

### The Political Ideology of Sabato Rodia: A “Natural Anarchist”?

MICHELE PRESUTTO AND LUISA DEL GIUDICE

Renewed scholarly interest in Sabato (Sam or Simon) Rodia in recent years has largely focused on the artistic, cultural, and historical migration narratives linked to this still enigmatic Italian immigrant worker and his visionary art site: *Nuestro Pueblo* (a.k.a. the Watts Towers) in Los Angeles. International conferences on the topic at the University of Genova, Italy, in 2009 and at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2010, and a subsequent volume on Rodia’s art edited by Luisa Del Giudice (2014a) have done much to refocus attention on the monument and on the man. Yet, even though the question of the artist’s political leanings has recently been addressed in an essay by Del Giudice (2014b, 163–165), no unequivocal proof of his political adherence has come to light until now.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly he had both internalized and even voiced concepts of egalitarianism, class consciousness, and anticlericalism, echoing many key anarchist talking points. If we listen to his interviews and read the reports of the various people who met him, we find that most of Rodia’s discussions were peppered with impassioned ideological rants on such topics. His aversion to clerics and (Catholic) religion derived both from family tradition and personal experience. For instance, he recalled unhappy childhood memories of school days in a convent in Italy (Babitz n.d., 46–47) and later battles with avaricious priests in the United States who expected free labor from workers like him (Del Giudice 2014a, Appendix A.1, 355). And of course he was known to have annoyed his pious sister Angelina and his brother-in-law Saverio Colacurcio (Sam Calicura)—whom he hosted in his early Oakland, California, days—by singing anticlerical songs along with his equally irreverent companions (Del Giudice 2014a, Appendix A.6, 382).<sup>2</sup> The Rodias were known to be “troublemakers” even in Serino, but Sabato Rodia, as a fourteen-year-old boy, likely further developed his political ideas, or at least confirmed and refined them, on U.S. soil, as a result of his own migration experiences and those of his older brother, Pellegrino, whom he had joined in Pennsylvania upon arrival in America (Pellegrino soon after died in a mining accident). This brother, Sabato Rodia confirms, “tell me many things. From him I learn many, many things” (Del Giudice 2014a, Appendix A.3, 365). We presume most of those

“many things” had to do with political ideology and worldview. But while we may accept that Sabato early on absorbed his anarchist political ideas from Pellegrino, in reality—and this is the main goal of this brief essay—archival materials that have recently come to light in the course of Michele Presutto’s research on Italian anarchists suggest that the more ardent family anarchist was Antonio, Sabato’s younger brother. Because of Presutto’s recent discoveries relating to Antonio, we are now able to better understand the political leanings not only of Antonio, but of Sabato—a complex and, from a political point of view, not easily classifiable figure. The objective of this essay, therefore, is to add evidence that might confirm the ideological framework within which Sabato Rodia’s life, his migration experience, and his artistic achievement might best be read. In order to do this, we must now shift our attention to this younger brother Antonio.

Antonio Rodia was born in (Rivottoli di) Serino (Avellino province) on September 18, 1883, to Francesco Rodia and Nicoletta Cirino, the fourth of five children: Pellegrino, Sabato, Giuseppe, Antonio, and Angela (Archivio di Stato di Avellino 1874).<sup>3</sup> As a known anarchist, Antonio was closely watched by the Italian police from 1907 to 1941.<sup>4</sup> In the communiqués between various consular offices of the Ministry of the Interior, his movements and his writings in favor of the subversive press were duly noted by the authorities and by the police. In a report of December 12, 1907, we find a description of the family:

I fratelli Rodia sono tre e non due e cioè: Pellegrino di Francesco e Nicoletta Cirino nato a Serino il 27 ottobre 1875, Sabato, nato pure a Serino il 12 febbraio 1879 e Antonio nato pure nello stesso Comune il 18 settembre 1883. Il Pellegrino emigrò per le Americhe da oltre 17 anni, Sabato da circa 13 anni, ed Antonio da oltre 10 anni. Tutti e tre trovati ora in California. (Prefettura of Avellino 1907)

There are three and not two Rodia brothers, that is: Pellegrino, son of Francesco and Nicoletta Cirino, born in Serino on October 27, 1875; Sabato, also born in Serino on February 12, 1879; and Antonio, also born in the same municipality on September 18, 1883. Pellegrino immigrated to the Americas more than 17 years ago, Sabato approximately 13 years ago, and Antonio more than 10 years ago. All three now find themselves in California.<sup>5</sup>

Based on this reconstruction, we may deduce that the three brothers traveled separately to the United States, beginning with Pellegrino in 1890, followed by Sabato in 1894,<sup>6</sup> and lastly by Antonio. Presumably all three arrived directly by ship in the port of Philadelphia, where they most likely went on to one of the many mining areas in the state of Pennsylvania. Pellegrino,<sup>7</sup> as we noted above, came to his tragic end in just such a mine.

While Sabato may have had difficulty with reading and writing—indeed, many presumed him to be illiterate (Del Giudice 2014a, Appendix A.6, 381)<sup>8</sup>—Antonio (as reported in the police records) could read and write in both Italian and English. But what is even more notable is that Antonio was under constant watch and repeatedly reported upon by the Italian police, whereas no such personal file exists for Sabato Rodia in the central police records (known as Casellario Politico Centrale). However, in one official report on Antonio, we find a most revealing reference to his brother Sabato: “Pare che un fratello del detto individuo [Antonio Rodia], a nome Sam Rodia, residente presso Oakland, California, abbia idee ancora più avanzate dell’Antonio” (It seems that a brother of said individual [Antonio Rodia], named Sam Rodia, living in Oakland, California, has even more radical ideas than Antonio) (Comuniqué of the Royal Consulate of Italy in San Francisco to the Ministry of the Interior 1907).

In yet another report, dated March 24, 1909, of the Italian Embassy in Washington to the Ministry of the Interior in Rome, we find:

In risposta alle richieste d’informazione del 12 dicembre 1908 [. . .], mi prego di informare [. . .] che dalle diligenti indagini eseguite dal Regio Agente Consolare in Seattle riguardo ai nominativi Ricci Michele, Strariglio, Rodia A., Lancellotti V., Biollino G., Bombino M., Casali Giuseppe, Piombino M., Parisi Alessandro, Bolognini G., Tucconi N. è risultato che il Casali G., Piombino M., Parisi A., Bolognini G., Tucconi N., Biollino G., Lancellotti V., e Strariglio E. costoro sono tutti bravi operai, imbevuti di qualche idea socialista per aver vissuto nella stessa casa con un propagandista socialista, certo Gildo Biagi che attualmente vive a Cle Elum, Wash. Essi, direttamente interrogati hanno recisamente negato di far parte di qualsiasi gruppo anarchico, dichiarando che ignorano anche le idee di tale dottrina. Il trovarsi come contribuenti nella “Protesta Umana” è dipeso dal fatto che, una sera, in una bicchierata fra amici, il Rodia A., che è un anarchico convinto, senza spiegazione di sorta, si fece iniziatore di una colletta fra i presenti, e, più per amicizia che per altro, nessuno seppe rifiutare la sua quota. (Royal Embassy of Italy in Washington to the Royal Ministry of the Interior 1909)

In response to the request for information of December 12, 1908 [. . .], I duly inform you [. . .] that a diligent search made by the royal consular agent in Seattle regarding the names: Michele Ricci, Strariglio, A. [Antonio] Rodia, V. Lancellotti, G. Biollino, M. Bombino, Giuseppe Casali, M. Piombino, Alessandro Parisi, G. Bolognini, N. Tucconi, we can confirmed that G. Casali, M. Piombino, A. Parisi, G. Bolognini, N. Tucconi, G. Biollino, V. Lancellotti, and E. Strariglio, [reveals that they] are all good workers, imbibed in a few socialist ideas as a result of having lived in the same house with a

socialist propagandist, a certain Gildo Biagi who currently lives in Cle Elum, Washington, [who, when] directly interrogated [they] resolutely denied being members of any anarchist group, declaring that they knew nothing about its doctrines. The fact that they contributed to *La protesta umana* derived from the fact that one night, while drinking with friends, A. Rodia, who is a dyed-in-the-wool anarchist, and without explanation, began to pass the hat among those present, and that they, more due to friendship than for any other reason, didn't feel they could refuse to make a contribution.

It is clear that Antonio subscribed to *Cronaca sovversiva* (literally, subversive chronicle), published in Barre, Vermont, and to *La protesta umana*, published in Milan.<sup>9</sup>

In his personal file we find his letter to Concettina Rosella of Seattle. The letter is a declaration of love for Concettina, but it also brings to light Antonio's own ideas and his family relations. Further, this letter helps paint a clearer picture of the marital morass from which Sabato fled, leading to years of existential free fall and alcohol abuse, before he found his life's creative project. It is worth citing in its entirety:<sup>10</sup>

Sacramento, California, 24 settembre 1907

Mia carissima Concettina:

Ti scrivo questa presente lettera per farti conoscere l'ottimo stato della mia buona salute, altrettanto spero sentire di te e la tua famiglia.

Sono contentissimo che tua sorella Lucia si sia riunita di nuovo col suo marito cioè Sabatino se non per altro per i figli perché quando perdono la madre è un gran male, specialmente se il padre si sarebbe ammogliato con un'incoscienza, cioè una cattolica ignorante, perché se fosse un'anarchica uguale a me e gl'altri anarchici, e tutto differente perché, noi, o io trattiamo tutti i bambini come nostri figli, tutti i vecchi come nostri padri, e madri, siamo difensori dei deboli, vogliamo la fratellanza, l'uguaglianza, e la libertà, e quindi vogliamo un sistema, che non ci siano più né ricchi né poveri, che tutti gl'uomini forti e abili debbano lavorare, secondo le sue forze, per un paio d'ore al giorno e tutti debbono vivere bene, e dopo raggiunta l'età di 45 anni non sono obbligati più a lavorare e avranno tutto quello che gl'abbisogna per soddisfare i loro bisogni, tutti, i fanciulli, maschi e femmine, debbono andare alla scuola o collegio, sino ai 18 o 20 anni, le donne debbono essere istruite ed avere la piena libertà uguale all'uomo, insomma tutti uguali, libertà per tutti, e stare tutti bene: l'armonia. Capisci mia cara Concettina che idee ci ho io? E a te, non ti sembrano buone? Questo di sotto non lo farai sentire ad altri, capisci.

Allora sì che si faranno tutti i matrimoni per amore, e non per interesse come avviene oggidì perché essendo lei istruita e in libertà sceglie il miglior

giovane che gl'aggrada, e così anche l'uomo. Ma oggi invece cosa avviene, che si maritano tutti e, tutti per interesse e non per amore, per esempio l'uomo prende moglie, per avere una casa della sua, per farsi lavare la biancheria, ecc. e la donna è tenuta schiava, maltrattata dai genitori e i fratelli, e sapendo che poi diviene vecchia e non trova nessuno che la mantiene, appena sa che c'è un individuo che la vuole, sia brutto, vecchio, antipatico, lo marita lo stesso per farsi tenere ma non l'ama, e così tante volte commette l'adulterio, e se poi lascia il marito, o altro, allora tutti gl'ignoranti l'insultano e disprezzano, ma non noi Anarchici però, perché noi pensiamo in questo modo: che una donna che si vende ad un uomo, nello stesso letto baciato ed altro, quando che non l'ama ma è l'interesse, e più, o si rende più prostituta di quell'altra che si vende al pubblico per uno scudo, perché questa si vende per una volta sola per uomo e quell'altra si vende per tutta la sua vita, capisci e pensaci bene.

Carissima Concettina, io sono andato via da dove stà mio fratello e la famiglia, per non vedere più a quella canaglia, o imbecilla che tu sai, cioè Maria, quella non è degna d'essere amata, e non conosce chi l'ama e vuole dare la libertà alle donne lo stesso come all'uomo. Te si che sei una gentildonna degna davvero d'essere amata, o come sarei felice se potrei trovare una donna uguale a te, amarla ed abbracciarla con tutto il mio cuore, e poi essere riamato, sai che quando penso a te il mio cuore s'infiamma? Te non puoi immaginarti quanto bene io ti voglio. Non altro per ora mi devi scusare che ti ho parlato in questo modo, però devi pensare che l'ho fatto perché t'amo.

Ti saluto cordialmente assieme alla tua famiglia e credimi tuo aff.mo amico

Antonio Rodia

International Grocery, 1110 Third Street  
Sacramento Cal. (Rodia 1907)

Sacramento, California, September 24, 1907

My dearest Concettina:

I am writing to let you know my excellent state of health, as I hope to also hear about you and your family.

I am very happy that your sister Lucia [Lucy Ucci] is newly reunited with her husband, that is, Sabatino, if not for any other reason than because when children lose their mother, it is such a great loss, especially if the father were to remarry an unconscionable, that is, an ignorant, Catholic. If she were instead an anarchist like me and other anarchists it would be a different matter altogether, because we, and I, treat all children as our own, all elders as our own fathers and mothers: We defend the weak, we desire brotherhood, equality, and liberty. Therefore, we want a system where there are no rich and poor, where all men, strong and able, must work according to their abilities for a

couple of hours a day and all must live well, and after they have reached the age of 45 are no longer obligated to work and will have all that they need to live. All of them, children, men and women, must go to school or college, until the age of 18 or 20; women must be educated and be fully as free as men—all equal in other words, freedom for all, and all must get along: harmony. Do you understand, my dear Concettina, the ideas that fill my head? And don't they seem good to you too? What follows below you must not show anyone, understand?

Only then will marriage be based on love, and not on material gain, as is so common these days, because when a woman is educated and is free, she chooses the best young man, one who pleases her, and so too for the man. But today instead, what do we have? That everyone marries, and all marry for material gain and not for love. For example, a man takes a wife to have a home of his own, to have his laundry done, etc., and the woman is made a slave, mistreated by parents and brothers, knowing that she will become old and will find no one to support her. As soon as there is someone who wants her—as ugly, old, and hateful as he may be—she marries him in order to be supported but she doesn't love him, and then, as frequently happens, she commits adultery, and then if she leaves her husband, then all the ignorant people insult her and hate her. But not we anarchists, though, because this is how we think: that a woman who sells herself to a man, and in the same bed kisses him and so forth, who doesn't love him but must find a means to live and more besides—she becomes more of a prostitute than the other woman who sells herself publically for a buck, because this one sells herself for one time only, while the other sells herself for the rest of her life. Understand this and think hard about it.

Dearest Concettina, I left the place where my brother and his family live, in order to no longer see that riff-raff, or that idiot woman you know, that is, Maria, who is not worthy of being loved, and doesn't know the one who loves her and who wants to give women freedom, as much as a man may have.<sup>11</sup> You instead are a gentlewoman really worthy of being loved. Oh how happy I would be if I could find a woman your equal, love and embrace her with all my heart, and then be loved in return. Do you know that when I think of you my heart is on fire? You can't imagine how much I love you. Enough of this for the time being. Forgive me if I have spoken these words [out of turn], but you must know that I have done so because I love you.

I send cordial greetings to you, as I do to your family. Your affectionate friend,

Antonio Rodia  
International Grocery, 1110 Third Street  
Sacramento Cal.

Antonio Rodia's relationship with *Cronaca sovversiva* was one of long-standing familiarity, developing over a period from 1906 to 1917. He was a dogged defender of the newspaper and faithfully contributed his share in the form of steady subscription. Furthermore, he participated directly, as well as indirectly, in various activities of the movement: For example, he organized fund drives, took part in demonstrations, arranged political rallies, and wrote articles for the newspaper. As noted above, his first subscription to the Barre, Vermont-based newspaper, goes back to December 1, 1906, and his last is recorded as July 28, 1917, when the United States entered World War I and new laws immediately rendered life for the Italian language press impossible. Antonio Rodia's first byline is dated October 29, 1910, with an article titled “Una parentesi” (A parenthesis; Rodia 1910b, 2), which was his response to a series of previous articles about “la crisi dell'anarchismo” (the crisis of anarchism), written by Libero Tancredi.<sup>12</sup>

In this article, Antonio Rodia (1910b) calls himself an *anarchico societarista* (communitarian anarchist), as opposed to *anarchici individualisti* (individualist anarchists), such as Tancredi. And he further clarifies the ideas at the base of his own political choices: First and foremost is economic equality, which, to be achieved may necessitate the use of violence, i.e., in his own words:

Quello che noi vogliamo è l'uguaglianza economica, vale a dire che la terra dev'essere di tutti, e non di pochi fannulloni, come ora, e che l'autorità dell'uomo sull'uomo, di una classe sopra l'altra non è legittima: quindi facciamo appello a tutti gli istinti feroci e selvaggi dei reietti, dei paria, dei diseredati acciocchè, mediante la violenza individuale e collettiva, si possa fare di questa putrida società un cumulo di rovine. (Rodia 1910b, 2)<sup>13</sup>

What we want is economic equality, that is, the land must belong to all and not merely to a few do-nothings, as it is today; and that the authority of man over man, of one class over another, is not legitimate. Therefore, we call on all the fierce and wild instincts of outcasts, pariahs, and the disinherited, in order that the use of individual and collective violence might lay waste to this putrid society.

Antonio Rodia's various subscriptions also provide a fairly complete overview of his displacements over time. In December 1906 and May 1907 he was in Los Angeles. In November 1907 we find him in San Francisco. In March 1908 he was in Seattle, in May 1909 he was in West Berkeley, and the following August in Walla Walla, Washington. In November 1910 he was again in Walla Walla, where, together with other Italian anarchists, formed a *circolo di studi sociali* at 1001 Waller Street. In December 1910 he was in Vancouver, Canada, and in January, 1911, he was back in Seattle. His presence in Vancouver was most

likely for a brief propaganda tour in favor of the Tampa, Florida, strike.<sup>14</sup> It was from Seattle that, together with Michele Bombino, Michele Cipriani, Vincenzo Cipolla, Domenico Marino, Giuseppe Piccirillo, and Michele Ricci—all members of the Socialist Studies Circle—he departed to join the Magonista battlefront in Tijuana on behalf of the Mexican Revolution. However, their presence in Mexico lasted only a few days. Disillusioned as they were by this experience, they returned to California where, during the following months, they engaged in subsequent debates on the nature of the Mexican Revolution (Presutto 2017).<sup>15</sup> It seems Sabato may have taken part in this short expedition, if we are to believe his brother-in-law. In April 1911, on the pages of *Cronaca sovversiva*, he reported on the miners' strike in Cle Elum, eighty-three miles southeast of Seattle (Rodia 1911). Beginning in January 1912, he was in Kellogg, Idaho. And it is from there that he requested, on the pages of *Cronaca sovversiva*, information regarding his brother Sabato's whereabouts, in a brief notice inserted in the *Comunicati* section of the paper:

Da Kellogg, Idaho.

Il compagno Antonio Rodia, box 27, di Kellogg, Idaho, desidera notizie di suo fratello Sam, o Sabatino Rodia. Chiunque sapesse il suo indirizzo è pregato di comunicarglielo.

(Rodia 1912, 4)

From Kellogg, Idaho.

Comrade Antonio Rodia, box 27, Kellogg, Idaho, wishes to have news of his brother Sam or Sabatino Rodia. Whoever knows of his address is kindly requested to send it to him.

These were Sabato Rodia's vagabond years, following a devastating divorce and separation from his children. He resurfaced in 1919 in Long Beach, California, having turned a page in his life, in order to "do something big, something they never got 'em in the world." In hindsight, though, given that this was a dark period both in his personal life as well as for Italian anarchists in general (on account of Italians being enemy aliens during the war and Italian anarchists being particularly suspect), perhaps it was a good time to keep safe by making himself scarce. The double dissolution of family life and ideological community could have represented a double delusion for Sabato—a series of unmoorings that led to roughly a decade of living under the radar, from which he resurfaced only once the war ended, in 1919. This long absence may have provoked an existential change of heart on many fronts—political among them. For a few years, for example, he seemed to have found religion and even preached in a Spanish-language evangelical group known as the The Cry of Christian Freedom (Del Giudice 2014b, 161, 165).



As regards Antonio, in December of 1912 we find him in San Francisco and the next October again in Vancouver. A year later, in September 1913 we find him in Tacoma, not far from Seattle, where on April 4, 1914, he organized a political rally on the occasion of the commemoration of the Paris Commune (Caiola 1914). In July 1914, he was again in West Berkeley, whereas in October 1915 he was in San Francisco. From February 1916 to July 1917 we find him in Martinez, a Sacramento River port, not far from San Francisco. At the outbreak of World War I, tensions—even within the ranks of the radical left—were on display, as were all of its internal contradictions. In the debates that followed, in which Antonio Rodia inevitably participated, he aligned himself with the antimilitaristic and anti-interventionist anarchist side (Parenti 1914).

Antonio Rodia was indeed a member of the West Coast anarchist group with close ties to *Cronaca sovversiva* (a weekly publication of Luigi Galleani), to which he contributed several times, both financially and as an author of articles.<sup>16</sup> But upon further scrutiny we also find the name of Sabato Rodia at least three times among the journal’s subscribers—first in 1908 as a supporter of Emilio Covelli, promoted by a group of Italian anarchists in San Francisco<sup>17</sup>; then on July 16, 1910, when the two brothers separately sent 25 cents from Seattle; and again on August 13, 1910. Therefore, we may affirm that Sabato too, on occasion, was a reader of the anarchist newspaper (or had it read to him) between 1907 and 1910 and probably continued to read it beyond those dates, at least while he was still in contact with his brother Antonio.<sup>18</sup> The last references to Antonio are in 1962, the year of his death in Martinez, California (Babitz 1974, 18).

Sabato was an anarchist and, like his brothers, became one in America, due to his young and impressionable age, his brotherly allegiances, and his migration experience. This allegiance to anarchist ideas, as we have seen, matured in the United States. It is emblematic that when we lose Sabato’s tracks, his brother Antonio put an announcement precisely on the pages of *Cronaca sovversiva*, which leads us to suppose that Sabato was known within Italian anarchist circles. But Serino too, the small municipality whence the Rodias came, was not immune to anarchism, neither of the Italian nor of the “returned American” variety. Recall that emigrants themselves brought such ideas back with them from the United States, and we must bear in mind that one of the most frequent destinations for Serino emigrants was, in fact, Paterson, New Jersey, one of the most significant and active centers of Italian language anarchism (Salerno 2005, 611–625) and certainly a key site in the labor movement of the early twentieth century, e.g., the silk workers’ strike, which predominantly involved Italian Americans. Further “it might not be irrelevant to recall that Serino’s sister city is Paterson, New Jersey, the destination of thousands of Serinesi from its earliest days of mass migration” (Del Giudice 2014b, 439, n. 20).

In 1883, even in the small municipality of Serino, there was already a *Società Operaia*, or worker's circle (Moscati 2005, 344, 398), and an administrative battle divided the town into two factions: one linked to Cav. Gaetano Greco, and the other to Cav. Raffaele Anzeroni—both exponents of the local bourgeoisie. It is not a coincidence that one of the prime reasons for political conflict was directly linked to the question of administrative (and electoral) redefinition, when in 1898 the number of hamlets of the municipality was reduced from six to two, with an unquestionable advantage accruing to the party of Cav. Greco (“Probabili disordini in Serino” 1898). Into this political fabric is woven one of the most conflicted periods of the history of this municipality, against the backdrop of the entire Italian peninsula burning during the uprisings of 1898, when Serino too (from January 1898 to the spring of the following year) witnessed a period of unrest. The unrest here, however, took the form of a substantial number of crimes, which alarmed the local citizenry (as well as the local carabinieri and the prefecture of Avellino): arson, damage to crops and property, thefts, and so forth, all provoked, if not performed—according to the local police—by shepherds as reprisals or revenge against property owners (“Reati contro la proprietà consumati da ignoti dal 1° Gennaio 1898 al 31 Maggio 1899” 1899).<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, Serino was not spared social and political tensions during the 1890s, and it is most probable (due also to the migration experience itself) that socialism and anarchism had begun to spread there. From this perspective, the case of Raffaele Santoro becomes significant. Born in Serino in 1875—a contemporary of Pellegrino Rodia, although not economically disadvantaged (his parents had a butcher shop)—he decided nonetheless to immigrate to the United States in 1895, settling in Paterson, where he worked in a silk mill. Upon his return to Serino, in 1901, he came under the watchful eye of the police, as he himself “affirms to have known the regicide Bresci, whom he said to have met frequently in houses of prostitution” (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma, Casellario Politico Centrale, *Santoro*).

We conclude that for the young Sabato his anarchist leanings seem to have been confirmed in America, evolving under the influence of his two brothers Pellegrino and Antonio (likely more under the tutelage of the latter) as well as a result of his direct experience with the harsh conditions of work and life in the new land. Furthermore, the precious archival documents upon which this brief essay is based not only help confirm Sabato Rodia's radical left worldview and adherence more fully but also may contribute to clarifying other issues relevant to his life history, his migration experience, and ultimately the milieu into which the singular creation of this visionary artist, *Nuestro Pueblo* (the Watts Towers), was to rise. These sources seem, both directly and collaterally, to shed light on other vexing questions (e.g., the reasons for the Rodia brothers' immigration

to the United States, Sabato Rodia’s level of literacy, details about Sabato’s early family life, divorce, and subsequent gender views). Still more significantly, they help consolidate the basis for his ideas about freedom, equality, inclusion and the “brotherhood” of man, concepts woven deeply into his monumental *Nuestro Pueblo*—the direct outcome, as well as the further evolution of, his early political education. Ultimately, the Watts Towers may represent a concrete embodiment of core ideological principles that openly favor a universal and idealistic message of love and compassion for all. Only further scholarly exploration—in as-yet untapped places and archives—will help us better appreciate the diverse contexts of the artist’s life experiences—which, in turn, will allow us to more fully understand the singular Sabato Rodia and his monumental life achievement: the Watts Towers.

## Notes

1. This essay is the outcome of a happy coincidence. Upon reading an interview conducted with ethnographer and oral historian Luisa Del Giudice, by Umberto Mucci for *We The Italians* (Del Giudice 2017), Italian historian Michele Presutto contacted her to inform her about archival documents he had recently discovered regarding Sabato’s brother Antonio during his research for “The Revolution Just Around the Corner: Italian American Radicals and the Mexican Revolution” (Presutto 2017). Such startling records helped confirm her suspicions—hitherto merely intuited—about Sabato’s anarchist leanings, an issue she explored in “Sabato Rodia’s Towers in Watts: Art, Migrations, and Italian Imaginaries” (Del Giudice 2014b). (The term “natural anarchist” was used by Sabato Rodia’s great-nephew Brad Byer [Landler and Byer 2006] in an interview conducted with him in 2009 [Del Giudice 2014c]). The present co-authored essay represents a serendipitous convergence of research projects and an example of collegiality and open collaboration.
2. On the widespread anticlericalism among Italian immigrants, see Vecoli 1969, 217–268, and Bencivenni 2011, 78–82. On Rodia’s (political) song culture, see Del Giudice 2014b, 164–165.
3. The parents were married on December 12, 1874 (Archivio di Stato di Avellino 1874); the couple had five children: Pellegrino, born October 28, 1875; Sabato, born February 12, 1879; Giuseppe, born February 12, 1882; Antonio, born September 18, 1883; and Angela, born April 16, 1886 (Archivio di Stato di Avellino 1875–1886).
4. After the murder of Italy’s King Umberto I on July 29, 1900, in Monza by Gaetano Bresci (also from Paterson), the Italian authorities decided to create an information and control network outside Italy. See Jensen 2014, 214–219.
5. Translations from the original Italian texts into English were made by Luisa Del Giudice.
6. This confirms that Rodia was indeed fourteen, as he had always maintained, when he emigrated from Italy.
7. Pellegrino, as is reported in various sources, appears as “Riccardo,” “Ricardo,” “Tony” (Babitz n.d., 46–48), or “Frank” (Del Giudice 2014a, Appendix A.3, 365). As demonstrated instead by the documents housed in the state archives of Avellino (Archivio di Stato di Avellino 1875–1886), his true and only name was Pellegrino. The difficulty regarding this brother is due to the fact that his name does not appear in the parish registry. To complicate things even further, once Pellegrino immigrates to the United States, he adopts the name of Dick (a diminutive of Richard < Riccardo) Sullivan. Did he change his name to elude the Italian authorities, given the conflicted politics of Serino, in the context of Italian uprisings (see below)? We do not know.

8. Indeed, as recently confirmed (August 21, 2017) by Jeanne Morgan, one of the last living members of the Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts to have personally known Rodia, Sam Rodia was illiterate and had others read to him when in need.
9. Antonio's relationship to the two publications is decidedly different. In the case of *Cronaca sovversiva* we find several of his authored articles and his correspondence, whereas he appears to have had only an occasional subscription to *La protesta umana*. On *Cronaca sovversiva*, see Bettini 1976, I:2, 182–183; for *La protesta umana*, see Bettini 1976, I:1, 198–199, and Cerrito 1977, 106–109.
10. All transcriptions reflect the original spelling and usage in the Italian manuscripts.
11. Sabato had very rigid notions regarding gender roles, perhaps as a result of having been negatively impacted by his first marriage and divorce, after which he severed all ties and resisted his children's attempts at reconciliation. His brother's correspondence helps fill in some of the gaps of information, re-creating the family milieu in which his brother Sabato lived—even though Antonio's point of view may be naturally skewed in favor of his brother. Sabato Rodia's ideas on women, however, have little to do with Antonio's liberal ones (see Del Giudice 2014b, 161, 438, note 15).
12. Libero Tancredi (pseudonym of Massico Rocca), who resided in the United States from 1908 to 1911 and founded the newspaper *Il novatore*, was a somewhat controversial figure within the framework of Italian anarchism. When he returned to Italy, he openly favored military intervention, first in Libya, and then during World War I. He became a Fascist immediately after the war and, after a series of events, became a collaborator of the Organizzazione per la Vigilanza e la Repressione dell'Antifascismo (OVRA, the secret police of Fascist Italy) in Belgium. See Antonioli et al. 2004, 438–440. The polemic between Antonio Rodia and Libero Tancredi is found in *Cronaca sovversiva*, in a letter by Antonio Rodia (1910a) and an article by Libero Tancredi (1910).
13. Rodia (1910b) added a note: “Gli atti individuali [sono] storicamente utili ed anche esteticamente belli” (individual acts [are] historically useful and also esthetically beautiful), and Michele Angiolillo, the assassin of Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo in 1897, is defined as “un poeta nel senso più nobile della parola” (a poet in the most noble meaning of that word). On Michele Angiolillo, see Tamburini (1996).
14. On the Tampa strike, see Mormino and Pezzotta (1987).
15. “Saverio says he [Sabato Rodia] left that wife [Lucy Ucci] in Albany and ran off to Mexico where he became mixed-up with a Mexican girl, some hot-blooded brothers, and a revolution” (Del Giudice 2014a, Appendix A.6, 382). It is not inconceivable that Sabato also traveled with his other anarchist companions on other occasions of political action and rallies. He himself reports that he was widely traveled, and the list of his destinations includes Canada, Guatemala, Brazil, as well as cities all over the United States (see Del Giudice 2014a, Appendix A.4, 373).
16. Antonio Rodia wrote several letters and articles for *Cronaca sovversiva* and often contributed money to support its publication. See for example his letter from Seattle to Libero Tancredi (Rodia 1910a), or his article on the conditions of the miners of Cle Elum (Rodia 1911). He also sent money to the journal for various campaigns from 1907 through 1917.
17. See “Sottoscrizione pro' Covelli” (1908). Emilio Covelli, a historic figure in Italian anarchism, was a friend of Carlo Cafiero since childhood. He took part in the Italian section of the First International in Naples in the 1870s and in the life of the movement at least until he began to be interned in various madhouses. See Antonioli et al. 2004, 462–463.
18. There has been much speculation about Sabato's level of literacy. Many believed he was illiterate in both languages. Subscriptions to this newspaper may prove otherwise, although he may simply have prevailed upon other Italians (or his brother) to read it to him. See note 8.
19. The crimes numbered 194 for 1898 and 99 during the first five months of 1899 in a municipality that numbered little more than 6,000 residents. As an aside: In a recent visit to Rivottoli di Serino, on the occasion of the book presentation devoted to the Watts Towers (Del Giudice 2014a), the editor of that volume, and co-author of this essay, was taken aside and told, in hushed tones, that a female member of the Rodia family (it was not specified if a blood relative or an in-law, nor specific dates) had been accused of setting fire to the city hall. I have since wondered if the reason for the Rodia children's emigration was due to the desire to keep them safe from political turmoil and reprisals and *not*, as is sometimes assumed, to keep them from the draft.

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