing the spouses from acting as *compari d'anello* to their own marriage sponsors. Some of our informants say that this exchange occurs sometimes, but another says that it never occurs.

With the celebration of the marriage ritual, the *compari d'anello* enter into the family circle. At each stage of the nuptials, from the walk to the church to the dance that closes the festivities on the night of the wedding day, marriage sponsors are given a position of importance. They follow the bride and her father (or brother) on their way to church. In church, they stand at each side of the couple. After the priest's reading from the Gospel of Saint John, they hold each end of the white ribbon that holds the rings for the priest's blessing. They directly follow the newlyweds on their way back to the house where the wedding banquet is given. They sit at each side of the couple during the meal and at the dance. The *comare* dances with the bride and sits near her, and the *compare* is at the side of the groom when villagers come forth to place into a bowl envelopes containing money for the newlyweds.

The relationship of *comparatico* that the marriage ritual establishes is not only expected to be permanent and reinforced at the birth of the couple's first child, but to survive the death of any specific individual. It can do so because the ritual kin bond is extended to members of their respective families. When death strikes the husband or wife or a marriage sponsor, those who survive participate in the funeral. The *comari* share with relatives the obligation to prepare *u consulo*, the mourning family's meals. Ritual kin should also abstain from any type of entertainment (e.g., eating sweets, listening to the radio, playing cards, etc.) during the week that follows the death. The *comare* joins the women of the family in the recitation of the rosary. This is expected to be performed daily for as long as one month.

In Terrone parents enter into the community of adults when

they have their first child, and the child becomes a member of the Christian community through the ritual of baptism under the sponsorship of godparents. The godmother or a young girl carries the infant to church, placing the baby's head on her right arm, if he is male, or on her left arm if the infant is female. They are followed by relatives and friends. Custom once dictated that the child's parents should not be present at the baptism. The presence of the mother was considered sinful because of her impurity. In addition to a candle and some salt, a slice of bread, a slice of lemon (no longer used), a glass of water, and a towel were taken to church for the priest to use to cleanse the sacred oil from his fingers. Each item except the towel has a symbolic meaning.

Before the new rulings of the Second Vatican Council went into effect in 1970, both the godmother and godfather held the infant at the baptismal font. They both recited the Credo, being careful not to make mistakes because an error on their part could cause the child to suffer from stuttering or somnambulism or to come into contact with evil spirits. To protect the child, religious images are placed in the cradle, a pair of open scissors are hidden under the pillow, amulets are placed in the swaddling clothes, and a thin black cord is tied around the child's left wrist. It is only after the infant is made a Christian that he gains some protection from the malign intentions of either humans or spirits. At the end of the baptism, both godparents hold the sacramental candle that represents the flame of faith that the godparents and the parents are committed to keep alive in the child from that day forward.

Before the new rulings of the Second Vatican Council, the prominence of the godparents in the ritual of baptism was unchallenged by the presence of the parents. The pre-Council regulations did not require the parents to participate in the ritual. They required only that the godparents be older than twelve years of age, be Catholic of good repute, and that they had received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist. However, they prohibited the same person from serving as a baptismal sponsor for all of the children in one family and from standing as confirmation sponsor for their own baptismal godchild.

Within the framework of church rules, the Terronesi prefer to choose godparents who are not their own kin and who are of about the same age as the child's parents. They also favor two baptismal sponsors, a godmother and a godfather, preferably unrelated to each other. Although social equals can be and often are selected, the preference is to choose as godparents «*una persona in*

vista, evoluta, civile», that is, one who is superior in wealth and prestige to the child's family. It is said that social superiors are particularly desired by poor and landless families. The preference is also to choose villagers rather than outsiders and, among villagers, those who are most accessible, «in direct contact with the people», such as merchants, artisans, or teachers. Between a respected local artisan and a professional who is not a villager, the Terronesi prefer someone whose family reputation is "an open book" to them.

The same criteria are used to choose confirmation sponsors. Because the ritual of confirmation requires the presence of a bishop, it is held in Terrone only once in every three or four years. Although church rules prohibit the same person from standing as confirmation sponsor for more than two children during the same ceremony, this was the custom in Terrone at the turn of the century. At that time, one person often acted as godparent for many village children. The wishes of the child are taken into account in the selection of the sponsor. The child's choice is often based on the sponsor's ability to bestow a gift of value.

Although the church ritual and the cost of the services of the priest and the *sacrestano* were the same for everyone, not everyone could afford to celebrate a baptism or a confirmation. Poverty prevented some parents from holding a party after the church ritual had ended. One informant said, «Baptism was just a normal everyday occasion in the life of a poor family; it did not require special festivities». Other circumstances that prohibited festivities were fear for the child's life, illness in the family, mourning, or the absence of the father from the village. Under such conditions, the event could not be made "too solemn" and the number of sponsors was held to the bare minimum. Only one, a godmother, would participate in the ritual. And in the event the child was illegitimate, neither a relative nor a man could serve as sponsor.

The Terronesi view all relations created by the sacramental occasions of marriage, baptism, and confirmation as being of equal importance. They are all created by sacred ritual and they can all link families in bonds of prescribed respect and friendship. They all carry with them duties. Ritual sponsors are expected to act as trustworthy advisors for a couple and to supervise their godchildren. They are considered *di casa* with rights and duties similar to family members. They are to be consulted when major decisions concerning their spiritual charges are to be made. In times of crisis they are expected to assist the family and to provide

both emotional and economic support. When ritual sponsors themselves are in need, they must be given assistance. The Terronesi say, «One should not stop to put out the fire when a godparent needs help». It goes without saying that not all ritual kin fulfill their duties to the extent that they are expected to do, but even when they do not the ritual relationship cannot be broken.

As we have stated elsewhere (Miller & Miller 1978), safeguards are built into the choice of ritual kin that insure that they will be able to live up to their role. In choosing ritual sponsors, the Terronesi not only tend to select sponsors who are not competitors, they also choose persons who are the «*specchio del paese*», who mirror the village standards of conduct. Thus in many cases sponsors fully deserve the respect that is their due in any case.

As we noted in our previous article and as shown by the data presented in Table 1, in both of the two time periods we have surveyed, the Terronesi's actual choices of baptismal and confirmation sponsors conform for the most part with the preferences stated by our informants in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. When choosing baptismal and confirmation sponsors, the majority of the Terronesi do choose fellow villagers over outsiders, nonkin over kin, and (among nonkin) persons whose social status is generally higher than that of the child's father. However, in the first period, from 1927 through 1931, it is clear that they did not choose the number of sponsors that they now prefer — one godfather and one godmother. In that period only 31 percent of the baptisms exhibited dual sponsors. (Perhaps at that time they did prefer to have only a woman stand as sponsor, we do not know. However, we do know that today they view the selection of a godmother alone as an anomaly.) Table 2 shows that it has only been in the post-war period that the majority of baptisms have come to conform with the present preference. But it also shows that this is the culmination of a long-term trend in baptismal sponsor selection. The percentage of baptisms in which only a woman has stood as sponsor has declined steadily over the ninety years for which baptismal records are available in Terrone. As a result, the percentage of solo female sponsors in 1975-84 is exactly what the percentage of dual sponsors was in 1895, 9 percent. We made an attempt to explain this finding in our earlier paper, but we will not reiterate it here because Palumbo (1986; see further) has recently shown that the hypothesis we constructed is defective. He has pointed out that one cannot do what we did in order to explain it; namely, to mini-

mize the importance of the *madrina*, the godmother. By analyzing the symbolic role that she plays in the ideology and the ritual of baptism and her structural importance in the system of social relationships created by the rite, he has gone a long way toward explaining why it is that both in the community in Campania that he studies and in Terrone when only one person is chosen as a sponsor it is almost invariably a woman. Palumbo's argument is insightful and persuasive and we do not question it. However, it is not without limitations. While it goes far toward explaining the omnipresence of the *madrina*, we feel that there are also other reasons why women were chosen as baptismal sponsors and men were not in Terrone in the first half of this century. Further, analyses of this type are unable to explain why it is that, in Terrone at least, there has been a steady increase in the percentage of dual sponsors and, hence, in the importance of the godfather, the *padrino*, over the last ninety years and, consequently, why it is that dual sponsors are dominant in both ideal and real patterns of selection today. We think that it would do well to look into the total context of the institution of *comparatico* in Terrone, that is, into both the sociocultural system and the conditions of life there, and into how these have changed, in order to explain what we have found taking place in selection patterns in this century: persistence and change – the persistence of women and the emergence of men.

The persistence of women

As mentioned above, in 1965 nearly total sex segregation was still very much in evidence in Terrone. Only men could linger in the village square, sit on its benches, or enter cafes and inns to drink, play cards, or watch television. Only male members of the elite could take a daily stroll along the state road without eliciting criticism. Females, especially girls, should not have been on the streets unless on their way to a specific, approved destination. In the schools, boys sat on one side of the classroom and girls on the other. Men and women entered church through different doors, and once inside, they sat on opposite sides of the church. The same pattern was maintained in other public activities in which members of both sexes participated, such as religious processions and funerals. Some tasks, such as the harvesting of grain, might bring men and women together in work, but most tasks were allo-

cated exclusively to one sex or the other. It was only in the home that the worlds of men and women intersected. But even there a clear differentiation was made between male and female spheres of activity. The exchange of daily favors between households and the borrowing or lending of items needed in the home were primarily woman's work. And it was only to other women that a woman could turn for help in the care and supervision of children and for advice in those things considered to be *cose di donne*, women's (intimate) affairs. And because it was considered shameful and embarrassing for mothers to talk to their own daughters about matters pertaining to sex, such as menstruation, girls had to turn to other women for information or advice on such matters.

Up until the Second World War, the woman who could be trusted with another woman's secrets and who had the expertise to give sound advice with regard to child-rearing, health, and sexual matters was the *mammanna* or *donna pratica*, the local midwife. These women did more than deliver babies. They pierced little girls' ears and they were called on to suggest health remedies at any time in a woman's life cycle.

Although in Terrone pregnancy did not entail any major change in a woman's activities, during the pre-war years the birthing of an infant was a fearful occasion. The life of the child and the health of the mother were both in jeopardy. In Lucania in general, a high rate of infant mortality did not begin to decline until the 1950s (Marselli 1958: 87). In Terrone the parish records testify to the concern for the infant's life. Although today the interval between the birth of a child and its baptism may last for three or four months, before the 1940s it lasted for only one, two, or three days.

The Church's response to the reality of infant death was to allow "baptisms of necessity". These could be performed by a lay person when an infant's life was in doubt. But because midwives were in the best position to know the condition of the infant and to perform the rite at a moment's notice, it may be assumed that on occasion baptisms of necessity were administered by them. Thus from the time of the Council of Trent, the Church felt the need to put under surveillance «the moral conduct of the *comare* (midwife) ... and to supervise the choice of the woman who in villages would have come to know the secrets of all mothers» (Pancino 1984: 28).

Given the utility of these practical women, it is not surprising that for some time now midwives have been called *comari* and that during the time at the beginning of this century when the Ter-

ronesi tended to select only a female to be a baptismal sponsor, the woman they chose was quite often a *mamma* (5). In as much as the infant is given spiritual birth into the world of Christians by means of the ritual of baptism, it would seem that it would be most fitting not only to have a woman play the major role in it, but to have one whose life's work is resonant with her role in the ritual, and, moreover, to have the one who helped bring the infant in question to life.

Although either practical or symbolic considerations in and of themselves might have sufficed to make *mamma* desirable as *madrina*, we think that there were still other factors that led the Terronesi to select them as godmothers. For one thing, to be asked to serve as a godparent is a great honor. For many Terronesi mothers, this may have been the only reward that they could give to the woman who had delivered their baby. For another, it appears that in Terrone *mamma* were highly esteemed and respected. It goes without saying that these two qualities are the *sine qua non* of a godparent. One informant also pointed out that these women represented a more *evoluto* type of woman, one that could be admired and appreciated. But most importantly, midwives were accessible to women at different stages of their life cycle. In describing *mamma*, our informants chose to depict them not in terms of their skills in midwifery, but rather in terms of their responsiveness, their *effusione*, and their concern for the well-being of fellow villagers. When we asked our informants to explain why midwives were no longer selected as godmothers, almost all of them pointed out that the midwife-godmother disappeared when a new type of midwife appeared in Terrone, the *ostetrica*, a schooltrained, state-appointed, and salaried midwife. Although she was formally trained to do the work previously performed by the *mamma*, it was primarily the law that helped to displace the latter. It prohibited the local *mamma* from delivering babies. And the licensed midwife was not only imposed on the village by the state, she was also paid by it. One of our informants said that when this occurred "there was no longer any need to reward her by making her a godmother". And she has not been so rewarded. In recent times the *ostetrica* has been selected as *madrina* very rarely.

This brings to light other reasons why the old *mamma* as well as other village women were selected as *madrina*. It was not solely the act of bringing children into the world or the symbolic requirements of the ritual of baptism that made it necessary for a

woman to take the godparent role. It seems, rather, that it was her accessibility to the child's mother, and consequently the intimacy and affection that could be established between the two women that did. When discussing this point, our informants used the same word, *disponibilità*, over and over again. One of them even claimed that single women were preferred for this reason. In Terrone, no state-sponsored outsider, to say nothing of a man, could fulfill the role expectations. When informants were asked to state whose role they considered to be more important, that of the godmother or the godfather, a few of them said a godmother was more important because she could be a substitute for the mother. Others emphasized, instead, that the two are of equal importance. But when these informants were asked to explain why women are invariably selected as sponsors while men are not, they unanimously stated that women, unlike men, are accessible and always available.

Since the meanings of these words differ so little from one another, we must clarify what our informants mean by them. When they say that women are always available they refer to the fact that village women were always there whereas men were not. Men must leave in time of war and men are the first to go when opportunities to emigrate arise. When they say that women are accessible they mean, instead, that an intimate relationship can be established with them. Such a relationship cannot exist between a mother and a man from outside the home. It is true that a godfather can enter the home of the mother. He is, in fact, the only man outside the family who can. But even so, when he does so, he creates a good deal of suspicion and criticism (6). This is the reason why a man can never stand as a sponsor for an illegitimate child.

Thus godfathers cannot be of much aid and comfort to mothers. This holds true even if the father of the child dies (and we must bear in mind that in southern villages in the past death did not strike only the very young or the very old). When a father died, his widow was not allowed to remarry. Should she have done so, she would have been severely criticized. Thus only a godmother could have been of support to a widowed mother. On the other hand, in Terrone, children who have been left motherless are pitied more than those who lose their father. This is because men can remarry. The trouble is that when they do, it is thought that this works to the great disadvantage of their children rather than to the amelioration of their lot. For then a new figure

enters the home, the *matrigna*, the evil stepmother of legend. If the godmother represents the virtues of womanhood, the stepmother represents its vices. Godmothers have the interests of the children at heart, stepmothers do not. Godmothers work to keep the family intact, stepmothers bring conflict into it. Their mission is to turn a man against his own children, to have him withdraw his affection from them, and to fail in his duties to provide and care for them.

By contrast, the godmother is one of the family, and a model to be imitated. She is the mother's substitute. To her respect, affection and protection are due. The older Terronesi say that «one should kiss the door where she has laid her hand». Even when young, her godchildren should not tolerate any public criticism of her, even to the point of striking an adult who has insulted or ridiculed her. For her part, the *madrina* had not only the right but also the duty to intervene in the event that a *matrigna* abused her godchildren. This provides still another reason why women were so highly valued as baptismal sponsors. We do not doubt that *mammane* were selected as godparents because of their practical value, the service they performed in bringing children into the world. Nor do we doubt that they were selected and women in general are selected because of their symbolic value in the ritual that brings children into the Christian community. But we do doubt that these are the only reasons. When one looks at the conditions of life in Terrone in the past, particularly at the precariousness of life for adults as well as children, and at what the cultural system dictated that women and only women can do for the mother and for her children, one finds other, compelling, reasons why it is that when only one godparent was chosen by the Terronesi, it was always a woman and frequently a midwife.

The emergence of men

If what we have said above succeeds in showing why the Terronesi always chose a woman when they chose only one baptismal sponsor, it does not explain why they tended to choose only one sponsor. Thus we are still faced with the task of explaining why they seldom selected a godfather in addition to a godmother in the first half of this century, as well as why they have done so since then.

We have already touched on one factor that could answer this

question. We have seen that the main reason women were desired as sponsors was because of their availability, their *disponibilità*. When one considers that there was a decrease of 384 residents in Terrone between 1901 and 1902, that Lucania led all other regions of Italy in the proportion of emigrants per inhabitants in 1899 and 1901, and that Italy was engaged in three major wars in as many decades in the first half of the present century, it becomes apparent that men may not have been selected as sponsors as frequently as women were simply because they were not as available as women were. But while demographic factors deserve to be taken into consideration, they do not suffice to explain the secular variation in selection patterns in question simply because the increase in the selection of males that is notable in the post-war period has gone hand-in-hand with a high rate of male migration to northern Italy and northern Europe in the 1960s and with a sharp decline in the size of the village in the last decade. One must therefore consider other factors in trying to explain the recent increase in the percentage of male baptismal sponsors.

Another way to come to grips with this problem is to approach it in the same way that we approached the preceding one. We should then examine 1) the godfather's role – looking particularly at how it differs from the godmother's, 2) the cultural requirements for the best relationship between the godfather and the godchild's family, 3) the social conditions affecting the role and the relationship, and 4) some of the social characteristics of the men who the Terronesi select when they do select *padrini*.

Unlike the godmother, who is expected to share in the mother's domestic concerns, in the rearing of small children, and in the supervision of adolescent goddaughters, the godfather is expected to aid the father in the man's world, the world outside the home, the world of work. He should give the father a helping hand, he should advise him, and, if he can, he should assist his godsons in becoming well-situated. But while the godmother role could be played and was played successfully under the harshest economic conditions, the fulfillment of the godfather role presupposes that the *padrino* has some power to mobilize material and/or social resources in behalf of his ritual kin.

It should go without saying that in the time of *la miseria* the Terronesi would have been hard put to find many men in the village who were in a position to do much for a godchild and his family. In the past most Terronesi men were powerless in these respects and the few who were not were not highly respected.

(Even today when the Terronesi do choose males and do choose social superiors, they still do not turn to the richest men.) Thus it could be that relatively few men were called on for support before the Second World War simply because so few were in a good position to give it.

However, even when men do not have the resources to materially benefit their coparent and their godchildren, it is still expected that a godfather's family interests should not conflict with those of his *compare's* family. In a world in which men must struggle and are often obliged to compete with one another to provide the bare essentials for their family, and in which deception, chicanery, and betrayal are anticipated, the godfather is the only man outside the family who can be trusted. Both he and his *compare* are duty bound to do nothing that might harm the material and reputational interests of the other's family. Thus the tendency to select a *madrina* alone in the past may also reflect the fact that when underemployment and unemployment were chronic and when there were no avenues for upward mobility inside the village, there were also few men to be found who were not in competition with one another and thus eligible to serve as sponsors.

We say this because in our prior analysis (Miller & Miller 1978) of selection patterns in two different periods, we found that in both periods when the Terronesi do select men to serve as baptismal sponsors they tend to select, first, men who are not kin; second, men who are social superiors (*vis-à-vis* the child's father); and third, even among their equals, men who hail from economic sectors or, at least, occupational categories that are different from that of the child's father. Furthermore, the Terronesi try to select people whose reliability is well-founded and whose reputations are beyond reproach. When all this is taken into consideration, it becomes apparent that the Terronesi take pains to protect relationships with their coparents from any source of friction that would prevent these relationships from being ideal relationships — from the frictions that too often arise in dealing with relatives, that can arise when men compete, and that would arise were they to select people who lack good moral credentials.

Finally, to find a compact summary of still other reasons the villagers did not choose a godfather in the past as frequently as they do today, we have but to look back to the reasons they gave for not making the occasion of baptism "too solemn", for there we will also find a *résumé* of the conditions faced by many fami-

lies in the Mezzogiorno in the time of *la miseria*: threats to the life of the infant, illness in the family, death in the family, and the absence of the father, or even a father. There too we will find that many of those who did not face these particular conditions nevertheless faced the other one that precluded selection of a *padrino*: abject poverty. The fact of the matter is that many could not afford the luxury of a party and, hence, the luxury of a godfather.

Furthermore, it seems to us that the same factors that explain selection against two baptismal sponsors in the past serve to explain the predominant pattern, the selection of two, in the post-war years. It is simply that the conditions that once mitigated against the selection of a godfather have changed. For one thing, more families today are in a position to conform to the ideal pattern of celebration of the ritual. For another, as the Terronesi have come to rely less and less on local agricultural jobs and more and more on jobs and other sources of income outside the village, there has been a reduction in competition and with it an increase in the number of men with whom it is now possible to establish an ideal relationship. And, perhaps, even as the size of the village is rapidly decreasing, they can now find more men there who have the resources to be of as much aid to other men as women once were to other women.

Notes

1. Because we have to rely very much on questionnaires and correspondence in order to obtain much of the data that are new in this paper and to recheck much of the data that were originally obtained when we did fieldwork in Terrone, we feel obliged to acknowledge each of the villagers or former villagers who supplied us with data for this paper. It is no exaggeration to say that without their great generosity and interest in this project, the present paper would not have been possible. They are Amalia Chiorazzi, Caterina and Antonia Di Biase, Lucia Filippo, Giuseppe Fortuna, Antonio Petrizzi, and Angela and Maddalena Urgo. Great thanks are also due to Prof. Signorini for the same reason. Without his encouragement we would not have even attempted to write this paper. We also want to pay a debt of gratitude to Dr. Palumbo. His excellent studies of *comparatico* have been provocative. As will be seen below, they have obliged us to rethink ritual kinship. Last, none of the people mentioned here can be responsible for the shortcomings of this paper.

2. Informants were questioned concerning other occasions that Bronzini (1964), De Martino (1959) and Palumbo (1986) have found to initiate ritual kinship. These are the first cutting of a male child's hair, ear-piercing, children's illnesses, visits to a *maciavo*, pilgrimages to shrines or sanctuaries, and the funeral

lament by women. All informants agreed that none of these occasions gave rise to relationships of *comparatico* in Terrone.

3. For more extensive discussion of several characteristics of ritual kinship that set it apart from dyadic friendship and other types of extra-domestic relationships, see Miller & Miller (1978: 118-126).

4. This relationship was still in use in the 1960s, but today the custom of having a *comare d'unghie* is no longer followed. However, informants who still reside in the village claim that it is still practiced among the "most traditional" townsmen. It is interesting that our male informants cannot remember who their *comare d'unghie* was while all of our female informants still do.

5. We are unable to be precise about the number of godmothers who were midwives in any one year or longer period. Our older informants have told us that in the past midwives served as godmothers for many village children and the parish records support them by identifying many godmothers as midwives. However, they do not do so invariably. A *madrina* identified in one year as a *levatrice* may not be so identified in the next. We are also unable to calculate the frequency of baptisms of necessity in general, much less the number of these performed by midwives, but the records are not totally mute on this point. In the older ones that we have seen, it was common to enter the phrase «took the child to the baptismal font» after the name of the godmother. The fact that this phrase is missing from some entries in the same year and in the same hand invites the inference that these baptisms were performed elsewhere, probably of necessity, and perhaps by a midwife.

6. It is for this reason that the relationship between the child's mother and its godfather, one which creates an impediment to marriage, has come to connote sexual intimacy. Davis (1973: 230) reports that in Pisticci «a lover seen to enter a house frequently is euphemistically or ironically referred to as a *compadre*» and that «a man may refer jokingly to his mistress as his *commare*». See also Gower Chapman (1971: 117-118).

Table 1 – Some characteristics of baptismal and confirmation sponsors, 1927-1931 and 1957-1966 (in percent)

Characteristics of sponsors	1927-1931 Baptisms (N=265)	1957-1966 Baptisms (N=355)	1957-1966 Confirma- tions (N=208)
Fellow villager	86	81	83
Non-relative	77	74	80
Higher socioeconomic status than godchild's father	44	43	38
Non-relative of higher socio-econo- mic status than godchild's father ^a	63	67	40
Occupation different from the occu- pation of the godchild's father ^b	72	83	82
One male and one female ^c	31	70	—

^a The base for these percentages is different because sponsors who are related to the godchild have been excluded.

^b The base for these percentages is different because only the occupations of god-fathers have been compared with those of the godchild's father.

^c The base for these percentages is different because the following unusual cases have been excluded: five cases in which a male was the only sponsor (three in 1927-1931, two in 1957-1966), one case in which two females were sponsors (1927-1931), and one case in which no sponsor was recorded (1927-1931).

Table 2 – Percentages of baptisms in which women are the only sponsors, 1895-1984

Year	Number of baptisms	Percent of baptisms in which a woman is the only sponsor
1895	(55)	91
1905	(37)	89
1915	(44)	70
1925	(42)	62
1935	(32)	62
1945	(19)	47
1955	(27)	37
1965-1974	(105)	20
1975-1984	(44)	9