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Return from Exile: Joyce Lussu's Many Autobiographical Voices

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INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the ways in which Joyce Lussu sought to reestablish her sense of self after exile through autobiographical writing. In particular, it discusses how the works she created narrate and facilitate over the years a series of returns from both political and social exile. I focus primarily on Lussu's *Fronti e frontiere* (1945) and *Portrait* (1988), a memoir and autobiography, respectively, to examine how she utilizes the genre of autobiography.¹ Specifically, I argue that Lussu's use of autobiographical writing accomplishes two goals: first, to reclaim her identity, which had been suppressed during her clandestine activity in exile, and which she had to suppress or modify upon her return to patriarchal Italian culture; second, once reclaimed, to connect the story of her life to the larger narrative of her family, friends, and Italy to firmly root her identity and establish herself as a contributing member of history and society.

The importance of autobiographical discourse is shown by its prominence throughout her writing.² In the two texts I will examine for this paper, a diachronic element also exists as they were written at very different points in Lussu's life: *Fronti e frontiere* (1945) was written upon Lussu's return to Italy after years of exile, and *Portrait* (1988), her "official" autobiography, was written at the age of 76.³ Despite the temporal distance between the two, both texts fall under the general umbrella of *life narrative*. This general term—offered by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson along with "life writing" as an alternative to the more loaded traditional term "autobiography"—encompasses the broad category of writing that focuses on a life as its subject.⁴ For the authors, autobiography falls under the category of life narrative, and it is within this broader and less restrictive context that I will examine Lussu's texts.

To begin my analysis I will briefly examine the genre of life narrative to elucidate the ways in which Lussu's approach to life writing and her literary production aid her returns from exile. I will then look at *Fronti e frontiere* to examine how writing this specific memoir allowed Lussu to reclaim a specific sense of self—as a Resistance fighter, antifascist, and activist—after having had to suppress it during her many years in exile. The following section will address *Portrait* and

examine the ways in which Lussu utilizes her more traditional autobiography to establish how her identities and life story fit into the paternalist Italian society that was at odds with her independence as a woman, while consistently marginalizing her after her return from political exile. Life writing allows Lussu the flexibility she needs in her literary poetics to encompass the various versions of self that she performed over the course of the twentieth century: by focusing on the autobiographical in her novels, poetry, and life narratives, I argue that Lussu is able to reclaim and reestablish a multi-faceted, multi-voiced sense of self.

A brief biography will aid in understanding the exile and social marginalization throughout Lussu's life that led her to reclaim her identity through life narrative. Born Joyce Salvadori in Florence in 1912, she was the youngest of three children. Frequently called Giocanda, Salvadori's English name Joyce was a tribute to her English heritage, as both her paternal and maternal grandmothers moved to Le Marche from England. Her parents, both intellectuals, had moved to Florence in part to distance themselves from their fascist relatives in Le Marche and in part for better job opportunities.⁵ During the rise of Fascism, her parents found themselves increasingly under political scrutiny for their antifascist activities: both were active writers who published in newspapers and journals in Italy and England. After her father was brutally interrogated by the *camice nere*, the entire family (her parents along with her two older siblings) fled to Switzerland in 1924 and began a period of exile that would last for Joyce until Mussolini's fall in 1943.

Joyce began her university studies in Heidelberg, but was forced to leave in 1932 with the advent of Nazism and Hitler's rise to power. Shortly after, she became involved with the antifascist movement *Giustizia e Libertà* (GL), and was tasked with giving a message to deliver to their leader, Emilio Lussu. Emilio was also in exile living clandestinely in France, and after a brief separation in which Joyce moved to Kenya with her then-husband Aldo Belluigi, they reunited in Paris and developed a life-long romantic and political partnership.⁶ Emilio and Joyce shared an unequivocal belief that men and women were equals and, despite some resistance from other members of GL, Joyce became active in many of the group's riskiest operations, functioning as GL's official ID forger, and occasionally being captured by fascist police and imprisoned.⁷

Lussu's involvement in politics continued after the couple's return to Italy in 1943; Emilio had been an active and well-known politician before his exile, and was nominated for the "Ministro dell'Assistenza Post-bellica" by the Parri government. Like many women, returning to Italy after years of activity in the antifascist movement was difficult for Lussu. Her skills as a forger had made her an integral member of GL, and her husband's leadership role in the organization protected her from some discrimination by those who believed women should not be involved in such dangerous activities. Her political engagement became more challenging after the end of World War II; during her exile she had

benefitted to some degree from the suspended societal “rules” that had blurred the patriarchal gender roles. While both she and Emilio were active in the *Partito d’Azione* (PdA), after its dissolution in 1947 they focused their energies on the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI), with Joyce becoming one of the national leaders of the *Unione Donne Italiane* (UDI). Her uncompromising sense of equality between men and women frequently put her in conflict with politicians, and over the years her involvement at the national level dwindled.⁸

Longing for an autonomous pursuit that would distinguish her as something more than “Emilio Lussu’s wife,” Lussu joined the international peace movement where she met Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet and started her career as a translator (despite not knowing any Turkish).⁹ Translating and publishing poets from Angola, the Middle East, China and the Black Power movement in the US became a new political pursuit for Lussu; she considered these translations to be a type of political engagement with societies and cultures that were frequently ignored by western civilization.¹⁰ Interestingly, Lussu frequently did not speak the languages of the poets she was translating, a problem that did not seem much to worry her given her absolute belief in the universality of humanity and its desire to tell life stories.¹¹

During the Hot Autumn of 1969 (including the intense activity that spread from 1968 to 1972) Lussu became particularly involved in student protests.¹² Largely a response to the United State’s involvement in Vietnam, Lussu’s personal politics resonated with the student protestors’ pacifist message. Throughout the 1970s she continued to be active in the feminist movement, publishing essays and her most politically-engaged feminist narratives within her *oeuvre*.¹³ After her husband’s passing in 1975, Lussu returned to her family’s home in Le Marche, where her research and writing began to focus on the local traditions of the various places she had lived.¹⁴ On November 4, 1998 Lussu passed away in a clinic in Rome at the age of 86.

LIFE WRITING & AUTOBIOGRAPHY

To a certain degree, having to include a brief biography in an analysis of autobiographical texts can seem contradictory; the very nature of the word autobiography suggests that the texts in question will recount the life of the narrator, rendering a biographical overview superfluous or redundant. As Consuelo Tersol has noted, however, much of Lussu’s writing, and in particular *Fronti e frontiere*, does not easily fall into canonical genre classifications.¹⁵ In this study, I am focusing specifically on the autobiographical elements of the texts, and therefore will concentrate on the ways Lussu employs life writing within her literary production. In many respects, Lussu’s autobiographical narratives follow conventions of women’s autobiography, though she uses the techniques of women’s autobiography to tell the story of her involvement in the antifascist movement, which was situated firmly within the political, and therefore traditionally male, world.¹⁶

Several scholars, including Estelle Jelinek and Sidonie Smith, have identified characteristics common to many women's autobiographies, and those characteristics are common throughout *Fronti e frontiere* and *Portrait*.¹⁷ In Lussu's works, instead of exclusively writing in prose narrative, she occasionally mixes genres and interjects moments of poetry into her narrative to convey a particular state of being or to describe a specific moment in her life; instead of writing exclusively about her own life, she frequently detours into the lives of family, close friends, and even historical figures who had a profound impact on her personal history.

Of the two texts taken into consideration here, *Fronti e frontiere* would more generally fall under the subgenre of memoir, while *Portrait* represents the more recognizable example of autobiography. Despite this, autobiographical information in both narratives makes them worthy of analysis, and one could even argue that the differentiation between the genres is of minimal importance given that autobiography (in the broadest sense) is a flexible genre that lends itself to authorial manipulation. Leigh Gilmore goes so far as to suggest that the common understanding of autobiography should in fact be opened up to include any texts which demonstrate a clear use of "autobiographics," a term she offers to encompass not only the traditional mode of enunciation within the genre of autobiography but also the interplay between the self and self-representation.¹⁸ In her study of women's autobiography, Graziella Parati refers back to James Olney's theory of "autobiographies as contexts in which metaphors of selves are performed," and states: "I consider autobiography as fiction, as narrative in which the author carefully selects and constructs the characters, events and aspects of the self that she or he wants to make public in order to convey a specific message about her or his past and present identity."¹⁸ As will be seen in the two texts examined here, Lussu employs autobiographics throughout her writing with the clear intent of structuring specific narratives of her identity for the reader. The result is a series of portraits (by no coincidence, I believe, the title of her autobiography) of a woman who has anchored her existence within the larger contexts of Italian, European, and global history. Through her stories, she reaffirms and validates her various identities—such as political activist, ally, translator, and poet—that frequently did not conform to societally accepted versions of womanhood in twentieth-century Italy.

Lussu struggled throughout her life with political and social exile, under Fascist oppression but also from paternalistic pre- and post-war Italian views of women; the dominance of the Church's interpretation of the woman's sphere within the home never truly coincided with Lussu's life, and her alignment with the student protest movement in the late 1960s spoke to her desire for societal change that would lead to the empowerment of the working class. Autobiographical writing served as a useful tool to reaffirm and anchor these many facets of her life, professional and otherwise. The stories of Lussu's life are, however, extraordinary, and her participation in traditionally-male spheres of

influence mean that while she approaches her autobiographical narratives with many of the same conventions that other women of her time adopted, in Lussu's texts there is the distinct feeling that her literary technique is nevertheless applied to what could be considered a traditionally-male story. She blends the techniques of women's autobiography with the narrative expectations of standard (men's) autobiography to create her own autobiographical space that encompasses her unique experience.

FRONTI E FRONTIERE

Lussu's first narrative, *Fronti e frontiere* was published in Rome by Edizioni U in 1945.²⁰ It is a personal account of Lussu's involvement in *Giustizia e Libertà* (GL) from 1938 to 1943. This text is most easily classified under the autobiographical sub-genre of memoir, given that the duration of the account is relatively short and written without much distance between the events and the moment of writing. Additionally, Lussu excludes many important personal events from the narrative, but pays a significant amount of attention to the missions of GL and historical events of the time. While this phase of Lussu's life is relatively brief, it is particularly formative and represents one of the most important periods in the formation of Lussu's identity, as Lussu's desire to write and publish the memoir so quickly after the events occurred suggests. To avoid any confusion in my analysis of the texts, I will refer to Joyce Lussu the author/historical figure as "Lussu" and Joyce Lussu the narrator/protagonist as "Joyce."

In the opening scene of *Fronti e frontiere*, Joyce is attempting to affirm her identity as an Italian citizen in the port town of Aden, Yemen. She had moved to Kenya with her first husband (who is not mentioned in either this text or *Portrait*) to find work, but after a time had decided to return to France alone with her expired passport as her only proof of Italian citizenship. Already labeled a problematic citizen that the Fascist government preferred to keep within the country's borders and control, Lussu's previous attempts to renew her passport had proven unsuccessful.²¹ The importance of legal documentation to confirm an identity through citizenship becomes a primary leitmotif throughout the narrative:

Il mio passaporto era scaduto da diversi anni, e i consolati italiani rifiutavano di rinnovarlo. Decisi di tentare col console di Aden, dove la nave si fermava per mezza giornata. Speravo che in quell'angolo dell'Arabia i nostri funzionari non avessero informazioni particolari sulla mia persona. [. . .] Il mio passaporto scaduto era la mia ultima difesa, in un mondo dove era molto difficile circolare e trovare lavoro. Perciò ero decisa a non separarmene mai, per nessun motivo. Ma il console di Aden seppe tentarmi, abilmente. "Me lo dia," mi disse, "glielo rinnovo in dieci minuti e glielo restituiscono subito." [. . .] Tornò infatti dopo mezz'ora, tutto trionfante, e con un sorriso

maligno me lo mise aperto sotto il naso. Sulle pagine c'erano grandi croci di cancellatura, e timbri e timbri, tutti uguali: annullato, annullato, annullato.²²

Joyce's hope that a government official in Aden would not be aware of her status as a blacklisted Italian citizen who had been labeled a dangerous antifascist is short lived. With a passport that was merely expired, Joyce is initially able to maintain the fiction that the Italian government recognizes her relatively unrestricted citizenship and that her actions are at least tacitly accepted. The cancellation stamps shatter that illusion, and with only a canceled passport for documentation Joyce is faced with either conforming to the law and returning to Italy or officially taking up a clandestine identity to maintain her freedom to travel and work abroad. Keeping in mind the heightened imagery that comes with the understanding that in Italian the verb *cancellare* means both "to cancel" and "to erase," once the consul has voided Joyce's passport it is no longer possible to maintain the pretense that her legal Italian identity is still valid. Her Italian citizenship is relegated to an extra-judicial space. Since Joyce is unwilling to return to Italy and the guaranteed suppression of her activism, the "grandi croci di cancellatura" mark the beginning of Joyce's obligatory adoption of clandestine identities while a *fuoriuscita*.

Joyce's first thoughts upon seeing the cancellation stamps turn to the incredible loneliness that comes from having her citizenship and a part of her identity denied:

Come sarei sbarcata a Marsiglia? Come avrei trovato lavoro? Mi sentii sola nel vasto mondo, con una gran voglia di correre da mia madre. Ma mia madre era in Italia, probabilmente in carcere o al confino; tornando, ci sarei finita anch'io, e certamente non nello stesso luogo.²³

Returning to Italy would have resulted in severe punishment and isolation for her subversive actions, and choosing to live clandestinely under false names would create a barrier of separation between her true identity and that which she performs. In essence, given that Joyce does not conform to the behavior that Fascism demanded of her, the government denies her the legal right to exist as Joyce Lussu, a citizen of Italy.²⁴ The loss of the passport and the inability to replace it marginalizes and relegates Joyce to a space of juridical non-existence in which she becomes incapable of proving she is herself. Faced with the choice of legally returning to Italy where she would almost certainly be imprisoned or sent into confinement, or illegally remaining in self-exile, Joyce chooses to travel to France where a sympathetic anti-fascist guard allows her to disembark. From this point on, however, the narrator must keep up an elaborate ruse of false papers, documents, and languages to avoid imprisonment, and the result is that Joyce must

construct several new identities—constantly changing names, birthdates, birth towns, occupations—to replace her original, denied Italian self.

Fronti e frontiere focuses on the period of Lussu's life when she was most active in *Giustizia e Libertà*, and much of the narration revolves around one of Joyce's main tasks for the group: fabricating documentation for the false identities that she and her fellow resistance members adopted while in France. Much as Lussu would come to do through her autobiographical writing, Joyce is tasked with creating the false identities and their accompanying life stories. A fellow *gellista*, or member of GL, taught Joyce to reproduce the official government stamps that gave the group's fake documents credibility before he left France, and Joyce becomes "la sola depositaria del segreto."²⁵ These false documents were vital to the members and affiliates of GL, as Joyce experiences first-hand in Aden. Under Fascism, Italian citizens were rarely granted passports for international travel, and admitting to being Italian instantly raised suspicion in Occupied France. "Non si poteva vivere che passando per cittadini francesi" because Italian *fuoriusciti* resistance fighters were being arrested everyday by the Nazi and Fascist troops.²⁶

Joyce and the other members of GL held to the standard that "uno dei principi della vita illegale è difendere la propria falsa identità fino all'estremo possibile," even when it seemed impossible to maintain the fiction.²⁷ The most reliable way to truly go into hiding in France was to live a still relatively out-in-the open life as a French citizen, suppressing any reference to an Italian identity that would alert the authorities. Elaborate document and story construction as well as collaboration with other Resistance fighters to protect against the threat of cross-examination in detention went into every false identity: the *fuoriusciti* continuously adopted new identities to ensure that the authorities did not have a clear history of who they were pretending to be. As the only member able to falsify documents, much of Joyce's time is spent perfecting official signatures and ensuring that the ID cards will pass inspection. The weight of the responsibility and the highs and lows of success and failure are taxing:

se il documento non era perfetto e destava i sospetti della polizia, il compagno sarebbe stato arrestato, torturato, mandato in carcere o in campo di concentrazione o forse passato per le armi—e tutto per colpa mia! [. . .] Ma che soddisfazione quando imitavo, ultima e lieve fatica, la firma del sindaco o del commissario in fondo a una carta d'identità veramente riuscita!²⁸

The formidable effort needed to maintain not only Joyce's charade but also that of her companions left very few resources to dedicate to maintaining a sense of self that conformed to what she remembered and claimed as Italian. By writing down her story upon her return to Italy and re-rooting her self in a literary reality, Lussu is able to reestablish and reclaim the elements of her Italian identity that

she was forced to give up: birthplace, hometown, name. In that process, she is able to reorient Joyce's experiences within the parameters of her Italian identity. Through life writing, Lussu is able to reclaim an aspect of herself that had been suppressed in exile, and establish it within a continuous personal narrative that was previously fractured and made up of false identities.

The effort required to maintain a false identity is at times more than Joyce could endure without losing the distinction between her Italian and adopted self. In one episode Joyce recounts a precarious period when she is taken into custody by the Italian army for helping fellow antifascists cross the border into Switzerland. Never once admitting that she is an Italian citizen, despite the fact that she was arrested by Fascists and held in Italian containment, Joyce maintains her false French identity and even defends it to the point that she loses touch with herself and is completely, albeit momentarily, the invented woman that she created for her false documents, Maria Teresa Chevalley from Sallanches, France: "Il nostro esercito—ribattei, *sentendomi ormai francese per davvero*—l'hanno battuto i tedeschi."²⁹ While maintaining her false identities the strength and credibility of Joyce's forged self determined whether or not her story was accepted. Similarly, choosing to write an autobiographical account of a period in which her Italianess was denied allows Lussu to reclaim a piece of herself that she had necessarily suppressed during this time. By writing Joyce's story, Lussu is able to contextualize her narrator's actions in a global setting and reintegrate the many identities and life stories that Joyce experienced under the umbrella category of "Joyce's life narrative" and, by extension, "Lussu's life narrative." By examining Lussu's construction of Joyce's autobiographical story, we learn what Lussu felt was necessary to reclaim or reaffirm. This is because *Fronti e frontiere* anchors her sense of self in an authentic, Italian context. Not only that, it reintegrates the activities Lussu carried out under false identities into one continuous life narrative, uniting the fractured identities under a comprehensive whole and therefore completing her physical return from exile.

PORTRAIT

In her collection of commentary on Italian women authors, entitled *Tutte signore del mio gusto*, author Monica Farnetti opens her essay on Joyce Lussu with the declaration that Lussu was "un'eccentrica":

Partiamo dal presupposto—così condiviso e unanime da non aver mai suscitato la benché minima obiezione—che Joyce Lussu sia stata un'eccentrica e che lo sia stata, per così dire, a tutto tondo. Lo è stata infatti come militante [. . .] Lo è stata come storica e come letterata [. . .] Lo è stata come traduttrice [. . .] Lo è stata come pensatrice e come conversatrice [. . .] Lo è stata infine come femminista.³⁰

While written as a light-hearted introduction, this affirmation takes on a serious note when Farnetti explains that the result of this perceived eccentricity was to “ritrovarsi [Lussu] oggi fuori dai manuali letterari e di storia nonché fuori dalla memoria dei suoi stessi compagni di lotta, dove dovrebbe a rigor di logica occupare una postazione centrale e dove invece si ritrova marginalizzata.”³¹ After the years of exile in her youth, Farnetti has pinpointed one of the most lasting forms of exile in Lussu’s life: she was exiled from Italian and antifascist historiography for her non-conformity to societal, political, and literary standards. If not for the impressive *oeuvre* of original narratives and translations that she left behind, it would be nearly impossible to identify Lussu’s extensive involvement in pre- and post-war politics and Italian society from history books alone.

Written in 1988, *Portrait* is the best representation of a standard autobiography that Lussu published in her long career. The narrative arc encompasses her whole life, with occasional divergences into the histories of important family members and friends. Whereas *Fronti e frontiere* allowed Lussu to reclaim an identity that had been suppressed and denied, when Lussu wrote *Portrait* over forty years later, her reasons for writing an autobiography had noticeably changed. There is a strong sense that with *Portrait*, Lussu is establishing her place within a society that finds her identity as an active and independent Italian woman to be problematic. Indeed, the whole story of her life is atypical—from her upbringing in a liberal household abroad to her relationship with Emilio Lussu—but by writing her autobiography and presenting a solidly Italian version of her sense of self, she is able to reaffirm her identity’s place in society.

As her official autobiography, *Portrait* ostensibly should give us the most complete picture of Lussu’s identity, especially considering that in *Fronti e frontiere* the portrait that Lussu painted of herself was exclusively that of Joyce, the antifascist activist. While many other aspects of her identity undoubtedly were of great importance when she wrote *Fronti e frontiere*, it was predominantly her conviction as an Italian antifascist that had made it impossible for her to live in Fascist Italy. Consequently, the main part of her identity that needed to be reclaimed through writing *Fronti e frontiere* was contained within the more narrow confines of the story of Joyce’s activism in exile. In *Portrait*, it is clear that Lussu’s identity was problematic for Italian society from an early age, and not just because she was an antifascist. The many controversial elements that made up Lussu’s lived experience included: being an exile, a divorcee, an active member of the Resistance, and a socialist, activist, and pacifist, as well as having had an illegal abortion. In short, Lussu’s perceived *eccentricità* marked her as an outsider, and therefore the literary return from social exile provided by *Portrait* is more about rooting her actions and existence in the broader context of Italian history rather than reclaiming that which she had to systematically suppress.

Portrait declares itself to be an “anti-autobiografia” in the synopsis on the back cover, though what is meant by the term is not made clear in the brief

summary. The reference within the title is clearly to painting and visual arts, but instead of entitling her piece *Self Portrait*, as many famous painters have done in clear references to the resemblance between subject and artist, Lussu chose the title *Portrait*, removing the self reference and, to some extent, relaxing the supposition that the story of Joyce—the-protagonist is a perfect match to the life of Lussu—the-author. The act of creating an accurate portrait still requires a certain amount of fidelity to the subject, but by likening her task to portraiture instead of self-portraiture, Lussu removes herself from the task of recreating her life as she knows it from intimate experience. Rather, she positions herself to tell the life story that she chooses based on the subject sitting before her: Joyce. The autobiography's title proves to be a particularly apt description of Lussu's approach to life writing. Throughout her narratives there are portraits of Joyce the mother, Joyce the granddaughter of English immigrants, and Joyce the translator of poetry: however, given the privileged status of *Portrait* as the official autobiography in a long string of autobiographical texts, we assume that this narrative will somehow offer a complete portrait of Joyce Lussu. By examining the constructed Joyce presented in this life narrative, we can determine how Lussu chose to orient the arc of her life within the broader context of twentieth-century history. The privilege of the classification as autobiography also suggests that it is in *Portrait* that Lussu decides what parts of her identity are of primary importance and what deserves to represent her in an official and established context.

In practice, Lussu's autobiography is not nearly as clear-cut. The opening lines to *Portrait* are actually a reprinted excerpt from her book *L'acqua del 2000*, printed in 1977: “[s]e dovessi scrivere la mia storia, prenderei come punto di riferimento il mio rapporto con il cibo e le bevande, che da tanti decenni continuano a carburare questa mia carcassa, con sempre rinnovata soddisfazione poetica.”³² This non-traditional textual opening suggests that even the idea of a completed autobiography is hypothetical, and indeed it becomes clear from the first pages that Lussu will attempt to start her personal story several different times before finding the opening that ultimately works. That these lines come from a previously published piece gives a sense that “scrivere la mia storia” is something that Lussu has thought about for a long time, and while this official autobiography is the culmination of many iterations of self-reflection, it is by no means the definitive or final representation of Joyce. Lussu's portrait of herself that she presents to the public is just one of the many of the ways that the artist/writer has viewed her subject, and the sense is that the artist/writer will continue to present slightly different portraits in the years to come.

Eventually Lussu does give a more formal start to her official autobiography, but her insertion of the hypothetical (*dovrei scrivere, Forse dovrei cominciare, andrebbe meglio*) undercuts the implication that this portrait of Joyce is more representative

of Lussu's life than any other autobiographical narrative that she has written or will write:

Ma sto divagando. Dato che dovrei scrivere, più o meno, una mia autobiografia, ho l'impressione di essere andata fuori tema. Forse dovrei cominciare in un altro modo. Per esempio, sullo stile che usava ai tempi della mia infanzia [...]

Nacqui, da poveri ma onesti genitori, nella città di Firenze, una sera di primavera del 1912.

Forse così andrebbe meglio. Ma allora, dovrò spiegare perché i miei genitori erano poveri e onesti.³³

Even within the flexibility of life writing Lussu cannot seem to help her tendency towards *eccentricità*, and through these false starts and humorous attempts at a beginning she somewhat reluctantly takes on the role of official autobiographer.

The idea of time is one connecting motif throughout the introductory excerpt, the brief moment of reflection, and the main body of the autobiography. By including an excerpt from a book that was published over ten years prior to *Portrait*, there is a sense of the cyclical or repetitive nature of human actions. Presenting her life story is a constant theme in all of Lussu's writing, and this reference to past work in the current narrative reinforces the commonality of her main subject: Joyce. Her ruminations on the arrival of the new millennium and the constructed importance of time in our society segue into her philosophy of the present moment, which "sembra un punto inesistente tra passato e futuro."³⁴ Because of this lack of a present, Joyce "[è] occupata appassionatamente dell'uno e dell'altro: storia, (come abbiamo risolto fino ad oggi i problemi della sopravvivenza e della convivenza); politica poesia utopia buon senso quotidiano, (come tenteremo di risolverli meglio da oggi in poi)."³⁵ In order to paint a portrait of Joyce's life, Lussu must first frame the narrative within the lives of her parents and grandparents and the society in which they lived. By telling her family history, Lussu is able to contextualize the formative upbringing that helped create the version of Joyce presented in *Portrait*.

Another point in the text in which Lussu breaks down the separation between past and present is at the end of the autobiography during the episode of Emilio Lussu's death. At this point in her life story Lussu once again switches from the *passato remoto* to the present tense and engages in what can loosely be considered more of a dialogue with the reader rather than the previous monologic account of events:

È difficile raccontare il distacco, per motivi che non hanno nulla a che fare con la nostra volontà, da una persona con cui si è vissuto così a

lungo. Forse posso esprimermi meglio con delle parole che ho scritto pensando a Emilio, prima e dopo la sua scomparsa.³⁶

Two poems follow here that Lussu wrote from 1965 to 1985; they speak of the passage of time and of having to continue on without the companionship of a long-time partner. Poetry has not generally been considered the standard writing style for autobiography, and yet through these two poems Lussu is able to convey a sense of emotion that she admits was difficult to express in a more direct, prosaic way. Once again, in creating a portrait of herself, Lussu chooses not to limit her writing to the confines of a genre but rather molds the genre to fit the form of expression that she considers best suited to the story of her life she wishes to present.

Whereas in *Fronti e frontiere* Lussu worked specifically to reclaim her Italian identity that had been denied, in *Portrait* Lussu is ostensibly recounting her entire life and creating a space for her identity within a larger societal context. She therefore gives considerable attention to many different versions of herself that have developed throughout her life, such as Joyce the mother and wife, Joyce the adolescent in exile, or Joyce the world traveler, to name just a few. Lussu treats her life story as a narrative that must be constructed, tended to, and developed in much the same way that a novelist would approach character development. One of the most telling stylistic interventions in both texts examined here is not Lussu's approach to life narrative, but rather her systematic omission of important personal events that become evident through reading other autobiographical or historical texts. One of the starkest omissions from *Fronti e frontiere* is the lack of any reference to both Lussu's unplanned pregnancy and subsequent illegal abortion in France during her time in exile, and to her second pregnancy shortly after her return to Italy. During the uncertainty of World War II, the couple could not conscientiously bring a child into the world, leading to their decision to abort. As can be seen clearly in many of the texts that Lussu wrote after *Fronti e frontiere*, including *Portrait*, choosing to abort her first pregnancy and follow through with the second one were two of the most difficult and important personal decisions she and her partner ever had to make. As Joyce remembers in *Portrait*: "Il fatto di dover rinunciare a un figlio (anzi, a una figlia: mi ero fissata che sarebbe stata una femmina) per la violenza delle circostanze esterne, e di dovermi sottoporre alla brutalità e alla umiliazione dell'aborto clandestino, mi fece piombare in una disperazione mai conosciuta prima."³⁷

There is no reference whatsoever to the abortion in *Fronti e frontiere*, and despite the frank honesty of emotions, the time spent reliving the experience in *Portrait* is surprisingly short. This lack of attention to the episode stands out in stark contrast when the entirety of Lussu's *oeuvre* is considered: we know from *Lotte, ricordi e altro*, *Inventario delle cose certe* and other texts that this aborted

pregnancy had a lasting and profound impact on Lussu's writing. It is a theme to which she returns frequently. However, in her first book, written immediately after the experience, Lussu does not include the event. Numerous reasons exist to explain this lack, but based on the importance of life narrative in her subsequent writing, I believe this omission was made because Lussu decided in *Fronti e frontiere* to paint, first and foremost, a portrait of a strong, woman Resistance fighter. In *Portrait*, after years of self-exploration through life writing, Lussu's focus shifts to that of an independent and active Italian woman in the twentieth century. She consciously removes or minimizes the details of her personal life that would distract from the final cohesive image that she strives for. This uniquely feminine experience of pregnancy and abortion, while important to the overall, multi-faceted portrait of Joyce, is not, ultimately, what Lussu wants to highlight as one of the main identifying sources of character in a text that is supposed to represent her official autobiography. Having spent most of her life struggling against the stereotypical ideal of an Italian woman—submissive, good mothers who look after the home and family—Lussu's autobiography presents a portrait of Joyce, the Italian woman whose multidimensional sense of self has a distinct place within Italian society, politics, and history.

In the years after the war Lussu was involved in the PdA and the PSI; Italy needed to be reestablished as a nation, and the *questione femminile* was gaining momentum in both the Parties and the newly formed women's groups. Thanks to Lussu's talent for clear and persuasive public speaking, and her personal history of extraordinary antifascist action, she was frequently called on in this period to give political speeches to Party members throughout the country. That involvement was short lived, however, as Lussu comments in *Portrait* on how the leaders "mi avevano convocato per pregarmi, con un certo biasimo contenuto ma solenne, di non far perdere voti al Partito offendendo dei padre di famiglia iscritti dal 1919."³⁸ Her tendency to demand that women be present during her speeches—going so far as to walk home with local leaders and invite their wives to the demonstrations—caused discord among the Party. Recreating a scene at one the events, Lussu remembers challenging the local leaders and refusing to speak:

"Io non vado su quel palco, se non ho una donna alla mia destra e una donna alla mia sinistra. Perciò se volete che parli, accompagnatemi alle vostre case. Se ci sono bambini, o ce li portiamo appresso, o il padre se ne occuperà per un paio d'ore." Così ricattati, i compagni mi accompagnavano dalle loro donne, che in genere erano felicissime di piantar tutto e venire con me. Meno felici erano i compagni; non pochi dichiaravano che non avrebbero più votato per dei partiti che sfasciavano le famiglie.³⁹

Frequently, rather than bolstering support, “il giorno dopo bisognava mandare un dirigente a riparare i guasti che avevo fatto, assicurando i capifamiglia che mai e poi mai le sinistre avrebbero messo il dito tra moglie e marito.”⁴⁰

Lussu’s life-long integration of feminist principles in her political action ultimately set her apart from the development of the women’s movement in post-war Italy. She did not consider herself an exemplary woman, and was dedicated to women’s parity within governmental and political structures, believing that emancipation would bring about long-desired gender equality.⁴¹ This dedication to women’s emancipation presented some challenges, since for many feminists at the time, “emancipation had become largely an individual strategy that offered the possibility of equality with men only for particular women, who, as a result, assumed a new status, which consisted in being different from other women and instead being like a man.”⁴² This personal difference in approach to “the woman question” ran counter to the women’s liberation movement that many second-wave Italian feminists embraced in place of emancipation, and alienated Lussu from other Italian feminists at the time.⁴³ While Carla Lonzi’s treatise against the sexism of German philosophers led her to declare “[l]’uguaglianza tra i sessi è la veste in cui si maschera oggi l’inferiorità della donna,” Lussu continued to argue precisely for sexual equality and emancipation.⁴⁴ As she remembers her involvement in the *Unione Donne Italiane*, the tension between her desires for feminist action and the realities of the landscape of the women’s movement become a bit clearer:

io, in omaggio al vigente principio che la minoranza deve accettare le decisioni della maggioranza, avevo cercato di adeguarmi diventato persino responsabile nazionale femminile del Psi e dirigente dell’Udi. Ma le riunioni e le agitazioni di sole donne mi parevano altrettanto frenanti e riduttive quanto quelle di soli uomini, e poco rappresentative della moderna lotta di classe.⁴⁵

This sense of being out of sync with the mainstream—another possible justification for Farnetti’s declaration of Lussu’s *eccentricità*—contributed to Lussu’s eventual departure from the UDI and from the Italian political scene in general. Rather than being able to simply return to Italy and her Italian identity after her period in exile, Lussu returned to a country and a society in which her ideas and methods for action were not fully accepted. In 1988—after a lifetime of promoting feminist ideals and advocating for the ability of woman to be a *donna d’azione* without herself being remembered as an important antifascist feminist—one of *Portrait’s* important functions is to offer up a portrait of Joyce that serves as validation of her actions and beliefs.

Even though she is not officially returning from an experience of political exile in *Portrait*, Lussu’s autobiography serves a similar function in that it

reestablishes her identities that had been marginalized in paternalistic Italian society. In *Fronti e frontiere* she is able to reclaim what had been taken away from her, while in *Portrait* she affirms how her experiences and identity fit into the society around her.

CONCLUSION

The texts analyzed here represent just a small sampling of Joyce Lussu's use of autobiographical writing; self-representation and self-discovery are persistent themes not only in her original work, but also in many of the translations she collaborated on with foreign authors. For much of her life Lussu struggled against social systems that rejected her identification as an Italian woman equal to her Italian male peers. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson make clear in their writing on memory in autobiography, remembering the past and narrating it to an audience in written or oral form does not recreate the past experience, but rather creates a record of it. These memories or fragments of memories can change over time, but "we inevitably organize or form fragments of memory into complex constructions that become the stories of our lives."⁴⁶ Confronted with the fact that her identity was frequently challenged or overtly denied, Lussu chose to record the pieces of memory that stood out as essential to her life's stories. Documenting those stories in writing served as acts of creation and affirmation that connected her life to general history and anchored her identity in the larger fabric of society.

Throughout her literary career, Lussu paints us a series of portraits of Joyce over time, recreating and continuously reestablishing her self as an historical subject. Tellingly, almost all of Lussu's texts have largely gone out of print after their first few runs; when possible Lussu favored small printing houses to the larger publishers (another example of how a conscious choice fed the idea of her *eccentricità*), and the lack of resources coupled with her marginalization ultimately resulted in her texts being very difficult to find. Lack of access led to Lussu being either largely forgotten by scholars or relegated to the lesser historical role of Emilio Lussu's wife, a title she rebelled against and actively rejected in preference to her many other qualifications. Despite this hiatus in availability, *Fronti e frontiere* was republished in 2008 as part of a larger collection of Lussu's work entitled *Opere*, and *Portrait* was recently re-released in 2012.⁴⁷ Several other collections have also been reprinted, and Lussu's texts are once again available as examples of self-affirmation and self-emergence through autobiographical writing.

Notes

1. For this paper I will reference the recently republished version of *Fronti e frontiere* in *Opere scelte*, ed. Silvia Ballestra (Ancona: Il lavoro editoriale, 2008), 21–137 (original publication *Fronti e frontiere* [Roma: Edizioni U, 1945]) and *Portrait* (Roma: L'Asino d'oro edizioni, 2012) (original publication *Portrait* [Ancona: Transeuropa, 1988]). The two texts chosen for this paper represent Lussu's first autobiographical memoir and her official autobiography, respectively. While I have chosen to focus on these narratives in this study, the autobiographical nature of Lussu's writing, coupled with her prolific publishing career, offer numerous opportunities for further research in this area.

2. In total, Lussu authored twenty-four original works, both poetry and prose; she edited six volumes and published thirteen works of translated poetry. For a complete bibliography of Lussu's work, see Federica Trenti, *Il Novecento di Joyce Salvadori Lussu: vita e opera di una donna antifascista* (Bologna: Le Voci della Luna, 2009).

3. The judgment that *Portrait*—the English word title is original to the Italian text—is Lussu's "official" autobiography comes from the dust jacket of the book and its own self-representation (or better, perhaps, to say that of the publisher), and from Lussu's own musings on her text (see note 32).

4. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

5. Lussu's parents, Guglielmo Salvadori and Cynthia Galletti were both dedicated liberal antifascists. Salvadori studied in Florence and Lipsia prior to taking a position as a professor at the University of Pisa. Galletti, of English descent like her husband, wrote for the British newspapers *The Manchester Guardian* and *The New Statesman*. Her articles focused on the rising power of Fascism in Italy, and she hoped to raise awareness of the political change that was going on.

6. Joyce Lussu's first marriage was to Aldo Belluigi, a young landowner from Tolentino and a registered Fascist. The couple married in 1934 and shortly thereafter moved to Kenya where Belluigi and Max Salvadori (Lussu's brother) started an agriculture enterprise that did not succeed. After losing his investments, Belluigi decided to return to Tolentino in 1936 while Lussu chose to travel to Tanganyika (present day Rwanda and Burundi). Despite the autobiographical nature of Lussu's writing, she makes no mention of Belluigi in any of her memoirs, completely eliminating him from her personal narrative.

7. Spanning the years between 1938 and 1943, Lussu's many encounters with the Fascist police while she lived clandestinely in France, along with her subsequent imprisonment after helping Vera and Giuseppe Modigliani cross the French-Suisse border, make up the central story line of *Fronti e frontiere*.

8. Lussu's personal brand of feminism appears as a reoccurring theme throughout much of her writing: from her memories as a young woman who would challenge Benedetto Croce's view of women while dining with him and his wife, to her stories to feeling more kindred with the youth movements of the 1970s in Italy than the feminist movements of the 50s and 60s, Lussu based her feminism (a term she did not wholly

embrace) in the conviction that men and women were equal and, therefore, not inherently different. While much of Italian feminist thought has celebrated the differences that exist in being male/female, with a desire for a societal structure that is more maternalistic and female-centric, Lussu believed that in promoting equal engagement for women in the paternalistic society that surrounded them. This difference in approach to the gender question alienated Lussu from other Italian feminists at the time.

9. Lussu and Hikmet met at the Stockholm Peace Conference in 1958. Able to communicate with each other in French, Hikmet would read his poems to Lussu in their original Turkish, and then explain their meaning and effect on him in French, which Lussu translated into Italian. After Hikmet's death in 1963 Lussu continued to translate his work in this way with his former wife Münevver Andaç. For more detail on Lussu's approach to translation see *Tradurre poesia* (Roma: Robin, 1998). Lussu and Hikmet's first collaborative publication remained the preeminent Italian translation of Hikmet's poetry for many years. See *Poesie d'amore* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1980).

10. In total, Lussu published twelve collections of translated poetry by Nazim Hikmet, Agostinho Neto, Alexandre O'Neil, Jose Craveirinha, and Ho-Chi-Min.

11. Lussu spoke several languages—Italian, English, German, Portuguese, and French—which is no surprise given the extent of her travels and study during exile. For more on Lussu's philosophy of translation, see *Tradurre poesia*.

12. In her article on Italian feminism from the 1960s–70s, Judith Adler Hellman pinpoints the “period of social and political upheaval we now speak of as the hot autumn [as], in a sense, the logical outgrowth of the ‘Italian Miracle,’ the process of rapid economic growth and industrialization that unfolded from the mid 1950s to the late 1960s. [. . .] The hot autumn of 1969 (intense activity actually stretched from 1968 to 1972) opened with mass mobilizations of workers, but eventually drew other social classes into broad and sustained struggles that would change patterns of Italian politics.” Judith Adler Hellman, “The Originality of Italian Feminism,” in *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, ed. Ada Testaferrri, University of Toronto Italian Studies 7 (Ottawa, Canada: Dovehouse Editions, 1989), 18–19.

13. See Joyce Lussu, *Padre, padrone, padreterno: breve storia di schiave e matrone, villane e castellane, streghe e mercantesse, proletarie e padrone* (Milano: G. Mazzotta, 1976); and *L'uomo che voleva nascere donna: diario femminista a proposito della guerra*, ed. Chiara Cretella (Camerano (AN) [i.e. Ancona, Italy]: Gwynplaine, 2012) originally published in 1978.

14. See Joyce Lussu, *Storie* (Bologna: Il lavoro editoriale, 1986); Joyce Lussu, *L'olivastro e l'innesto* (Cagliari: Edizioni della Torre, 1982); Joyce Lussu, *Understatement*, ed. Alfredo DiLaura (Venezia: Centro Internazionale della Grafica, 1989).

15. See Consuelo Tersol, “Joyce Lussu's *Fronti e frontiere*: Re-Writing between Literature and Political Activism” (MPhil(R) Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2013).

16. The genre of autobiography has become a highly loaded category, with extensive research done on the importance of gender within the genre. Scholarship regarding traditional autobiography (thus equated with the male tradition) has evolved to a much more flexible space. See Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self*

Invention (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008). The focus on women's autobiographies has produced important research on those who choose to engage in life writing from society's liminal spaces. See Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Tess Coslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, *Feminism and Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2000); Susanna Scarparo, *Across Genres, Generations and Borders: Italian Women Writing Lives* (Newark, [Del.]: University of Delaware Press, 2004); Ioana Raluca Larco and Fabiano Cecchini, *Italian Women and Autobiography: Ideology, Discourse and Identity in Female Life Narratives from Fascism to the Present* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011).

17. See Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*; Estelle C. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986).

18. Gilmore states: "I offer the term *autobiographics* to describe those elements of self-representation which are not bound by a philosophical definition of the self derived from Augustine, not content with the literary history of autobiography, those elements that instead mark a location in a text where self-invention, self-discovery, and self-representation emerge within the technologies of autobiography—namely, those legalistic, literary, social, and ecclesiastical discourses of truth and identity through which the subject of autobiography is produced. Autobiographics, as a description of self-representation and as a reading practice, is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation." Leigh Gilmore, "Autobiographics," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, 183.

19. Graziella Parati, *Public History, Private Stories: Italian Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

20. This first version of *Fronti e frontiere* was subsequently heavily edited and modified in 1967, and all subsequent editions have been based on the 1967 Laterza version. For this paper, I will be referring to this subsequent edition. For an analysis of the changes Lussu made to her text, see Gigliola Sulis, "Scritture e riscritture: note sulle varianti d'autore di *Fronti e frontiere* di Joyce Lussu," *Quaderni del Circolo Rosselli*, 4 (2003): 81–95; and Consuelo Tersol, "Joyce Lussu's *Fronti E Frontiere*: Re-Writing between Literature and Political Activism." (MPhil(R) Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2013).

21. For a detailed and historical biography of Joyce Lussu, see Trenti, *Il Novecento di Joyce Salvadori Lussu: vita e opera di una donna antifascista*.

22. Lussu, "Fronti e frontiere," 23–24.

23. *Ibid.*, 24. Lussu's mother was indeed sent into *confino*, as were many political dissidents at the time. This practice of internal exile banished activists to remote villages and islands throughout the country, cutting off key figures from their networks and effectively reducing their ability to organize the antifascist movement. Emilio Lussu and Fausto Nitti wrote of their daring escape from *confino* in 1927, see Francesco Fausto Nitti,

Escape; the Personal Narrative of a Political Prisoner Who Was Rescued from Lipari, the Fascist "Devil's Island", (New York; London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1930); Emilio Lussu, *Marcia Su Roma E Dintorni*, Terza edizione, I Coralli, 219 (Torino: Einaudi, 1972).

24. While Fascism's rhetoric of the ideal woman and its practices day-to-day were not necessarily one and the same, from 1922 to 1945 under Mussolini's reign being a woman in Italy involved delicate balance and maneuvering between the advancement of modernity and the celebration of femininity equated with motherhood. By coupling the future and tradition, women were expected to fulfill a paradoxical role that ultimately denied their freedom. See Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

25. Lussu, "Fronti e frontiere," 44.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 105.

28. Ibid., 45.

29. Ibid., 104. Emphasis mine.

30. Monica Farnetti, *Tutte signore di mio gusto: profili di scrittrici contemporanee* (Milano: La tartaruga, 2008), 128–129.

31. Ibid., 129.

32. Lussu, *Portrait*, 9.

33. Ibid., 13.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 117.

37. Ibid., 78.

38. Ibid., 103.

39. Ibid., 105.

40. Ibid.

41. Lussu's development of her feminist ideas started at a young age under the tutelage of her parents in Switzerland. This physical removal from Italian intellectual circles, coupled with her family's progressive ideals, placed young Joyce at odds with the prevailing philosophical thought of the time, particularly in regards to the Crocean philosophy of aesthetics. Somewhat surprisingly, Benedetto Croce and Lussu were close friends, and it is thanks to Croce that Lussu printed her first collection of poetry as a teenager. During one scene in *Portrait* Joyce recalls the many fights the two had over lunch, both raising their voices to shout over the other and—to Croce's surprise—Joyce not backing down, "abituata com'er[a] a una famiglia poco convenzionale, senza gerarchie paterne; le donne di casa [le] guardavano perplesse." (*Portrait*, 44) While Croce was willing to concede that Joyce was the exception to the rule that women were the inferior sex, this concession only further angered her, as she goes on in *Portrait* to adamantly declare that she was one of millions of smarter and cleverer women.

42. Lesley Caldwell, "Italian Feminism: Some Considerations," in *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture and History*, ed. Zygmunt G. Baranski and Shirley Vinall (Reading, England: MacMillan, 1991), 100.

43. For a comprehensive overview of the history of the women's movement in relation to the ideas of emancipation and liberation, see Giulietta Ascoli, "L'UDI tra emancipazione e liberazione," ed. Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso-ISSOCO, *Problemi del socialismo*. 17(no. 4) (December 1979): 109–59.

44. Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel: La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale* (Milano: Rivolta Femminile, 1977), 21.

45. Lussu, *Portrait*, 105–106.

46. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 16.

47. Corresponding somewhat with the recent availability of her texts, new scholarship is emerging on Lussu. See, for example, Consuelo Tersol, "Joyce Lussu's *Fronti E Frontiere*: Re-Writing between Literature and Political Activism" (MPhil(R) Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2013). Additionally, this article originates from my research for my forthcoming doctoral dissertation entitled "Out of Italy: Italian Women under Fascism Reimagine Home and the Italian Identity" (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, forthcoming).