

Taken from A Slice of Sicily, appeared on European Travel & Life, June 1987, pages 136-137.

Ignazio Apolloni, an author, poet, political commentator, and editor and chief contributor to *Intergruppo Singlossie*, his own contemporary journal, is fortunate as well, but he questions himself, his island country, and its relations with Italy, which he calls with mischief “the mother country”.

“You must understand that there are many Sicilys”, he says. We are in his Palermo apartment, every wall of which is painted – a section of Picasso’s “Guernica” reproduced on one wall, cartoons and political caricatures in the foyer, abstracts and seashells mural of jeans hanging from a washline painted on his bedroom wall. “We are Greek. We are influenced by the Normans, the Arabs, and the Spanish Bourbons. We have the fatalism of the Arabs, the pride of the Normans, the courtesy of the Spaniards. It is what we feel. It is difficult to describe the Sicilian soul. Are we Sicilian? Italian?”

“Let me tell you that many of us feel Italian these days, but that is because for centuries the national government forgot us. They felt we were inferior and they behaved as if we were. The north was industrial, the south agricultural and forgotten.

“After 1945 that changed. The *contadini*, the peasants, organized. The socialists and communists organized. Lands were occupied. Landlords were thrown out. Then the government recognized there was a problem in the south, and in the 1960s lot of money came here. We then knew we had a government. We became Italian. We received autostradas, port expansions, unemployment compensation, health care, school funds”.

This thin and elegant man, with a gray beard and close-cropped gray hair, is a cynic who loves his country and its earth. We talk at an open-air food counter in Palermo, eating *panelle*, deep-fried fritters or mashed chick-peas, fresh parsley, and flour. Apolloni smiles as he says that he was away from his country too long. He was born in Palermo but lived in Rome, Turin and Reggio Calabria before going to New York and then to California, where he taught Italian literature at UCLA for almost three years. “Then I had to come back”. In addition to his literary talents, he is a lawyer, has been a union organizer, a politician, and, he says, “a Sicilian, but when I see vandals, see people in government who do not care about others, then I am furious and not so proud”.

These are the concerns you are not aware of as you travel about the triangular island, for Sicily is beautiful to see, wonderful to touch, delicious to taste. Its sensuality captures you. But when you have spoken about Sicily to Sicilians, your perceptions sharpen and the land becomes fuller.

Fred Ferretti