Symbols and Identity in Siena, Italy

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ABSTRACT

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Symbols and Identity in Siena, Italy

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Identity is a significant aspect of everyday life within the walls of Siena, an Italian city located in the hilly and culturally rich region of Tuscany. Siena is relatively small for a city, comprised of only about 20,000 people in its center; but it is unique because it is divided into seventeen distinct territorial districts known as 'contrade'. Each contrada has its own cultural and historical characteristics, signified by symbols and colors that represent them. Twice a year during the summer, ten of the seventeen contrade take part in the dangerous Palio horserace where riders run horses bare back around Siena's Piazza del Campo. The symbology of the Palio is inscribed within the symbolic landscape of Siena. However, symbols of the contrade system are used to construct and reinforce the various identities of the contrade members throughout the entire year. This study will serve to answer the question regarding how symbols associated with place work to influence and produce community identities through time and space.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the contrada is a social purpose. They try to keep together, young and old people, and they manage to do it very well. They try to teach younger people the traditions the songs, the way to play the drum and flag, they teach the younger people to love Siena and to learn more about its very glorious history in the past at least. And to yeah, and to basically to love the city, to love its tradition... also contrada teach us respect for the people in general moreover, for Siena, and for its beautiful traditions... So we have a very deep respect for our treasures. And we try we always try to keep them as much as good as we can so I don’t mean only, the old buildings, the streets but also the paintings and many many treasure we also have in the contrada museum. For example, and also they try to organize visits of the different various museums or churches or exhibitions that are in town or around Siena just to make also sort of culture of class... we could say.—Matteo, a member of the Bruco contrada

The area of study for this research is Siena, located in the central Italian province of Tuscany (Figure 1). Through this interview response, Matteo shows how much he is connected to, and respects, the city of Siena because of the values and symbols that connect him to the contrada (Appendix A). My interest in studying the contrade system developed after visiting Siena and realizing how little is known about the construction of place in regards to this particular city. The city center is very small, with only about 20,000 people residing within the city walls, and about 35,000 people living in the surrounding area. In Siena, the bond between the people and their city is unusually strong. This paper will therefore explore the complex relationship Sienese have to their city through symbols and place attachment in association with the contrade system.
In particular, I have chosen Siena to look into how the seventeen contrade (Table 1) of the city are depicted through symbols and connected to Sienese identity. Siena is divided into three terzo (or three divisions) (Figure 2) that are further divided into the seventeen different contrade, which are similar to wards within the city and are also referred to as ‘districts’. The symbol of the city is of a she-wolf suckling two infants that represent Romulus and Remus as seen in Figure 3 below. This image is everywhere in the city, from on the top of the pillars that line the entrance of the walls, in the fountain that resides in the Piazza del Campo, and in the Palazzo Pubblico hidden inside one of the most important paintings about government from the Renaissance period. The she-wolf is an important icon of Siena because it represents the birth of the city as it was founded by
the son of Remus, and is thus known as the son of Rome. Although this symbol is intriguing, there are many more symbols throughout the city that represent each contrada that are used more on an everyday basis than the symbol of the she-wolf.

Figure 2: Map of the 17 contrade and their flags. Map from Burgundy Ballooning.
Table 1: The 17 contrade.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Contrada</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Colors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nobil Contrada dell’Aquila</td>
<td>The Two-headed Eagle</td>
<td>Mostly yellow, with black and blue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobil Contrada del Bruco</td>
<td>The Caterpillar</td>
<td>Yellow and green with blue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrada della Chiocciola</td>
<td>The Snail</td>
<td>Yellow, red, and blue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contrada Priora della Civetta</td>
<td>The Owl</td>
<td>Red wine and black with white.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrada del Drago</td>
<td>The Dragon</td>
<td>Green and purple with yellow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrada Imperiale della Giraffa</td>
<td>The Giraffe</td>
<td>White and red.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrada Sovrana dell’Istrice</td>
<td>The Porcupine</td>
<td>Black, white, red, and blue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrada del Leocorno</td>
<td>The Unicorn</td>
<td>Orange and white with blue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrada della Lupa</td>
<td>The She-Wolf</td>
<td>Black and white with orange.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobil Contrada del Nicchio</td>
<td>The Half-Shell</td>
<td>Blue with red and gold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobil Contrada dell’Oca</td>
<td>The Goose</td>
<td>White and green with red.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contrada Capitana dell’Onda</td>
<td>The Wave</td>
<td>Light blue and white.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contrada della Pantera</td>
<td>The Panther</td>
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<td>Blue and yellow.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contrada della Torre</td>
<td>The Tower</td>
<td>Red wine with blue and white.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrada di Valdimontone</td>
<td>The Ram</td>
<td>Yellow and red with white.</td>
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Figure 3: The she-wolf with Romulus and Remus. Photo by author.
The history of the contrade and their development is a rather complicated one. The earliest documentation of the contrade was in 1208 (Argenziano et al, 2003). This document discussed the contrade as being an administrative entity, which controlled taxation in the district and organized the cavalcades and military duties. Since the thirteenth century, almost sixty different contrade were documented. The black plague drastically decreased the population of the city, and along with varying conflicts between Florence and Siena, dropped the number of contrade to twenty-two by the middle of the fourteenth century (Argenziano et al, 2003). By the fifteenth century, the present day contrade names were documented as the military control of the wards dissipated. When the military divisions of Siena no longer needed to focus on worrying about nearby city-states trying to take over their land, they turned their contrade into symbolic competitors through sport with events such as the Palio (1283 was the first documented Palio) (Meichtry, 2005). This concept, similar to that of “if we trade together, we do not fight together,” was to ensure that everyone would be on friendly terms, and not attempt to turn their military might onto a neighboring contrada (Meichtry, 2005). This changed the purpose of the contrade, from military divisions to social demarcations.

By the eighteenth century, the contrade consolidated to the seventeen that are known today. Each contrada controls their own territory that was defined by a proclamation created in 1729 by the governor Violante of Bavaria (Argenziano et al, 2003). The contrade members placed markers in the territory where they worked and lived to represent their social position. Contrada markers create a powerful sense of identity attached to place, and Siena’s symbols and monuments demonstrate and
reinforce the identities of the districts. This changed the way people viewed the streets they walked on. This proclamation set to define each of the contrada’s territories street by street and building by building. Every structure and space inside the city walls was declared to be part of a territory except for the two universal spaces: the Piazza del Campo and the Duomo (church). Each contrada has an animal icon and colors that are seen throughout the city on flags and fazzoletti (contrada scarves). Additionally, each contrada has a church, società (headquarters), and museum in their territory. The contrada has its own form of government divided into two parts. The head of the contrada is called the Priore. The Capitano is the second in charge and is the head of everything that relates to the Palio, a horse race that happens twice a year during the summer.

The Palio is more than a simple horse race to the contrade; it is a chance for rival contrade to come head to head in an attempt to win over the universal space of the Campo. Only ten of the seventeen contrade run in a race: seven by right (the ones that did not run the previous year) and three that are picked by chance. The Palio is a four day event starting with the drafting of the horses, where each contrada is assigned a horse through a lottery system. After this, the contrade have six trial runs to get a feel for their horse and see if their jockey performs well (as the jockey can be replaced but the horse cannot). The cena della prova generale, or dinner before the last trial, happens the night before the race. All of the contrade, including those who are not running, gather in the streets of their territory for a large group dinner. The jockeys attend the “Jockey Mass” the morning of the race, and afterwards, the last of the six trial runs takes place. In the
mid-afternoon, the horses are blessed inside the contrada’s own church where contrada members gather to watch the ceremony and sing songs of the district.

Figure 4: The Istrice contrada jockey showing off before the start of the Palio race. Photo by Rachel Lavenda

The Palio race itself finally happens in the evening of day four. The race is preceded by a historical parade of all the contrade, the finale of this is the blessed Palio banner, the prize for the winner, drawn by a cart of white oxen. As the cart goes around the Piazza, the *contradaio* (members of the contrada) wave their fazzoletti (contrada scarf) for blessing and good luck. The race starts after this, lasting only a few minutes, where each second is held with bated breath by the observers hoping that their contrada
will win, and that their enemy will lose. Every contradaiol lives to win as many Palios as possible in their lifetime. Thus after one Palio is over, preparations begin for the next race. Certainly the Palio is what Siena is best known for; however, contrada identity transcends the race and is part of everyday life in a changing Siena. Therefore it is important to look more closely at the contrada system and determine how people maintain their contrada identities through the use of symbols associated with the contrade system.

Statement of Purpose and Research Question

This research will provide an investigation into the relationship between contrade symbolism and identity in Siena. The contrade system is something that has lasted for over five hundred years despite a changing geography of Siena. It has endured unlike other cultural entities that have diminished over time with the spread of globalization and other socio-political forces. The symbols and representations of the contrade have helped to maintain important identities through the long history of the city. Studying Siena will investigate a case study that displays the importance of symbolism and place, and how these perpetuate strong identities unique to the place from which they reside. The purpose of this study is to understand how symbols distributed through the urban landscape such as flags, graffiti, and monuments are used to construct and delineate the identity of the people who live in Siena’s seventeen contrade, and to answer the following question: How are symbols associated with place used to influence and produce community identities in the Siena, Italy contrade system? In chapter two, I will explore the relevant literature on the topic, discussing homelands, place attachment, monuments, graffiti,
symbols, sport, and ritual. Then, chapter three will explain my methodological approach to my research. Finally, chapter four will explore the results gained and my discussions on their relevance. I conclude this thesis by considering possible future directions for further work on symbols and contrade identity.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Geography and other social sciences have a long tradition of studying how people shape local environments by attaching social, political, or cultural meanings to particular physical spaces. This process can effectively transform a once meaningless space into a place with a unique identity. Examples of this idea are often seen when people turn spaces into sacred places. For example, someone who has lost a loved one in a car accident may mark the space with a wreath and cross. What used to be a typical stretch of road is now a place with powerful meaning to those who identify it as a representation of the loved one who has been lost. Place and identity are therefore two concepts that are fundamentally intertwined. The purpose of this chapter is to create a common thread between place attachment, symbols and monuments, graffiti, sport, homelands, and ritual literature. All of these topics show a relationship between space and identity in some way. It is for this reason that I work to show how these areas are connected and present in the urban landscape.

Place Attachment

Place attachment signifies an emotional connection between a person and a place (Antonsich, 2010; Kyle, Graefe, Manning and Bacon, 2004; Kyle, Mowen and Tarrant, 2004; Figure 1). Specific activities, thoughts, and behaviors are related to these spaces, creating an aura of human-place bonding (Kyle, Mowen and Tarrant, 2004). Environmental psychologists have created a new paradigm in the school of place attachment:
This new paradigm…places greater influence on ‘understanding the subjective, emotional, and symbolic meanings associated with natural places and the personal or attachments people form with specific places or landscapes’ (Williams & Vaske, 2003, p. 1) It also emphasizes that places are more than geographic settings with definitive physical and textual characteristics; they are fluid, changeable, dynamic contexts of social interaction and memory. (Stokowski, 2002 in Kyle, Graefe, Manning, Bacon, 2004, 213)

Symbolic connections related to place are also significant when considering the importance of this human-place bonding. In Israel, for example, the possibility of losing land due to border disputes between Palestine was something unthinkable to the Israelis (Hutson, 2009). The specific land in question was home to a cemetery. Even when given the option of moving the graves and memorials to a new location, a quarter of Israelis interviewed refused to give in as the soil itself was sacred and symbolic.

Figure 5: Meanings of place and the process of personal and social identification (Antonsich, 2010)

Many geographers discuss how people create place, but fewer have written how symbolic places help to shape the ideologies and identities of people (Agnew, 2002; Cresswell, 1996; Delaney, 2005; Duncan, 1993; Mitchell, 2000; Sack, 2003; Sörlin,
Robert Sack is one of the authors to argue there is a strong relationship between place and identity. He presents a short case study illustrating this argument, showing how Aboriginals of Australia find their identity connected to their territory (Sack, 2003). The Aboriginals believe that their bodies are a creation from the ancestral force that occupies their territory. Thus they believe that living in another’s territory would be like taking another’s identity and leaving their own behind (Sack, 2003). The author defines a term, *platialility*: “to discuss the mutually constitutive roles of geography and the self” (Sack, 2003, 75). Governments can try to create a sense of place attachment by manipulating landscapes in a way that furthers their specific agenda. David Atkinson and Denis Cosgrove analyze the relationships between government (politics), architecture, and the idea of ‘Italianess’ in the building, and later interpretation, of the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome (1998). The Italian government worked to define the Italian national identity through the monument’s location in the city and overall design. The monument was built to commemorate Italy’s first king, celebrating the unification of the country. As a symbolic place of national significance, it conveys the idea of a strong Italian identity, while remembering the past struggles that Rome and the Italian people as a whole had to endure (Atkinson and Cosgrove, 1998).

We construct space by giving meaning to place with symbolic acts and markers. A city is in part an object, defined by its meaning in landmarks and spaces within that are made significant by people (Tuan, 1977). These people who are shaped by this significance, may feel connected, or not, to that space. Places have insiders, those who are associated with the area and know and abide by its rules, as well as outsiders, who are
not to be trusted (Cresswell, 1996). Even among a place’s insiders, friendships and animosities exist (Angew and Duncan, 1989; Cresswell, 1996). Delving into the complex relationships between place connections, Antonio Arantes uses qualitative methodologies to interrogate the social spaces that help to construct identities in the public spaces of Sao Paulo, Brazil (1996). The author hypothesizes that the complex urban environment is constructed through combinations of many factors. He emphasizes that common spaces have a meaning that is often constructed and shared through groups and their “mutual interrelationships,” (Arantes, 1996, 82). Through constructed boundaries and established rules, people are taught how to behave in public spaces. The center of San Paulo, Cathedral Square, holds vendors, and people, wandering around the city. But the square is more than just a concrete space; it is an important landmark of the city where memories and ideas have been created and shared. It is, as Arantes states, “the home in the public space; not ‘the house and the street’” (Arentes, 1996, 86).

Because different people have different connections to space, different territories and boundaries can intersect and cause individuals to travel through space that may be welcoming, contested, or unfriendly. Choon-Piew Pow uses Robert Sack’s theoretical framework regarding places to understand how gated communities create a landscape that also create a sense of conformity within the community (2009). These gated areas create a vision that enforces the desired aspirations of the residents living within: safety, wealth, and high status. When people understand a place, they abide by its rules, and the environment becomes part of them, in part shaping their ideologies and understandings of
the world. I will now address some of the different processes by which people assign, interpret, and contest meanings associated with various spaces.

*Homelands*

Richard Nostrand and Lawrence Estaville’s edited volume, *Homelands: A Geography of Culture and Place across America*, highlights the strong connections people can develop to a place. Besides having a connection to a place, Nostrand and Eastaville argue that a true homeland means that a person has a tied identity to a place, and that they have stayed in that location long enough to have adapted to the environment while changing its cultural landscape (Nostrand and Estaville, 2001, xvii). They further describe the six values that homeland instills in a person:

A love for one’s birthplace and home;
An emotional attachment to the land of one’s people;
A sense of belonging to a special area;
A loyalty that is defined by geographical parameters;
A strength that comes from territoriality;
A feeling of wholeness and restoration when returning to one’s homeland.

Symbols and myths of a homeland have been used to create a sense of territorialized and nationalized space (Kaiser, 2002). Robert Kaiser defines homelands as more than just spaces where people are from, but as “politically constructed places toward which the population is territorialized,” (2002, 231). These homelands reinforce ideas of spatial identity, emotional attachment, and a sense of exclusiveness (Kaiser, 2002, 231). Kaiser explores the different instruments that are used to create and reinforce homelands. Maps are an important instrument as they show space and boundaries displaying the actual homeland. Monuments, myths, and other symbolic national landscapes are also instruments that are fundamental in the creation and sustainability of
a homeland (Kaiser, 2002). These places, sustained by people, also work as tools that help shape their identities (Sack, 2003).

The adaptation of the physical landscape is one way that people sustain their homeland to match their identity. The Kiowa tribe, who settled in an Oklahoma reservation in accordance with the Medicine Lodge Treaty, adapted the land to match their culture (Schnell, 2001). The Kiowa people were forced to end their mobility by settling into a life of agriculture and later urban living. They could at least still feel a connection to the southwestern portion of Oklahoma, where their ancestors are buried and the strong Kiowa spirit still thrives today (Schnell, 2001). Steven Schnell interviewed people of the Kiowa tribe and found they had a strong sense of connection to this land, and a desire to return upon retiring if they had to leave it:

Kiowas are constantly immersed in a white-dominated society, and many I spoke with often feel their tribal identity and values fraying with this contact. Periodically returning to southwest Oklahoma provides a means of restoring and sustaining a Kiowa’s identity. No matter how widely dispersed they may be in search of economic opportunity, many Kiowas never lose the desire to return to Oklahoma permanently. (Schnell, 2001, 153)

Shirley Stewart and Connie Rice shared a similar story of wanting to return to their Appalachian homeland (2000). Their book chapter details moments of their own lives, growing up and migrating to urban areas where their parents found jobs, and finally returning home when their family could no longer live away from their homeland. This movement of Appalachians to urban areas was common after World War II as there was a promise for work as jobs were scarce (Stewart and Rice, 2000). More often than not, these Appalachians who moved to find work outside of their home were greeted with
discrimination and stereotypes of their homeland and culture. Eventually, many moved back to their homeland, where they felt they most belonged. The Rice family wanted their daughter to grow up where they felt safe and knew that they were part of a community:

She never had a baby-sitter who wasn’t an aunt. She trailed along paths that her grandparents created. She knows where her ancestors are buried. She experienced mountain religion and mountain traditions, tasted fried bread, corn meal mush, and, unfortunately, asafetida. She never had to look for who she was or where she belonged, because she already knew. (Stewart and Rice, 2000, 46-47)

Living in Appalachia was important for having a community support system as well as living in a place where the Rice values were shared.

For some groups, a homeland can be a small town or community where their values and culture are uniquely instilled within the landscape through flags, signs, and other markers. For others, homelands are a larger portion of land, where symbolic images are large physical features such as the ‘Devil Tower’ or ‘Palo Duro Caynon’ of the Kiowa tribe (Schnell, 2001). These geographical features were not created by the Kiowa’s but they were incorporated into their myths and stories, becoming more than just rocky landforms in a desert. The size of the homeland has no significance; the place is powerful no matter how large or small to the people who feel a strong bond and connection to the land. This connection is what keeps bringing these people back to their homeland, and is why that space is more significant than just a city or town were a person may have lived part of their life. Symbols and monuments in the landscape are frequently used to demarcate homeland territories. In the next subsection I discuss how they are deployed to attach the social significance of place to physical spaces at a variety of scales.
Through understanding a city’s significant places, one can begin to understand the intricacies and unique characteristics of the neighborhoods that comprise that city. People within these neighborhoods often define place in their own way by working to incorporate their identities through created symbols, such as graffiti, art, or posters (Cresswell, 2004). In some places, people use territorial and personalized cultural markers to help define and legitimize their identity in spaces that may, or may not, be originally theirs (Cresswell, 2004). These markers are often inexpensive ones such as flags, lawn ornaments, or signs (Benedict and Kent, 2004). In Cleveland, Ohio, where many immigrants have flocked searching for jobs in manufacturing, it is not hard to find the most prominent immigrant group in the area. Puerto Ricans now make up 15.3% and 5.3% of the total populations of Lorain (suburb of Cleveland) and Cleveland, respectively (Benedict and Kent, 2004). This ethnic group has filled the gap that other immigrant groups have left behind, transforming the homes and communities into something they can claim as their own through brightly colored houses, immaculate flower gardens, and, of course, the Puerto Rican flag.

Everyone has witnessed markings of graffiti in their community or during travel, but do people consider the meaning behind these markings? Graffiti is much more than destruction of property; it is an expression of identity (Brighenti, 2010; Carrington, 2009; Ley and Cybriwsky; 1974; Macdonald, 2003; Miklavcic, 2008; Reisner; 1971). Tagging for an individual is a way of personalizing otherwise impersonal spaces (Carrington, 2009). Besides personalizing spaces, graffiti creates boundaries by showing who belongs
and adversely, who is left as the outsider (Brighenti, 2010, Macdonald, 2003). In turn, one can enter enemy territory and leave their mark, challenging their ownership of that space.

Ownership of a space can change or be contested. In the aftermath of conflict, landscapes and communities are often left devastated, both physically and emotionally. To try to reestablish space and identities, groups must work to rebuild what they have lost through urban development and try to memorialize what has vanished as to not be forgotten. Often times, memorials are built to help commemorate these losses, however, sometimes these monuments mean more than just memories as they can signify geopolitical tensions that may still be prevalent in the area (Berensten, 2002; Edensor, 1996; Forest, Johnson, and Till, 2004; Johnson, 1995; Mayo, 1988; Till, 2005). Members of a group share an identity and construct a landscape that reinforces that identity. A landscape’s inclusion and exclusion is related to power. One strategy for affirming this identity and power is through constructing these monuments (Norton, 2003).

Forest et al (2004) discuss the roles of memorialization in post War Germany and Russia. They discuss how areas of public memory are difficult to build, and are made up of many different components. Memory is constructed through a process of remembering the past, and can be manipulated by people in power and how they choose to remember the past through memorialization and monuments. Similarly, Johnson (2002) gives a review of many monuments in different places from varying eras to show the difference between the shaping of space and the forming of identities. She mentions the idea of public monuments working to help shape our understanding of our heritage and
responsibilities as a community or people that hold the power. Johnson (2002) discusses the idea of contested memorialization. She used the example of World War II’s Auschwitz where many different groups of people, ranging from religious groups to ethnic groups, wanted to ensure the meaning of the memorialization represented the views of those involved.

Forest and Johnson (2002) together discuss the construction of post-Soviet national identity by comparing four different case studies of monument sites in Moscow, Russia—Victory Park, the Lenin Mausoleum, the former Exhibition of the Achievements of the National Economy (VDNKh), and the Park of Arts. By considering the political struggles and ideologies throughout Russian history, they discuss the construction of post-Soviet national identity. They created three different categories that Soviet-era memorials/monuments were placed into: Co-opted/Glorified, Contested, or Disavowed (Forest and Johnson, 2002, 530). The Co-opted/Glorified monuments were ones that were worked to re-establish their meaning to a more positive connotation. Contested monuments held a disputed meaning from the Soviet era that constructed the new national identity that Russia was trying to establish. Disavowed monuments were taken down and removed from the public’s eye in an attempt to erase an undesirable part of history from memory.

These examples show how powerful symbols and monuments can be. However, they also show that they are not static. The symbols in a space can be changed to match the identities and feelings of those in control of that space. For some areas, this may mean that the dominant symbols and markers have not changed significantly, as the owners of
these signifiers have dominated the landscape for some time, adding to their ancestral markings while leaving room for future generations to add their own markers. For other areas, symbols and other markers can be a relatively young addition to the existing landscape as that ownership and expression has been altered over a period of time. Both scenarios hold equally strong connections to the identities constructed by the showing of distinctiveness in the territory. But demarcations of place-based identities need not be physical symbols or monuments. Demarcations of identity-based territorialization may also include social activities like sport.

**Sport**

*On the other side is identity, as there is likely no fan base so intense, so far flung, so proud of something even as often indefinable as Pittsburgh ethos.* – Gene Collier, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, *In Pittsburgh, the Super Bowl is the standard ... Nothing else will do*, article leading up to the 2009 Super Bowl

Whether it’s American football, European football, or another game, many fans invest a lot of time, energy, and money following their sport (Falk, 2005). For some American football fans in the Midwest and South, the game is almost a religion, and many plan their whole Sunday around the games (Falk, 2005). Fans of the Oakland Raiders team who do not live in Oakland can ride the “Raiders Nation” train from Sacramento and the San Juaquin Valley. This train is specially decorated in the team’s colors. It is no surprise then that many fans followed the team because of family members—such as parents—being fans, and some devoted fanatics even claim to have been fans of the Raiders before they were even born (Falk, 2005). Gerhard Falk, author of
Football and American Identity, uses Konrad Lorenz’s four conditions of “militant enthusiasm” to explain the actions of die-hard football fans:

1. A group with which we identify seems threatened by an out-group.
2. The hated enemy is present and visible.
3. A leader or a group of leaders is available to arouse enthusiasm in the crowd.
4. Many other individuals are present and agitated by the same emotion.

(Falk, 2005, 140)

Sociologists use the term “in-group, out-group distinctions” to describe the relationships between groups where some are accepted and others are excluded (Falk, 2005). This idea can be used to describe rival football teams as well. Some fans of the Pittsburgh Steelers would see other Steelers fans as insiders to their group, while fans of the Cleveland Browns may be hated and ostracized as outsiders. It may seem excessive to use the word ‘hate’ when talking about rival teams, but it has been documented that some fans actually feel this way, and may result in violence when they see an opposing fan or when their team loses a game that is important to them (Falk, 2005).

Sport is thus representative of an identity-based geography. A sport stadium becomes a place for contested voices and identities, expressed through chants, banners, and other symbology. “Conquering opposing team’s territory is therefore a common practice in the subculture of fandoms” (Miklavcic, 2008, 445). The opposition is the invader into their space and territory. In this way, we can see how sport teams create a strong connection to group and national identity, especially for sports played at the international level (Guttmann, 1994.). For the British and their former colonies, the game of cricket is highly related to a British identity (Guttmann, 1994). “From the remnants of wickets and bats, future archaeologists of material culture will be able to reconstruct the
boundaries of the British Empire” (Guttmann, 1994, 18). Since the game was so popular throughout all of the social classes, cricket became something that tied many different types of people together. Adversely, it is for this reason that cricket failed to materialize in the US. Since America was formed on the idea of disconnecting itself from its former colonizer, the idea of playing a game that was so ‘British’ was rather unappealing (Guttmann, 1994; Cogliano, 2004). America’s national identity was/is more closely associated with values of democracy since geography and ethnic identity was not uniform in the forming of the nation (Cogliano, 2004). Albert Goodwill Spalding, one of the founding members of the National Baseball League, was quoted in 1911 by saying that baseball is the American national game because it is the only sport that “is the exponent of American courage, confidence, combative ness; American dash, discipline, determination; pluck, persistency, performance; American spirit, sagacity, success; American vim, vigor, virility…baseball is a democratic game…a combative game” (Cogliano, 2004, 145). For America, the game of baseball was something unique in a time when the nation was looking for something to make it exceptional (Cogliano, 2004).

It would be impossible for a Britain, who had not breathed the air or this free land as a naturalized American citizen; for one who has not part or heritage in the hopes and achievements of our country, to play Baseball, as it would for an American, free from the trammels of English traditions, customs, conventionalities, to play the national game of Great Britain. (Cogliano, 2004, 153)

As ‘Englishness’ has become a mix of a rather diverse group of people, the English national identity has become a complex thing to try to define, and this has been reflected through sports throughout England. After World War II, there has been a growing number of multiethnic people that identify with being English, and as of 2001,
7.1% of England’s population (roughly 4,000,000 people) identified as being another ethnicity other than Caucasian (Polley, 2004, 15). Sport has been a way for different groups to assert a British identity, as many Jewish boxers demonstrated this in the pre- and post-war periods (Polley, 2004). Olympic jumper, Ashia Hansen, is a great example of how sports contribute to identity formation. Hansen was born to an American Afro-Caribbean mother, adopted by a English woman and Ghanaian man, grew up in Ghana and London, and after all of her complex multiethnic identity experiences growing up, she chose to jump for England (Polley, 2004).

Through British media, we can see how the English view and stereotype themselves and other European teams through their football sport writings, connecting identities to nation states. In football matches, it is easy to parallel the games with war when different international teams that have a violent history together are playing. This is especially a popular motif among English and German matches in the British media. In one example, the media portrayed the English team as ‘warlike leaders’ and ‘heroic’ in their match against Spain (Crolley, 2000, 110). The English are always categorized as being ‘brave’ and ‘the patriotic lionheart’ from the legacy Richard I left England after his brave death in battle with the French during the Third Crusade (Crolley, 2000). The British presses also have football stereotypes for Germany that are related to war and military power. The German teams are often shown as strong, aggressive, efficient, and full of self-belief (Crolley, 2000). These characteristics are reminiscent to the days of Prussian power, WWI, and WWII, and the ability of Germany to rise to be a strong economic contender after the destruction it faced in WWII.
Ultimately, there are many facets of identity tied to sport and often times these identities are connected to a place or country. The fans, the players, and the representations of the game all represent different expressions and meanings of identity. It is impossible to say one is more important than the other. Rituals and festivals, like sport, can help to preserve identity through place-based affiliations, too.

*Rituals & Festivals*

“A village means not being alone, knowing that the people, the plants, and the earth is something of yourself.” –Cesare Pavese (Platenkamp,, 1992, 74)

Rituals are performed everywhere in the world, and at different scales, ranging from family rituals, to community, or even national ones. These activities allow for the participants to feel a sense of group identity and also a feeling of belongingness (Hirabayashi, 2009; Kong and Yeoh, 1997). Rituals also work to maintain a sense of place, create a collective memory, and sustain shared values (Kong and Yeoh, 1997). They are an important part of cultural traditions, support and reaffirm collective identities, and often are filled with symbolism (Cartry, 1992; de Coppet, 2003; Pinnock, 1997; Platenkamp; 1992; Suter, Daas, and Bergen, 2008; Valdinoci, 2008). Through rituals and symbols, identities are negotiated, but also reinforced, as symbols and rituals are communicative of one’s identity (Suter, Daas, and Bergen, 2008).

Festivals can be a way for people to take part in a community activity with other members of the group. Hirabayashi (2009) highlights how the rituals and traditions of watching community music during her childhood strengthened her identity to that place.
She would intently watch and listen to the music players that took part in their yearly festival. This helped to create a stronger sense of comradery among the community:

For example, in the case of rituals, a community that has carried on its rituals is recognized both within and outside of itself through actions, practice and performance. These identities express individual character as well as community identity. At the same time, this implies that the community is discerned from the others in a society. In other words, a community’s identity is created by the difference in relation to the outside world and simultaneously by sharing something among the community and by uniting as a whole. (Hirabayashi, 2009, 43)

For the Kiowa tribe, their yearly ritual of the Kiowa Gourd Clan Ceremonials is a chance for members who have had to move away for work to reunite (Schnell, 2001). The event happens every year in July, and for many is viewed as a yearly pilgrimage back to the homeland. The event has a historical significance as it relates to the old ceremonies held years ago by the Kiowas. It is viewed as the most-important date of the year, and is the tribes chance to reestablish their identity that is often diminished with the surrounding American culture.

For people vying for membership into a gang, working to be part of an exclusive community, rituals are activities where the people that are involved are bonded together. Being accepted into a gang’s boundary, figuratively and literally, is imperative in becoming one of them. The gang’s turf is home to a sense of belonging, where people bond. Its lets others know whose neighborhood, street, or area it is—so there are insiders and outsiders. Here, symbols are important in gang identification, they create a way of telling different gangs members apart from these visible markers—but many symbols are still kept secret so that only those that belong to the group know and understand them (Pinnock, 1997). This secrecy provides an even stronger connection between the people
who know and understand the symbols, knowing that they are privy to special information.

Events like festivals can be political and contested in nature as they are not always welcomed by everyone. The Nazis used their power to influence Germans into recognizing and respecting their group through parades and festivals throughout Munich (Hagen, 2008). These parades decided who could be a member of the community and also who was not accepted through careful coordination and selection of participants. The Nazis wanted to showcase the strengths of their Arian race to the people of the city (Hagen, 2008). In New Zealand, a yearly event celebrating the 1840 singing of the Treaty of Waitangi is celebrated (McAllister, 2007). The treaty meant that New Zealand now belonged to the British, and the Maori people no longer had control over their own sovereignty. Because of this, the historical relevance of the event has caused conflict among different groups in New Zealand.

The production of rituals is a way groups can build collective identities and create a stronger sense of community amongst themselves. These events can sustain a sense of place as well as maintain important cultural traditions of a community. Although we often like to associate rituals and festivals with positive intentions, they can be filled with contested and deeply emotional politics.

Like all of the examples mentioned in this literature review, Siena is a place fraught with complex identity politics. This long history of identity politics is played out in the context of place attachment, symbols and monuments, homeland, sport, rituals, and festivals. Although geographers often talk about how people shape the spaces and places
around them, almost none explicitly discuss how places influence the shaping of peoples identities. However, as discussed in this chapter, sport, rituals, symbols, and place itself help to create a powerful sense of connection and attachment to an area, while at the same time work to define part of who a person is. The remainder of this thesis, however, will focus specifically on how symbols are used to produce and reinforce contrade identities through space and time. But before discussing the results of this research project, I must address the methods by which I completed it.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“To have a precise vision of Siena, we would do well to make clear that we are dealing not so much with a city as with a confederation of seventeen cities. And this is so true that the territory is divided by boundaries established first by habit and then by a law of the State (1729) which had and which still has full legal value" (Giulio Pepi, 1974) (Comune di Siena, 1999).

I spent three weeks between November and December of 2011 gathering data in Siena, Italy. I was prepared to immediately start collecting qualitative data upon my arrival to Siena as this project is a continuation of two months of previous research I conducted on territory and identity there during the summer of 2009. Thus I already had extensive contacts and experience within the area of Siena and its seventeen contrade. During my most recent visit I conducted semi-structured interviews, documented significant symbolic markers, and used participant observation to assist in answering my research question: Do symbols associated with place work to influence and produce community identities in the Siena, Italy contrade system? This chapter will explain my methods chosen and the limitations that I encountered during the research process.

Qualitative Methods

I used qualitative methods to gather the majority of my data. Qualitative approaches are a way to gather data to understand questions regarding societal structures and individuals lived experiences (Dowling, 2010; Dunn, 2010; Rossman and Rallis, 2003; Winchester, 2010). Interviews and observations are two forms of qualitative
methodologies that work to answer these questions. Interviews provide the missing gaps in knowledge that other methods cannot fill, and can help the researcher “investigate complex behaviors and motives” (Dunn, 2010, 102). They also are used to collect a diversity of opinions, experiences, and meanings in a way that can empower the informants in a respectful manner (Dunn, 2010). According to Dunn, one form of interviewing, the semi-structured interview, is “organized around ordered but flexible questioning…the role of the researcher is recognized as being more interventionist than in unstructured interviews” (2010, 110).

I conducted sixteen semi-structured interviews with people intimately familiar with symbolism in Siena associated with the contrade and the Palio. I asked them flexible, organized questions that I had already prepared (Dunn, 2010) (they can be found at the end of this document in Appendix B, C). The interviews were done in both English and Italian, and quotations used in this document were kept in the original English style used by my informants. I recorded the interviews to ensure proper documentation and to make sure that I understood everything that was said when speaking in my second language. According to Warren, mixing interviews with ethnographic methods (or the lived experience) can highlight the cultural as well as the biographical aspects of a person’s world (Warren, 2002). Thus, I conducted ethnographies on members of various contrade that that gave me insights into the importance of symbols and symbolic acts that help to construct identity within the individual contrada. I did this by being part of the ‘lived experience’ through interacting with the community and through gathering newspapers, books, newsletters, and other documents produced by the contrade that detail
their community history and events. This led to the construction of a thematic narrative of organized events and stories about the contrade life (Emerson et al, 1995). The themes constructing this narrative were focused around topics where a lot of information was collected as well as topics that proved to be important and significant to my informants (Emerson et al, 1995). Through this process, it was important ethically to understand which point of view I was creating these narrative themes from (Emerson et al, 1995; Nagy Hesse-Biber et al, 2004). Once I returned to Ohio University, I transcribed the interviews and they were then coded using open and analytic coding techniques (Cope, 2010).

Baxter and Eyles (1997) argue that one of the main dangers threatening the rigor of qualitative data is the misunderstanding of the meanings and context of interviewee dialogue. They state that the way to help ensure proper interpretations is to revisit the interviewees to talk about the context in which the researcher is using and representing the data (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). Upon my return to Ohio, I used a few follow up interviews through Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), or email communication, so that I could continue gathering data even though I was unable to physically be in Italy (Dunn, 2010). I kept this to a minimum as I felt being in Italy in person to gather data was the best way to ensure rigor in my research as I was able to witness events and communication first hand.

Because there are seventeen contrade, I originally decided to limit myself to interviewing members of only three contrade. The Onda (wave), Torre (tower), and Oca (goose) were chosen for this research project because they have the most complex
relationships of all the contrade. The Onda and Oca both view Torre as an enemy, while Torre officially only recognizes Oca as their adversary. Onda sees Oca as a strong ally, while Oca merely recognizes Onda as another contrada in Siena. This triangular relationship only exists between these three contrade, as the others only have one enemy.

I am already accepted as a friend within the Onda group from my previous research in Siena, thus I was able to interview needed contacts there easily. Although it may seem that being accepted in one contrada may lead to problems with its enemy, I have found that the Torre has been happy to talk to me, too. I felt that my research would be strongest if I worked to gather these different contrade opinions as I am working to understand the complex relationships between symbols and identity (Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

Table 2: Informant demographics and information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # of interviews</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-39 years old</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40+ years old</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrada member</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># who sell contrada related items as part of profession</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Paintings, ceramics, ribbons, jewelry, barbari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Contraide represented</td>
<td>8 of 17</td>
<td>Onda, Oca, Lupa, Bruco, Istrice, Torre, Drago, Tartuca</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The gender of my interviewees was split about equally with eight women and seven men (Table 2). I ended up interviewing people from eight different contrade,
though Onda, Torre, and Oca still had the most representation. I also talked with three people who were not part of a contrada in order to gather information on the group from the outsider perspective. Most of these informants were found through talking with people I knew and the many shops around the city center through a sampling of convenience and then snowballing to find interviewees. This helped me to find people who knew at least a little bit of English, which helped me to ensure that I could have a conversation and be able to understand the interviewee through dialogue when we were snagged on a word because of language. In addition to the interviews, I sent out a few surveys, made up of my interview questions, to contrade members before my departure as I wanted to gain some early information and contacts for future interview participants. Unfortunately, I only received two responses.

In addition to the interviews and associated ethnological methodologies, I used participant observations, immersing myself into the contrada life to acquire data relating to everyday life as ‘…interactionist researchers…want to gather data from their subjects while interacting with them’ (Adler and Adler, 1994, 378). I looked for references to and interactions with the contrada outside of the days of the Palio horse race. I used Rossman and Rallis’ strategies for ensuring objectivity in order to maintain credibility in my study (2003). They list triangulation and being there as two ways of ensuring rigor. Triangulation refers to using multiple data sources to build a more comprehensive picture of the study. Being there means just what it sounds like, as I should spend a significant amount of time in the study area to ensure I have more than a “snapshot view of the phenomenon” (Rossman and Rallis, 2003, 69).
For my observation, I spent some time in the Onda bar where many people of the contrada go to get a coffee or a snack. Many of my Onda informants and friends used this place to meet and talk for the interview as it is a rather warm and comfortable place. Although this is a specific location, all of Siena’s city center was a place for partaking in participant observation as every contrada has their own unique place(s) for gathering that is not necessarily a formal contrada establishment (such as the societas/headquarters). I was lucky enough to be able to attend the Christmas dinner Onda held before the holidays, which gave me the perfect opportunity to see a non-Palio event where many of the contrada members are together. I also had the opportunity to have a personal tour in the museum of the Bruco contrada and their headquarters in the evening one night which was another great time to see what happens there during days other than the Palio, when most of the people think of the contrade of Siena.

Mental mapping exercises were also used with interviewees to identify a person’s significant places, and feelings of a place (Towers, 2005; Gould & White, 1986). People attach meaning to places and in doing so, assign varying criteria to different areas. Gould and White (1986) argue that people tend to live and interact among places where they feel their cultural values are shared. With mental mapping activities, participants can share how they feel about a place, what areas they define as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, and show where they interact in daily life. To see how contrada members felt about the different territories of Siena, I showed them a map of the historical section of the city, and asked them to label the best and worst areas. I also wanted to see where people spent time in the city, to determine if contrada territories dictated where they would or would not go.
Everyone was asked where their favorite part of the city was. I did not specify that their favorite location(s) had to be a specific street, building, or territorial area. I provided a map of the city center for the informants to look at in order to decide and explain their reasoning. I intended on having each person draw their own mental map, but instead I found that people were quick to give answers about their favorite location as often times it was their contrada territory. Because of this, the already prepared map seemed sufficient and they could say what part(s) of the city they loved and which they hated. By visiting the places that people chose as their favorite locations, I could then assess both the symbolic and literal use of that space. In doing so, it helped to understand the question of how symbols can be used to promote identities through these communal influences.

Many values of a culture are portrayed in a visual manner, whether it be through pictures, websites, or other forms of media. Images themselves can be a form of resistance and can be a portrayal of social differences, as they are powerful representations of a culture (Rose, 2001). Waitt highlights Rose’s seven “Strategies for Doing Discourse Analysis,” which can help up to understand these images:

1. Choice of source materials or texts
2. Suspend pre-existing categories: become reflexive
3. Familiarization: absorbing yourself in and thinking critically about the social context of your texts
4. Coding: once for organization and again for interpretation
5. Power, knowledge, and persuasion: investigate your texts for effects of ‘truth’
6. Rupture and resilience: take notice of inconsistencies within your texts
7. Silence: silence as discourse and discourses that silence
   (Rose in Waitt, 2010, 220)
I decided to use the contrada websites as a form of discourse since they provide so much varying information, are updated regularly, and are the main form of information distribution for the groups. I worked to follow Rose’s (in Waitt) seven “Strategies for Doing Discourse Analysis” when analyzing the documents. I particularly paid special attention to ideas of power (who is producing their documents and how does that effect ideas of ‘truth’) and how power led to silence, or who/what was not represented on the websites. As Rose highlights (2001: 66), the invisible can shed some strong insights into the meaning of content:

Something that is kept out of the picture may nonetheless be extremely significant to its meaning…I am not making the point here that there is a single reality which visual images only selectively represent. Rather, I mean to suggest that certain representations of what is visible depend on other things being constructed as their invisible opposite, and content analysis is incapable of addressing their invisibilized others.

This concept is especially important when researching the seventeen contrade since they have enemies and allies, and thus will inherently portray their different relationships in varying ways, working to fulfill their specific agenda. Walking through the city, it is very easy to find visual markers representing the contrade. Posters about contrada events line the walls near the bus station and can be found in shop windows and bulletin boards. The local newspaper has a section that is dedicated to contrade events and news and often they have stories about a specific contrada in the other sections of the newspaper. Visual culture of the contrade can be seen when eating in a restaurant or shopping in a store as often those who are run or owned by contrada members have past Palio photos or the animal of their contrada decorating the walls and shelves. Visual
culture is therefore an important element of the Siena landscape as it shows who controls an area through specific imagery.

**Limitations**

The main limitation I found myself facing was that of time. Since I had only three and a half weeks in the field, I had to limit myself from trying to see all the museums and headquarters of the contrade and instead focus on finding informants for interviewing. The second greatest limitation I faced was trying to find members of the three contrade that I wanted to focus on to interview. Since I had limited time, I chose to talk to any contrade members I found, even if they were not a part of the three contrade that originally I wanted to focus on. As I am still working on my language skills, I did have a few moments of difficulty when trying to communicate, but overall this was not a huge problem for my research. For future research, if a few more weeks were allotted for time in the field, it would lead to more opportunities to explore all of the museums and contrada headquarters. This would also, of course, lead to new informants for interviewing. Although I was not able to interview as many people as I wanted, the data that I have collected provides insight into the cultural intricacies that are weaved symbolically through Siena’s geography and history.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this chapter is to explore the relationship that symbols have with contrada identities. I will first discuss the connection between symbolism and the sport of the Palio. Next I will discuss the how symbols inculcate contrada identities throughout the life cycle of a contrada member, from birth to death and everything in-between. In this section, I will also discuss the interactions with physical symbols, as well as symbolic gestures, such as time spent for the contrada, as well as explore the feelings people have for their contrada to help explain the importance of the districts and how symbols are a part of their everyday life.

Sport and Tradition of the Palio

Sport is a way of both bringing people of a group together and reinforcing identity as the activity creates a sense of belongingness (Falk, 2005). A sports arena becomes the venue for contested voices to meet, with the opponent being an intruder into the space or territory (Guttmann, 1994; Miklavec, 2008). For Siena, the Palio is more than just a sport; it is a tradition that has been reoccurring for about five hundred years (Figure 6). But nonetheless, it is still a game, and the Sienese love to compete in it. The Palio days create a transformed city, where each street has an obvious owner, and symbols are used to demarcate one district from the next.
The Palio itself is a four day period, though thinking about and planning the event happens throughout the year. Of the seventeen contrade, only ten participate in the race, the seven that did not run the previous year, and three that are drawn through a lottery by chance. Before the Palio begins, the city workers truck in red dirt from outside the city walls to cover the cobblestones in the Campo square where the race is held. This is to prevent the horses from slipping on the track but it is also a very symbolic action bringing the old race course that started outside the city walls many years ago to the ‘new’ location. When people see the dirt in the Campo, they know the festivities are about to start, and it is quite common to see people (especially the older generation) bend down and touch the soil in a thoughtful manner. The days of the Palio start with the draft of the
horses. The contrade do not select their own horses for the race but instead are given one through a lottery system. This is after the ten contrade Capitanos (or head of the contrada during the Palio) agree on ten horses to be used for the race through a series of trials used to witness the horses’ potential and performance in the Campo. After this, there are six trial races in the Campo to allow the contrada a chance to see their horse in action and to find the perfect jockey to ride on their behalf. The jockeys are usually from outside Siena, and are replaceable up until the last trial before the actual race. The horse given to the district is not replaceable; if the horse is not a very good contender for winning, or if it is injured, the contrada is stuck with it. The horse is thus treated with the utmost care and attention and it is now the symbol connecting the race to the district. Finally, on the fourth day, the Palio race is run. It is preceded with the historical procession made up all of the seventeen contrade and ends with the procession of the Palio banner which is displayed on a wooden “victory” wagon driven by white oxen that symbolizes the winning battle between Florence and Siena at Montaperti in 1260 (Figure 7 below). Next, the jockeys line up in an order determined by another lottery.
Everyone waits in the Piazza silently as they watch for the race to begin. After a few usual false starts, the official race commences as the jockeys run bareback around the Campo, whipping their opponents. The race takes about 90 seconds, and before all of the horses are finished running, the winner is met with screaming and crying contrada members reaching for the jockey that brought them victory, and the Palio banner that is now rightfully theirs. After the race, the winning contrada is able to have their flags up all
year long, showing everyone who is owner of the bragging rights, and in a sense the city (Figure 8). One member of the Onda contrada explained why the Oca was the only contrada with its flags out as we walked through the city:

The Oca have won the right to have their flags out, they have won bragging rights, so they are entitled to wave their flags, you can see the entrance of the contrada, they can have their flags out and they can keep their lanterns on and out throughout the course of the entire year, they own the city for the year after their Palio.—Emily, a member of the Onda contrada
During the four days of the Palio, all of the contrada members come together, working towards a win for themselves and a loss for their rival. Throughout this time there are dinners organized for hundreds of people, talks with other contrade to make alliances, and other preparations are made (often in secret) for the race. In these days,
anything can happen. It is like a time of war. One may be friends with someone in their rival contrada during the rest of the year, but during the days of the Palio, they do not speak, and they are not friends.

In these interview responses, we see the feelings about the most recent Palio race from a member of Torre contrada, and a member of Oca, the winner and rival of Torre:

No no, crying and angry. All the Palio are different. This year, I was angry, I was in my shop, watching in TV and then I ran to house and I was very sad. Very. Because Oca has been so lucky, very lucky. —Sabrina, a member of the Torre contrada

But it’s a real big big big and strong feelings, extreme feelings. And so sometimes we are angry without any reason because we are nervous…The bell sing for three hours for all the parade, and it’s a sound we have like the beating of the heart, and every single minute pass that we are going to the horse race we are getting excited and nervous at the same time cause it’s not the only thing, but it’s the most important, it’s the close. It’s the big moment the horse race, so we do really think, we do feel the moment. We don’t want to talk, I stay home for example but in complete silence…and every Palio has got different moment for example, I lose my sister last year and so during this Palio we won and I do really miss her much and much more than any other moment ok, cause the last one we were together and so while everyone was crying and laughing together and screaming I couldn’t even breathe cause you know it’s the first thought you have, people who are not here anymore, because you would like to have them cause it’s the perfect joy. It’s ecstasy. —Isabellina, a member of the Oca contrada

The Oca and Torre contrade have had a strong rivalry over the centuries. The Oca has also had a long history of elaborate pageantry, which they used in more recent years to anger their rival by having two elephants (symbol of the Torre) kneel at a large crowned goose (symbol of the Oca) in the Campo for the 1977 Palio win (Le Guide Al Grand Tour, 1991). The Oca is the most winning contrada, especially in the last century, which causes more pain for their rival, Torre, every time they produce another win. Oca’s
winning streak is said to be from luck, or the unluckiness of others. Irene, one of my interviewees, explained to me that she felt it was not only luck that helped Oca win, but political reasons. During the unification of Italy, or Risorgimento, political members used the Oca district as their meeting point. The contrada who used to be signified by green, white, and pink, then changed its colors to green, white, and red, to match the colors on the Italian flag (interview data). There is no proof however in any book that this was a contributing factor for Oca’s winning streak in terms of economic supplements for people who wanted a symbol of unified Italy to prevail, but oral histories have passed down this message. Saint Catherine, a patron saint of Europe, Italy, and the Oca contrada, is from the territory of the contrada and was a daughter of a cloth dyer (a traditional job for those in this district). The contrada still have the house she grew up in as a prized and pious possession in their district, and their religious connection and constant symbolic tributes to the saint may, for some, be the theory for their winnings (Figure 9).

Figure 9: The house of Saint Catherine. Photo by Megumi Takaku.
During the Palio, the territorialization of the city through symbols becomes even more obvious than normal. The streets are filled with contrada members wearing the fazzoletti (scarves) of their contrada. The ten participating contrade line their streets with flags and lanterns in the shape and color of their district. During the evenings, contrada members fill the streets, socializing and eating dinner. The most important night of the Palio happens the day before the race, when every contrade, including those not running, line their streets with tables and decorations for the cena della prova generale, or dinner of the prova generale (Figure 10). The ten participating contrade set up a table in the middle of the dinner where the elected members of the contrada sit with the jockey in a setting that is reminiscent of da Vinci’s ‘Last Supper.’ One informant from Siena, but not a part of a contrada, explained how the city is different during the days of the Palio and the rest of the year:

Yes, if a person from the world came to Siena in the Palio days, and then he returned after one year in the winter or spring, he meets two different towns. Yeah. The first he meet Siena in the middle age, with all the factions and the other you find a normal city, not so modern but human dimension is small and where to live is fun and easy.—Thomas, a non-contrada Sienese
The Piazza del Campo itself is a symbol of contrada territorial identity. During most of the year the Campo is ‘owned’ by all the contrade and Sienese. The night of the Palio, right after the race however, the piazza is suddenly filled with the winning contrada’s flags. On the high wall of the Palazzo Pubblico, only the winning contrada’s flag is left flying in the wind, showing ‘ownership’ of the space. The second time that the winning contrada gets to take over the city (in a sense) happens in the fall, when the elaborately organized feast takes place thanking the Madonna and horse for winning the
Palio. Usually, the contrada dinners are prepared by its members, but for such an event as this, the feast is generally catered so that everyone can relax and enjoy the moment. One informant said during our interview that one year an enemy of the winner was working the feast and gave many diners of their enemy contrada food poisoning.

A few of my informants said that the biggest change over the years in regards to the Palio has been the increase of expenses related to the festivities. The price paid for contrada dues has risen accordingly. The Palio days are very expensive, but of course, winning the race means lavish parties with no expense spared. The longer it has been between wins for a contrada, the more elaborate its celebrations will be. When Onda won their last Palio in 1995, they built a giant boat, in reference to their symbols the wave and dolphin, for the winner’s celebration that happens in the fall (Figure 11 below). Since nobles used to be the ones funding the district, it was a change when people had to use their own money for such events. So when a contrada with a small population wins, there is a large burden to create spectacular celebrations complete with symbols. Even if funds are limited because there are less people in the district, they are still willing to pay as winning “is the perfect joy, its ecstasy” (Isabella, Oca).
Tourists come into Siena in droves during the Palio days. They do not understand the intricacies of the contrade and Palio, and come to just see a lively horse race. Because of this, they can often get in the way and do things that are insulting to those who are members of the contrada. Most of the time however, the city is very accepting of tourists, as it is a good source of revenue for businesses and the Sienese love talking about the beauty of their city. But when a tourist performs a faux pas during the four days of the Palio, contrada members, in their frenzied state, will often be unforgiving. One informant, who sells contrada ribbons worn after a Palio win, shared a story of an interaction with some naïve tourist visiting for the race:

… First there is the family and the second thing is the contrada in life. So for example, two years ago, there was a couple here who bought two ribbons one the girl and one for the man. And they bought the owl and the unicorn, they are enemy, ok. And I don’t know why, it was Palio days… and I said “please, if one of these two contrada win, the other just take off the ribbon. Because I know you are going to the cathedral to get picture of the winner, that’s normal, but they are enemies, so if one of
the two won, it means the other got the biggest pain you can have in the Palio.” “Ok”
the day before…cause the Owl won. They were the nonna. They went to the duomo,
and they came here before and said thank you for the advice cause you know,
sometimes people watch the Palio on tv and think everything is fake just…for show.
But it’s a real big big big and strong feelings, extreme feelings.—Isabella, a member
of the Oca contrada

There are many layers to contrada life, and outsiders do not always understand these
intricacies. Yet all of these particularities help the contrada members reinforce their
identity day by day, creating a deep and life-long connection to their district. Non-
contrada members interviewed often used the word ‘crazy’ or ‘strange’ when describing
the contrade. They mentioned how loud they can be and find their excessive celebrations
after a Palio win to be distracting and annoying in the middle of the night, and cannot
understand why they honor a winning horse with such praise and fanaticism (Figure 12).

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1 Nonna literally means grandmother. It is the name given to the contrada that has gone the longest
without winning the Palio.
Tradition is a highly valued part of Siena’s culture, and a very important part of contrada life, both during the actual Palio and throughout the rest of the year. Rituals and traditions create an atmosphere of belongingness, maintain a sense of place, create shared memoires, and reinforce group identities (Hirabayachi, 2009; Kong and Yeoh, 1997). These activities are often filled with symbolism that work to reinforce one’s identity, as well as the collective identity, and Siena’s traditions exemplify this idea pointedly (Cartry, 1992; de Coppet, 2003; Pinnock, 1997; Platenkamp; 1992; Suter, Daas, and Bergen, 2008; Valdinoci, 2008). One important tradition is the *giro*, or walk through the city, with a company (group) in traditional contrada costumes, drums, and flags (Figure

Figure 12: The bridle of a winning Palio horse is encased in glass in a shop. Photo by author.
13 below). The contrada giro during their yearly saint’s day celebration, visiting the contrada that they are on friendly terms with (Consorzio per la Tutela del Palio di Siena, 2004). A portion of this company will also lead the procession during their representation in the Palio parade leading up to the race. An Onda woman explained the feelings she has for this tradition:

One of the most moving moments is when during the giro, the celebration, I wait at my window waiting for the people of my contrada, and they used to make a flag throw going to my window because during the giro, all the members of the company, which is the group of people with drums and flags, they go to every single member of contrada living in the center, and I wait for them at my window and then I go down and I am quite moved to have that. I think symbols are essential and my fasoletto (scarf), I am very attached to it, especially the one that was used for my baptism in the contrada and I am very attached to that even if now I use a newer one.—Maria, a member of the Onda contrada
Many informants also talked to me about the specific importance of oral traditions. Since the contrade have been around for hundreds of years, one really understands the value of storytelling when they hear how a Palio was won in the 1600s,
and what the rival contrada did to try to stop another contrada. One Oca interviewee described how oral histories are important to understanding past events in a more human form. For example, she explained how one can find the facts of a past Palio win in a book where in 1910, for example, this contrada won with ‘this horse and that jockey.’ However, the real stories, such as those remembering what happened eighty years ago at the church of the rival, are passed down through storytelling. For the contrada members, this is the real spirit of the Palio, retelling stories from generation to generation because “you don’t find the proper Palio on a book” (Oca informant).

Symbols related to superstitious feelings are quite a common sentiment in Siena. Every year, two highly acclaimed artists are chosen to each paint a Palio banner. When people gather to see the revealed banner for the first time, everyone looks to see if there is a sign indicating that their contrada will win it, and almost everyone sees some sort of connection to their district. My informant from the Oca contrada, who had just won the Palio, shared the symbols that she saw that made her think they were going to be the victor: With a group of seven to run in the race, they were the seventh in the order to be assigned a horse. On the backside of the Palio banner, where the outline of the painting was seen (much like the back of a thin canvas painting), there was an outline of a goose head, the symbol of the Oca. The contrada had just lost a young member, and there was a small mark on the back that was like his symbol.

Generally speaking, events like the Palio and the giro get the most publicity and are perhaps what is best known about Siena and its traditions. However, during my research I found that contrade identities are important to residents of Siena all year long.
In fact, if one looks closely at the city during times outside the days of the Palio or giro, symbols make it apparent that people are concerned to express their identity all year long. Therefore it is important to explore how symbolism is used in conjunction with Siena’s geography and identity.

*Symbols and Siena’s (Changing) Geography*

Siena is a complex city, its spaces filled with many different meanings and uses to different people. It is hard to find anyone in the city who does not love and use the Campo (main square), but as Agnew, Duncan, Cresswell, and Arantes highlight, these spaces have different meaning for varying groups, and among one place, different insiders and outsiders exist (Agnew and Duncan, 1989; Arantes, 1996; Cresswell, 1996). During one day, the Campo is a place for socializing with university friends during the evening or for a free concert. The next day, the space is used for a contrada feast day giro. The insiders and outsiders change in these scenarios, and at the same time can overlap as they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In this way, the campo is a symbol of the city that is always a part of shifting geography of meaning for those occupying its space.

Everyone I talked to told me how they loved the city of Siena. When I asked if they had a favorite part of the city, I got varying answers. Some in the contrade said that their territory was of course their favorite and to ask such a question was silly. Others however said they loved certain views or streets. All of the contrade members said that they do spend time in their contrada territory. They go to the society for gatherings or a certain bar for an espresso during the day or a drink at night (Figure 14 below). Some
informants shared with me that for them, walking into their district was like entering their home, and they instantly felt pride for the territory. For those who are forced to live outside the city walls, it is common to hear that when they arrive to the city center, the first place they will head is to their territory, no matter what the reason for entering the city. Though of course, many reasons for going into the center are for partaking in contrada activities or spending time in the socità, or contrada headquarters.

Figure 14: Inside the Onda bar where many contrada members enjoy an espresso and a conversation. The bar is decorated with the colors and symbols of the district, as seen by the large Onda shield on the wall. Photo by author.
In Siena, a person’s attachment to—and identity with—a particular contrada is accompanied by varying physical and emotional symbols. Displaying contrada symbols is a way for the members to show their dedication as well as to reinforce this strong identity connection. In the same way, traditions are used to remember the past and to continue the ideals of the contrada into the present and future. As mentioned in a previous chapter, people use territorial and personalized cultural markers to help define and legitimize their identity in spaces that may, or may not, be theirs (Benedict and Kent, 2004; Cresswell, 2004). This concept is a very important one in Siena both inside and outside the city’s walls. In each district, the contrada have various symbols throughout their territory. Flags and contrada colored lights can be found within their territory, and other pictures and symbols of the contrada can be found within shops and restaurants within the territory as well, demarcating the ownership of that place. Street entrances have ceramic placards on the walls to signify which contrada the street belongs to. Sometimes, a street is cut down the middle, with one contrada owning a half and another contrada the other half, and so placards are a way to show this to demarcate the territory (Figure 15 below). There are also metal framed, glass cased announcements embossed with the contrada symbol throughout the districts, notifying the members of upcoming events, or displaying an image of a past Palio win to relive the moment (Figures 16, 17). Sometimes the contrada even makes poster sized announcements for the city bulletin boards to make additional and important messages assured to be seen by everyone.

During the winter, many contrada placed Christmas trees decorated in the contrada’s
colors within their territories, in both the streets and within their headquarters (Figures 18, 19).

Figure 15: Placard showing Bruco ownership. Photo by author.
Figure 16: An old poster fixated with tape the color of the district and highlighting a past Palio win. Photo by author.
Figure 17: A large mural showing Torre winning the Palio is hung in a restaurant owned by a Torre member and filled with symbols of the district. Photo by author.
Figure 18: Bruco Christmas tree made with barberi and lights colored in the green and yellow colors of the district, and topped with a metal caterpillar. Photo by author.
Graffiti found in a community is often also a symbolic expression of territorial identity as well as a claim of ownership for that space (Brighenti, 2010; Carrington, 2009; Ley and Cybriwsky; 1974; Macdonald, 2003; Miklavcic, 2008; Reisner; 1971). It was somewhat surprising to me that I did not find more graffiti within the territories of the contrada, but I suppose marking the territory unlawfully to show ownership is not necessary in this case as there are already so many symbols and territorial makers built into the city that clearly show the ownership of each street and square. It was interesting to note that some graffiti that I documented two years prior to my most recent visit was still there in the Onda district, highlighting the greatest of the contrada (in their opinion).
in blue and white spray paint (Figure 20). This fascinated me as the contrada always ensure that their district is well maintained. You will never find walls covered in other forms of graffiti here, because if it were present, the district would immediately remove it. Because this Onda “tag” is positive and reinforcing the identity of those who belong in the district, and since it is on the wall of an Onda owned building, it is allowed to remain. In fact, I think it had been repainted to touch up the fading image to make sure that it is visible to everyone. Other graffiti I have seen has been made with less permanent substances. For example, people of different contrade drew an image in chalk of the Selva symbol with “for Selva with love” written underneath and surrounded by a snail and turtle (two other contrade) (Figure 21). Since it was made with a temporary substance (chalk) and was a positive message, nobody felt the need to wash the graffiti off of the wall. I also found some owls painted in the Civetta (Owl) territory that at first glance appeared to be graffiti, but instead are classified as ‘decorations’ above their società door (Figure 22).
Figure 20: Graffiti in the Onda territory praising the contrada, saying “Make way for Onda”. Photo by author.
Figure 21: Graffiti dedicated to the Selva (Forest) contrada, “To Selva with love.” Photo by author.
Symbols Help Maintain Contrade Identity in the Face of Siena’s Changing Geography

Aspects of communities naturally change over time, even if the symbols and traditions of these groups remain mostly the same. For Siena, the changing economy and city structure has reorganized the city’s physical and social geography. With the rising prices of property inside the city walls, not all contrada members are living within their territories. Because of this, they are no longer able to spend all their free time in the territory. Symbols allow people to move beyond the contrada territory while still
demonstrating—and feeling connected to—their contrada identity. Marie explains how this is important in keeping a living, and ever changing, society reminded of their values:

Also this is a living community so it is impossible to think nothing changes. I think actually that contrada has to change to survive in different settings, I think that what’s important is that the feelings and ideas and the values of the contrada remains the same but of course the ways that they express that actually have to change because all the society is evolving. —Maria a member of the Onda contrada

Looking inside personal homes, one will see references to the contrada in different ways. Some contrada members will describe their home as a museum, filled with anything and everything of the contrada, allowing them to feel connected to the district even when they are not able to be there. This includes images of the contrada animals, flags, drums, and scarves of the contrada, barbari (balls decorated with the contrada colors, used to play Palio by children, Figure 23) and photos of past Palio wins. Other members take a more subtle approach, and only have a few items, and perhaps the color scheme of the contrada as a focus for the décor. One interviewee told me that when she moved to a new apartment, her first priority was to make sure she had a place to hang her contrada flag:

I live in the city center, I like dolphins of course. I have one flag of my contrada. And when I moved from my parent’s house the first things I wanted to be sure to have in my new house was the instrument you use to put the flag outside on the wall hahaha. When I moved, I actually checked that, that everything was ready for that (all laughing). I didn’t have the table for my kitchen but I had that to put my flags outside in case of victory or for the celebration of the contrada we have, every contrada has a celebration day, I wanted to be sure I was ready for our celebration day which is the last Sunday in June. The Sunday before the Palio.— Maria, a member of the Onda contrada
Figure 23: Although barberi are used for kids to play the Palio, they are also used by adults for decorations. Photo by author.

For people who live outside the city center, filling their home with these symbols is a way to help maintain the connection with their contrada. There are many artists in the city that create different contrada related items for the home such as Christmas decorations, ceramics, paintings, and knickknacks (Figures 24, 25, 26). These types of items are bought by contrada members who live in the city as well as those who live outside of it as a way to bring the contrada territory into their home. Since they cannot be in the territory of their district all of the time, they create their own territory in the home and through the home. For example, during the days of the Palio, saint’s day celebrations,
or victory, the home itself turns into the container for representing this identity through the act of displaying the contrada flag outside a window or on a porch during these important and highly emotional events. A member of the Onda, who lived outside the city center, told me that his home was covered with dolphins, the symbol of his contrada.

I have a lot of symbols in my house haha. More and more dolphins. Two flags and a big picture of a dolphin. And the cap of the jockey. Some shirts, but very very, a lot of dolphins. Pictures...haha my house is full of the Onda. I put the rest of my flags out always. Hahaha Also during the Palio, I live about 20 kilometers from here, but during the Palio or when the Onda gira, in citta, I put my flags on the window, always.— Giuseppe, a member of the Onda contrada

Figure 24: Some Christmas ornaments in the contrada colors hang above this Ram member selling funny signs about the contrada. Photo by author.
Figure 25: This artist from the Torre (Tower) hand paints all of the ceramics in shop, which can be found in many contrada homes and contrada owned shops. Photo by author.
Contrada members living in another contrada territory can only have their flag out during their patron saint celebrations and fifteen days after a Palio victory. However, this does not apply to people living outside the city center, as they are able to display flags and symbols of their contrada whenever they wish. In fact, the guidelines pertaining to rituals and symbols within the city say that “the Contrade cannot affix distinctive symbols outside of its territory” (Consorzio per la Tutela del Palio di Siena, 2004). And even for those that live within their own territory, there is a protocol for when flags and lanterns are displayed in the streets. Because there are so many specifications of when and where
people can have their contrada symbols displayed on the outsides of their homes in the city, showcasing symbols inside the home becomes even more important.

*Symbols and Identity through the Stages of Everyday Life in Siena*

In order to understand the relationship between symbols, place, and identities in Siena, I first had to fully understand the contrade system and how people felt about these groups. When interviewing people about this, I learned of the deep connection they have with their contrada and Siena. For them, Siena is a special place, unlike any other city in the world. Their connection to place is in fact so extensive that contrada identity begins at birth and does not stop with death. Symbols are used throughout the life and death of Sienese people to demonstrate their convictions of their territorial identities.

*From Birth to Death*

A contrada member has a special bond with their district that starts before they are even born when the mother and family sings contrada songs to the baby in the womb. This is the start of one’s contrada identity, and it grows throughout their lifetime. Once one is born into the contrada, they are part of the group for life, even if they move outside the walls of the city, or abroad. Symbols surround these important life events. When a child is born into a contrada, the district will place a flag with a blue or pink ribbon in the territory (Figure 27). One Onda man explained his connection to me:

I was born here, in this street (via dupre) and I feel it’s something like an identity because you identify yourself with the community. Now I live outside of Siena, for me it’s very important to go in the contrada to speak about the Palio or to see other persons in my contrada.—Giuseppe, a man of the Onda contrada
For Giuseppe, returning back to the territory of his contrada is a way to reconnect with the identity that he feels he was born into. During my interviews, my informants from the contrada all felt it was important to explain how the contrada has changed during their lifetime, as well as their parents’ lifetime. Forty years ago, it would have been unthinkable to have a child while living in one contrada territory, such as the Oca, and baptize them into the Onda. This was because contrada identity was so tied to the physical territory, so if you were born while living in the Oca district, you would be a
member of the Oca contrada. Historically, people were literally born on the land of their contrada territory through a homebirth. When the modern hospital was built, people felt that this would mean everyone would be a part of the contrada where the hospital was located. One informant told me that because of this, family members would bring in dirt from their territory to put under the mother when she was giving birth. As this was not very sanitary, the contrada switched to the baptisms that are now used. Today, it is more common for people to choose which contrada their baby is baptized into. One informant of the Onda had her baby while living in Nicchio’s territory. However, she chose to have her baby baptized in her contrada because she was not a part of the Nicchio community. Doing this ensured she could help facilitate play dates and friendships within the community in which she already knew everyone. Parents have to plan which district their children will be a part of as a couple may not be part of the same contrada or live in the territory of one district. One person told me that when a woman is pregnant, the first question is not about the gender, but about what contrada they would be baptized in as people are very curious to know if they will have a new member in their extended contrada family.

Oral traditions are an important part of growing up in the contrada. They are used to pass stories and songs of the contrada from one generation to the next. As one informant explained, children tend to imitate adults, so when they hear the older generations singing the songs of the contrada at dinner or during the Palio, they want to learn the words to join in. Grandparents often work to teach the youth the words, as parents will even start to sing the contrada songs to their baby when they are still in the
womb. Other traditions quickly passed down to the children revolve around being part of the company\(^2\). Since children love to beat on items and make noise, contrada drums (decorated with symbols) representing the real ones used in the company are a very popular toy, as well as the contrada flags. One of the first toys given to children is a set of wooden balls called barberi that are painted to represent the different contrada. These are used to play a game that emulates the Palio. Children have been known to identify these balls by contrada name earlier than by the colors as they are so used to being around the symbols of the districts. So from a very young age, the children learn to appreciate the drum, flag, and symbol of their contrada, and look forward to seeing the older contrada members using these items in the company giro (Figures 28-34). Through different stages in their life, they are able to be a part of the giro procession, starting when they are toddlers being pushed by their parents. Once they are older, children can wear the costumes and carry a flag or drum if they prove that they have the skill for the task. Once boys become young and talented drummers or flag twirlers, they become the leaders in the company. Even in old age, there are places for members of the contrada to take part in their giro procession. Contrada members find any opportunity to be a part of the company as wearing the historical costumes is seen as a great place of honor.

\(^2\) The group that makes up the giro, wearing historical costumes, playing drums, and waving flags.
Figures 28-31: From clockwise at the top, Figure 28 A: Bruco parents parade their babies in their first giro. Figure 29 B: Bruco children practicing flag throwing in the Campo so that one day they can be in the parade. Figure 30 C: Young boys line the church on Onda with drums during their giro. Figure 31 D: A young boy is in the parade as a flag carrier.
Figures 32-34: From clockwise at the top, Figure 32 A: Bruco men line the Campo with the flag of the contrada. Figure 33 B: Bruco men in the procession. Figure 34 C: An old man has the honor of carrying the historic flag of the contrada.
The contrada members feel a strong emotional loyalty to their land. Nostrand and Estaville (2001) highlight the importance of homelands in relation to identity. Their definition fits well in the landscape of Siena and the contrade system as they are defined by a geographical border and members feel a strong sense of belonging to that space (Nostrand and Eastaville, 2001). In a newsletter given to me by the Torre contrada, the district asked the young members, who were just becoming adults, to answer the following questionnaire (Contrada della Torre newsletter, 2009): 1. What is the tower (Torre contrada) for you, now that you've become an adult? 2. Is there a role or position that you'd like to have within the Contrada in the future? 3. What is the most beautiful memory of your youth group? The responses given were all very similar; that the contrada meant even more to the youngsters now that they were turning 18 and growing up. Several said that they felt like it would be a bigger part of their life and that they should take more responsibility in the contrada. Many of the women said that they would like to be in charge of the children’s group in the future, while the men said they would like to be the head of the district in charge of the Palio, or in another officer position. The memories that they listed mostly talked about dinners and events when their age group spent time together in the district. The contrada members feel so attached to their territory and those in it that they feel it is like a family as well as a home (for other examples see Antonsich, 2010; Kyle, Graefe, Manning and Bacon, 2004; Kyle, Mowen and Tarrant, 2004).

These people spend lots of time and energy helping their fellow contrada members in any way that they can. Many contrada members have different roles to
contribute their specific skills in order to maintain the district. Youth may help clean the district or help set up and serve meals during gatherings. Older youth will volunteer a few days out of every month to help run the contrada bar which sells food, candy, and drinks to help fund the district. Other people help to maintain the website, write the newsletter, give tours in the museum, help maintain the costumes, drums, flags, buildings, and other contrada owned items. One informant has the job of being in charge of Drago’s children group, the little dragons. Some of his activities involve organizing interactions with other contrada youths, and helping to teach the youth what it means to be a part of a contrada and how to love their district as well as how to respect and understand the others, including their rivals.

Just as one is part of the contrada upon birth and throughout life, the contrada recognizes membership even after death. Roberto explained that when a member of the contrada passes away, the district will place a contrada flag topped with a black ribbon in the territory, and everyone who comes into the district will go and ask who had passed if they have not already heard.

When there is person of a contrada who die, contrada hang a flag with black ribbon and the people who go to contrada ask ‘who is’ and after, there is a street where the names of people and the contrada pay for, and people arrive at the funeral and a man dressed with the color of contrada with a flag with black ribbon at the funeral, because the contrada went from when you’re were born to the death. From the beginning of the life to the finish of the life.—Roberto, a member of the Tartuca contrada

The funerals of contrada members often have the majority of their mourners from their district. The contrada comes together to share the loss and help those most affected by the mourning process. It is quite common for people to have their contrada symbol
and colors incorporated into their funeral service and on their tombstone (Figure 35).

Remembering those who passed is important in the contrade (Figure 36). Some informants told me that during the giro, the company will go to the graveyard and have a moment of remembrance, accented with a symbolic twirl and toss of the flags. When a contrada wins the Palio, people often think of those that are no longer with them, wishing that they were there to share in this moment of perfect joy. One Onda women shared her feelings with me about what she wanted to happen upon her death:

To be in the church, to have the funeral in the church. This is what I think also. I asked my boyfriend, my family, if something happen to me, I want to have my funeral service in the church of my contrada, and I want to have the flag of my contrada on my coffin, and I think probably it is very important when there is a funeral of a member of the contrada, the last symbol you see, when people go out of the church with the coffin on their shoulder, they will lift the coffin towards this street (via dupre) and the symbol means that now we will help you have a look at your contrada for your last travel before you leave definitely this earth, which is very moving.—Maria, a member of the Onda contrada.
Figure 35: A placard of the Bruco contrada on a gravestone. Photo from RAI, Oltre il tempo, 1998.
Symbols on the Body

People of the contrada often wear the colors of their district, jewelry and other accessories of their contrada animal (Figures 37, 38, 39). They are often drawn to purchasing items that remind them of their district and deter from buying items that remind them of their rival. A member of the Onda contrada told me about the significance of color when it came to clothing worn in the district:

One time my father went to the bar of Onda with a red sweater the color of Torre. And everyone say (swearwords) A scifo! Yes we have many problems haha. Sometimes it’s dramatic, especially in the period of Palio. No one wear something red. No one. But not only in Onda. Nicchio they have t-shirts, skirts everything with the shell. Many people in the contrada have bracelets, necklaces everything. It’s like when you buy a present, and you know the person who receives this
present is of Nicchio, you think of the colors, if you have two things you pick the blue because you think they like the things of this color. Yes we have problems. Serious problems.—Irene, a member of the Onda contrada

In this instance, Irene’s father was met with friendly ridicule because he was wearing the color of Onda’s rival and was in Onda’s bar, the most popular hangout spot for contrada members outside their headquarters. Irene expresses that buying and wearing items based on color or symbolism is likely viewed as a problem, or silly, for outsiders. But partaking in this action perpetuates the sense of belongingness that the contrada members feel towards their district and the other people inside of it. Another informant, Alexander, informed me that some people of Siena are so attached to the contrada that if someone gives them a present of their rival’s color or symbol, it is considered a bad or unlucky sign.

During the saint’s week celebration, as well as the days of the Palio, contrada members wear their fazzoletto, allowing everyone to quickly identify which contrada they belong to. There are two special items that people get to wear after their contrada wins the Palio. The first is the pacifier. When shopping, one interviewee found a pacifier that was green, white, and red, and as this is what people wear after a victory to show their rebirth (in contrast to the nonna, which literally means grandmother—it is the name given to the contrada who has gone the longest without winning the Palio). She felt it was a sign that Oca would win the Palio and so she bought it. The second item that the winner wears for the year after a win is a handmade ribbon in the color of their contrada (Figure 40). As this item is more innocuously affixed to a wardrobe than the pacifier, it is worn more commonly after the initial weeks following the Palio win. Some people even wear
the same clothes for every Palio, or do the same routine that they did when they won in the past because they feel these symbolic actions are connected to their fate.

Figure 37: A gold ring of a dragon worn by a member of the Drago. Photo by author.
Figure 38: Beaded symbols of the Oca (goose) attached to a cell phone. Photo by author.
Figure 39: Keychains in the shape of the barberi. Photo by author.
Figure 40: This Oca women makes the traditional ribbon worn after a contrada wins the Palio. She is happy to wear one as Oca won the last race. Photo by author.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Any travel book will highlight Siena as the city impassioned by its fast-paced Palio horserace. During the summer, people are indeed very emotional and in those moments, the Palio is very important. No matter how emotional and irrational people get during the four days of the Palio, however, the race does not define their life; it is a game. The Palio should be considered instead by outsiders as an event that is looked forward to all year long by all members of the contrade system, much like many Christians look forward to Christmas traditions. As interviewees said to me during my research, the contrada is NOT the Palio; it is rather an enduring community and a family.

Every life stage is celebrated through the contrada as it is a strong part of their identity. One is born into the contrada. Children are taught how to behave, how to celebrate, how to mourn, how to respect the city, and most of all respect their rival contrada. They learn these behaviors by playing with toy drums and flags so that when they are older they can take part in the historic procession. When a couple gets married, a page dressed in the historic costume of the contrada is there, presenting flowers to the new bride. Finally, people die as members of their district. In this way, the contrada shapes the entire life of the person, just as much as the person creates and shapes their district through activities including the Palio. My research findings tell me that symbols are used throughout all of these life events of contrade members to demonstrate their ongoing allegiance to their district.

When I first visited Siena, I walked into the main square of the city and immediately felt that it was a unique and important place for residents. I happened to see
the city in the summer, just days before the Palio. This is when the city was most
animated. I saw firsthand the deep connection people had to their district and their fellow
contrada members as well as the strong rivalries between contrade. Siena was alive with
symbols and bright colors representing all of the different districts that demonstrated the
passion and pageantry of the city and its people.

Contrade symbolism is most evident in the summertime leading up the Palio. However, my second visit to Siena during the wintertime for this research project allowed me to see that the contrade system and its symbols are important every day of the year. Symbols and contrade colors were not as visible in the landscape during my last visit in December; someone who is not familiar with the symbols of the contrada may not have seen them at all. However, animals and color schemes of the different districts were still present in the landscape when I looked closely. Walking in restaurants I often saw small ceramic figurines of animals, such as an elephant or porcupine that showed the owner or staff of the establishment belonged to Torre or Istrice. And although the flags and lights were not out in the streets, there were still markers on the physical landscape that defined this. I only needed to look at the walls to see the posters, bulletin boards, pictures of past Palio wins, and flowers of the contrada colors around the picture of the Virgin Mary. Contrada fountains, churches, and headquarters also signify districts—one just needs to look close enough to see the subtle symbols, such as a giraffe carved into a wall.

Many of the contrada members have to live outside of their contrada territories since it is expensive to live within the city center today. Because of this, the home and the body have also become containers for displaying the symbols of the contrada and for
making people feel connected to their districts even when they are not able to physically be in their territory. Many contrada homes have pictures and trinkets of their contrada animal or symbols within their home. The contrada flags and fazzoletto (scarf) given to members at birth are some of the most treasured items in the home and are displayed during the Palio and other celebrations throughout the rest of the year to signify which contrada they belong to. It is common to see people wearing symbolic forms of jewelry that relate to their contrada. When I met new people, I often saw rings, necklaces, bracelets, or earrings that indicated which contrada they belonged to. My contacts in the Onda contrada always seemed to be wearing shades of light blue, and when I went to their Christmas dinner, I did not see a single person in holiday red as it is similar to the color of their rival contrada!

Geographers often discuss how people shape their environments, communities, and culture. However, my findings show that a part of the cultural environment, in this case symbols, help to influence and reinforce the identities of the contrada members, too. These symbols are hundreds of years old, and have been ingrained into the landscape of the city long before any of the living contrada members in the city were born. From generation to generation, messages of how to act and how to live as a contrada member have been passed down in tandem with the symbols that define each district. The symbols such as the fazzoletto scarf given at birth encompass the meaning of the contrada, and thus help to shape the identity of the infant recipient. People tell the stories, but the symbols give the story meaning and context despite changing times and changing geographies in and around Siena. In a sense, it is a reciprocal relationship with the people
and the environment both helping to shape one another. This concept of place working to influence identity is not explicitly discussed in geography literature, and Siena lends itself as the perfect case study to explore this complex relationship.

**Limitations of This Study Provide Directions for Future Research**

I focused my qualitative research on Onda, Oca, and Torre to gain knowledge of the intricate relationships between rivals and allies, instead of trying to gain access to all of the seventeen contrade. I gathered the most in-depth data from the Onda contrada as I have spent most of my time immersed in their territory and society. Through my time spent with the Onda contrada I was able to see an intimate side of the contrada that most outsiders are not privileged to experience. With them I enjoyed dinners, the Palio, and various other social gatherings. While I may have been able to learn more about all seventeen of the other contrade had I not spent the majority of my time with the Onda, I would not have gathered the in-depth knowledge about contrada life if I took such an approach. This is especially the case given my short time frame to conduct research in the field.

Much more time spent with more of the contrade would likely lead to more in-depth research. In particular I found that there is a very strong connection between the contrada members and their community, and further research should be conducted to explore this relationship. Many of my informants mentioned that the contrada often help those in their district when they are in need. A narrative that came up a few times was about teenagers that developed a drug or drinking problem, often after starting University and being around non-contrada people. The stories always ended the same way, with
people of the district coming together to address the problem to help the young person through their addiction. Other informants said that problems like this do not often happen, or when they do, they resolve quickly because people are always surrounded by a support group, where elders are always talking to the young about traditions and the right way to live as a contrada member. My interviewees told me that the contrada helps other members of their district in any way that they can. One person explained that when a child collapsed because of a hole in his heart, the contrada pulled together to fly the child to a hospital to have the needed operation performed. They mentioned to me that when someone has a problem with finances, the contrada will be there to assist. One interviewee, Matteo from the Bruco contrada, also explained how important friendships are in the contrada, and how important the sense of community is for those that are a part of the district:

Yes, you should also consider that your friends you have in the contrada usually help you in case of need…it’s a friendship that was actually born in the contrada but develops everywhere I mean. So it’s very beautiful. One thing I would like to say, I understood the real value of a contrada in case of a mourning. It wasn’t mine actually, but it was a friends of mines mother that died of cancer very early actually, but all the contrada members were very close to them were actually sharing their pain, and I’m using this word, because it’s like this, they were literally sharing the…their pain, and they tried to be as close as they could to them in the months after the mourning to help them react to his tragedy, because it was actually a tragedy. But anyway you can understand the real value of the contrada when in need of someone that could help you morally I mean. And often you receive the more help by the people with whom you may have discussed with in the last few months because of various reason. That’s, and that’s just because you are all belonging to the same contrada, so it’s very beautiful, it’s not common in 2011.

Matteo shares how the bond within the contrada produces the strongest personal relationships, something he finds missing in the rest of life outside of the district.
Belonging to the contrada means having a large group of people as a support group, a symbolic family, as everyone is connected through the shared memberships and ideologies of the district.

This intense connection demonstrated through acts of kindness is something that could be further researched in the context of national identity, and in particular to understand ethnic groups’ attachment to place. The scalar aspect of this research is perhaps what fascinated me the most. Anyone studying identity has read about state, national, and ethnic and nationalist identities. Siena, however, is a unique case study on a very small scale that proves that identities expressed through symbols matter at every scale. A Sienese has a sort of nested, complex set of identities— including being a part of their contrada, a Sienese, a Tuscan, an Italian, and a European. This research did not go into the deeper intricacies of how all of these identities are important and displayed in different ways and moments throughout life in Siena. With this in mind, further research could be done to explore these complicated levels of identity, and could perhaps be used to help explore the tensions often found in conflicts between varying nationalities or ethnic groups at much larger scales. Understanding a group’s culture and its identities is important in cultivating a deeper understanding of what compels a group of people’s attachment to each other through place and its construction via symbols. Future research on power relationships in Siena could also be conducted in order to see the political aspects that help construct the dynamics of the city. For example, my researched found some specific gender roles in the contrada system. Further understanding the roles
gender, age, or social statues may have on the contrada could provide interesting results on their relationship in producing specific contrada identities.

In summary, symbols are an important part of the life of contrade members starting at birth and continue to be an important role in their lives as they grow. Symbols follow them through every major life event as well as the everyday events which help the fellow members define who they are in the multifaceted territories of Siena, Tuscany, Italy, and Europe. The strong connection to place in Siena and the way that events and symbols are incorporated into everyday contrade life is unique to this city. However, there are many more layers beneath the surface of the symbols yet to be investigated. The nested identities of the Sienese and the complex relationship between contrade communities are worth studying further to explore deeper relationships between people and their actions and feelings toward place. This study can also serve as an example that can be compared to future investigations of other places where symbols are an important part of the identity landscape.
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APPENDIX A

Glossary/Definition of Terms

Barberi: Balls decorated with the contrada colors, used by kids to play Palio. Also used for decorations to symbolize the Palio.

Capitano: The elected head of the contrada during the days of the Palio.

Cena della prove generale: Large dinner the night before the Palio.

Contrada(e): Territorial ward(s) in Siena.

Contradaioli: Members of a contrada.

Duomo: The main church of the city.

Fasoletto(i): The scarf worn by the Contradaioli during special events and the Palio, depicting the contrada symbol and colors.

Giro: A word used as to describe a walk around, for Siena, refers to the procession made by the contrada during events like their saint day celebration.

Palio: The horse race that happens twice a year on July 2nd and August 16th. The Palio is also what the banner is called that the winning contrada of the race receives.

Piazza(e): Square(s).

Piazza del Campo: The main piazza of the city. One of two areas that belongings to none of the contrada but to everyone. Where the Palio takes place.

Piore: Elected head of the contrada during the year but during the days of the Palio.

Società: Contrada headquarters/club where people of the district spend time together.

Terzo: The name for the three divisions of the city.
APPENDIX B

ENGLISH VERSION

Interview Questions

• Are you a member of a contrada? If yes, which one?

• How do you feel about the contrade?

• What are the purpose of the contrada?
  (b) Do you have a specific role in the contrada? (If informant is a member of one)

• Do you live or work within the city walls of Siena? Where?

• If you live outside the walls of Siena, how do you maintain and represent your contrada identity?
  (b) How do others do the same?

• Can you tell me about contrada symbols and monuments that are in the city?

• What are the most important symbols of the city?
  (b) How do they relate to your contrada, if you are a member of one?

• Do you feel that art is an important element in contrada identities?
  (b) Is art used to demarcate zones within the city?
  (c) Are any symbols used to demarcate zones in the city?

• Can you draw a map of Siena, highlighting the best and worst parts of the city?
  (b) Why did you label this portion as best/worst?

• How do you transfer the knowledge of the contrada to future generations?
Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Changing Geographies: Landscape and Symbols of Siena, Italy

Researchers: Mia DeNardi

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done to understand how symbols distributed through the urban landscape such as flags, graffiti, and monuments, are used to construct, define, and spread the enduring identity of the people who live in Siena’s seventeen contrade.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview(s).

Your participation in the study is optional, and will last the duration of the interview (roughly 45 minutes long) and any follow up interviews that take place. You can stop participating whenever you wish with no penalty. Interviews will last roughly one hour.

Risks and Discomforts
No risks or discomforts are anticipated.

Benefits

This study is important to science/society because it will help to answer the question on how place works to construct identity and ideologies. This research will help to fill the gap in working to understand the connected relationships between identity and place.

You may not benefit, personally by participating in this study.

Confidentiality and Records

Information collected during interviews will be kept confidential through a password protected computer. In addition, I will keep all written information to myself and my advisor, and the material will be secured in my personal apartment or locked in my office desk.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;
Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact:
Researcher:
Mia DeNardi
(330)-771-2001 (US country code 001)
email: md134610@ohio.edu

Advisor:
Dr. Harold Perkins
(740)-593-9896 (US country code 001)
Email: perkinsh@ohio.edu

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:
• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
• you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
• you are 18 years of age or older
• your participation in this research is completely voluntary
• you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_________________________________________ Date _________

Printed Name_________________________________________

Version Date: [05/15/2011]
Electronic signature is used in place of ink.