

Egregio dottore Leone,

Ho letto le risposte dei numerosi sostenitori di Derek e Jehnny (scusatemi ma non conosco i loro cognomi). Da tutti gli indizi, sembra essere chiarissimo che si tratti di un abuso non solo delle leggi, ma anche dei diritti degli altri proprietari della vicinanza. Le difese sono basate sull'unico fatto (che non vorrei negare) che questi due signori sono persone simpaticissime, belle, perfino adorabili. Forse ricorderete un bellissimo film "Il processo di Frine" (1951), con una memorabile interpretazione di Vittorio De Sica, avvocato di Gina Lollobrigida imputata per aver ucciso la suocera. L'avvocato ammette che la sua cliente è chiaramente colpevole, ma poi, con una strepitosa arringa, fa assolvere la bellissima popolana solo perché dotata di una bellezza mozzafiato.

(Il film si trova anche su YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rkxU9VZCiE>)

A tutti questi difensori vorrei porgere una domanda. Fate parte di una società dove ci sono regole e norme di legge? Siete nell'Italia del ventunesimo secolo o siete davanti all'Areopago di Atene intorno alla metà del IV secolo a.C.?

Se mi permette, Dottore, vorrei continuare in lingua inglese non solo perché non sono un Vladimir Nabokov, capace di scrivere ugualmente bene in due lingue, ma cosicché anche i miei numerosi parenti Australiani, Derek e Jeheny, John Kaisner, i loro amici, i loro sostenitori e i loro clienti che vengono dall'estero a visitare la loro "Villa Libertà", potranno capire meglio le mie risposte dettagliate.

Our ancestors were among the original settlers who came to Panarea from Lipari. We trace our origins back as far as the siege of 1544 and beyond. No one should be heard to suggest that we should not have a voice when it comes to expressing an opinion about what is our legitimate patrimony.

My personal interest in the archaeological discoveries on the Milazzese began almost sixty years ago and has never waned. I have developed the highest respect for all the scholars who have contributed to our knowledge of the culture and history of the Aeolian Islands. We are all very fortunate to have the benefit of the work done by the Centro Studi and its contributors. In particular, we owe the highest respect for the work done by Luigi Bernabò Brea and Madeleine Cavalier in documenting their discoveries at the Milazzese. There is no doubt that more artefacts and evidence of the life and culture of the people that inhabited this site thousands of years ago may still be waiting to be uncovered.

I wrote to you raising issues relating to the degradation of a heritage site. I did so not only as an Italian citizen (which I am), but also as a person from overseas concerned about whether private individuals should be in control of and allowed to wilfully modify the environment in an area that should be under the control and supervision of a public authority.

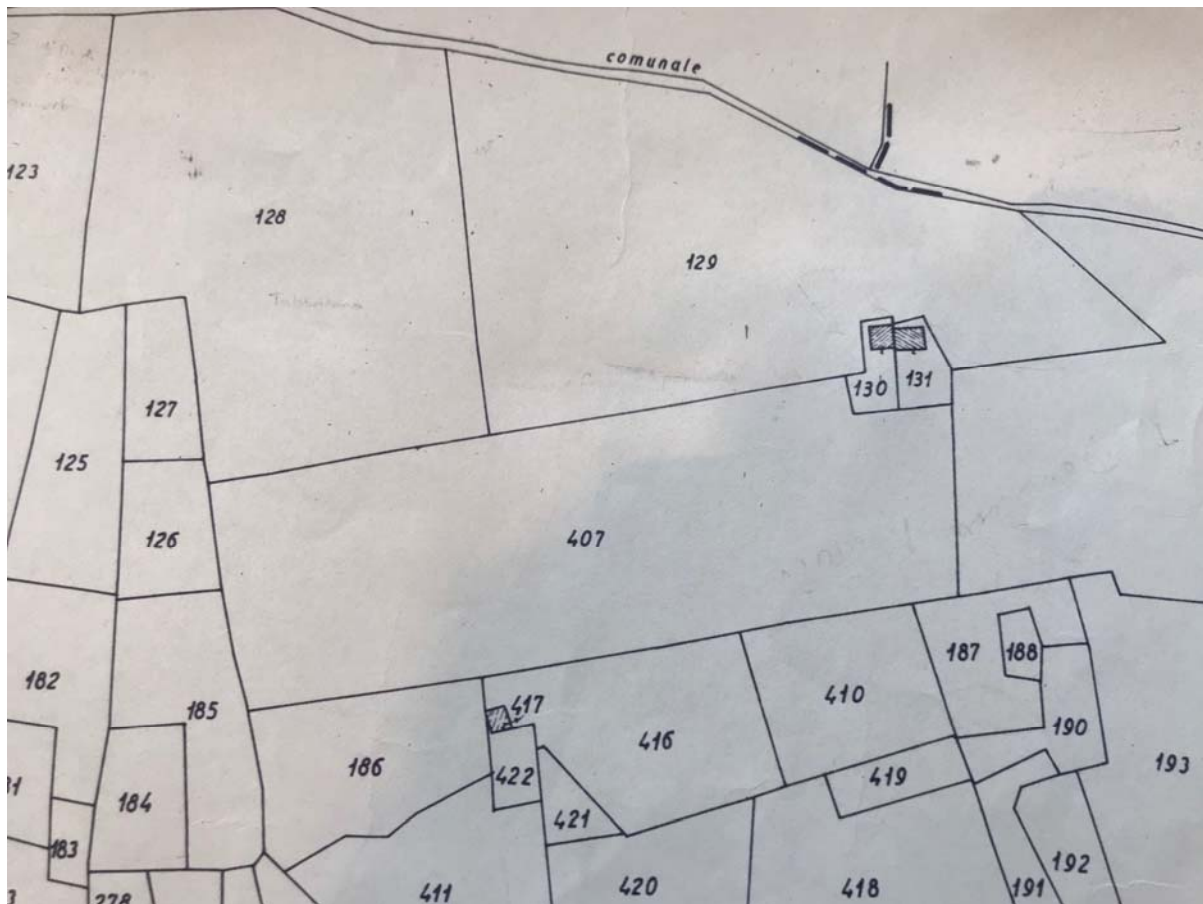
I shall refer to some of the published comments in response to my letter. Comparing Derek to me, Lorenzo Vielmo wrote: "We of Panarea firmly believe that he is less foreign than you are." To quote Dogberry, Shakespeare's comic character in Much Ado About Nothing, "comparisons are odorous". Even the most venal

inhabitant of Panarea should realise that the tourist dollars of the “Panaradisi” of the diaspora should be worth more than those of the casual tourist. We are not foreigners. We have a habit of coming back time and time again. Two of my great-grandparents lie buried in the cemetery.



Another great-grandparent who died before the outbreak of the Spanish flu in 1919 lies interred below the nave of the old church. Like it or not, Signor Vielmo, our children and grandchildren will keep coming back to visit the island of their ancestors. Dogberry was right. Your comparison stinks.

Below is a photograph of part of Foglio 18- Sezione di Panarea./



It depicts the same area that I photographed from the Google Earth satellite imagery.

Lots (particelle) 130 and 131 and the adjoining larger vacant lots belong to our extended family.

The structures on lots 130 and 131 are falling to ruin. Those ruins should be of no commercial value to any honest person who respects the spirit of the law prohibiting building work in an archaeological heritage area. It should be remembered that at the time these structures were erected, one hundred and fifty years ago or more, no one was aware of the archaeological importance of the area.

As your readers are aware, the owners of lots 130 and 131 are so mindful of the archaeological importance of the Milazzese, that a majority of them are now in agreement that the best way to prevent anyone from "restoring" it for their own use and enjoyment, is to donate it to a responsible organisation capable of protecting the environment.

The ruins on our land and the tiny uninhabitable ruin on Lot 417 were the only two structures to be found on the Milazzese.

The substantial evidence that has now come to light since I first wrote to you, leaves absolutely no doubt that what was a tiny uninhabitable ruin on Lot 417 (less than 2 m x 3m) has been gradually expanded and converted into a habitation, and that the

surrounding land has been unlawfully developed in a way that desecrates this precious archaeological site.

As your readers have been told, we are prepared to donate our holding to a responsible organisation capable of protecting the environment, such as the Fondo Ambiente Italiano. We look for no financial gain, but we want to be sure that the property will be owned and controlled by an entity that will not allow our ruins to be exploited for the purpose of any sort of habitation. There would be no point in our doing this if nothing is done to stop unlawful development, use and occupation in other parts of the Milazzese.

I have carefully read the comments of the chorus of supporters of the owners of the so-called "Villa Libertà. What they have disclosed has led me to make an investigation of what has been widely published through social media. Palpable evidence of what has been going on since 2002 has emerged.

One comment on social media says it all:

"Si può stare con una coppia che abitano in "Villa Libertà", la loro casa autosufficiente che hanno costruito su quest'isola."

("You can stay with a couple that lives in "Villa Libertà", their self-sufficient home that they have built on this island")

Another says: "It has taken them some years to build, but now they are there full-time. They are great people. He is a yacht pilot"

Now that the cat is out of the bag, the owners of the property are seeking, through the orchestrated entreaties of their friends, to protect themselves from the inevitable consequences of what can no longer be concealed from the authorities. The comments of these supporters all fall into the category of the fallacious argument known to logicians as "special pleading", an attempt to treat something as an exception to the acknowledged rules without offering any justification as to why it should be an exception. In the 21st century we live in a world of rules-based societies. The ancient Greeks, unlike the Romans, did not have a system of law based on rules. The orators put their case to the citizens and the citizens voted on a verdict. That is why I began in Italian by recalling that comical short movie "The Trial of Phryne". (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rkuU9VZCiE>).

The pleading of these friends is a chorus of loving praise for two sincere, enthusiastic young people in love with nature and firmly believing that what they are doing is for the good, not only of the islanders, but of the whole of the human race. It is argued that the "Commune of Panarea" (sic) should not only condone what has been done, but encourage it as a worthy contribution to the "community". After all, these are caring, lovable, beautiful people, and, just like Phryne, they should be absolved of any guilt for having broken the law.

Supporters of the "Villa Libertà" "micro farm" claim that Jenny and Derek have returned to the agricultural practises of my ancestors. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our ancestors' traditional subsistence farming bore no resemblance to the exploitation of the land by "Villa Libertà". Most importantly, there were no grazing animals anywhere on Panarea. My father recalled that when he was a boy, the terraces supported by the dry stone walls that would have taken generations to build,

were all under intense cultivation. There were no grazing animals. When, as the sun was setting and it was time to put your hoe over your shoulder and walk home, you would cut grass and tie it into a sheaf to bring it home to feed a few rabbits in hutches or perhaps, very occasionally, a tethered goat. This age old practice is immortalised in Leopardi's opening lines:

“La donzelletta vien dalla campagna,
In sul calar del sole,
Col suo fascio dell'erba;...”

Ours was not the pastoral heritage of the English-speaking world. On Panarea our ancestors did not wastefully convert vegetable protein into animal protein by allowing farm animals to openly graze. Our now ruined building on the Milazzese had a traditional underground cistern which was used to store precious water used to irrigate their surrounding land that we owned. There they grew their fruit and vegetables and, above all, sowed their precious crops of barley. Bread from barley flour was their staple food. From it they made “panecaliatu’ which would last for weeks without going mouldy. They were serious subsistence farmers with traditional proven practices, not urban refugees experimenting with all the hobby options that one finds in glossy magazines. The produce from this plot of land together with the protein from their seafood, kept my aunt Angelina Tesoriero in Natoli and her two children from starvation during the dark days of World War II. Thankfully those days are over and there is no need to farm the Milazzese anymore.

Here in Australia, I am no stranger to hobby farming. My family and I have been enjoying this weekend and holiday lifestyle at Macmasters beach for the past 40 years. See The photos below that testify to the immense enjoyment that I and my children, (now in their forties) have had from it.









But everything belongs in its right place. My children and I were rightly stopped from riding our horses through the trails in the adjoining “Bouddi National Park” because, as the Park Rangers told us, horse droppings contain seeds of exotic plants that threaten to overrun native flora. A National Park is no place for animals from a hobby farm. An archaeological heritage site like the Milazzese is no place for hobby farm animals.

I met Derek only once, it was after he had introduced himself to me and disclosed that he had just bought lot 417. I have never met Jehnny, but I have now been able to watch her and Derek speaking at length about themselves on “You tube”. I do not know their surnames. Neither of them is English. Derek is South African and Jehnny is Venezuelan and, from the way she speaks on You Tube, English is not her mother tongue.

I am not sure, but I thought for a moment that the given name Derek could be of Scottish origin. Maybe not. But thinking of Scotland brings to mind Skara Brae, a prehistoric village on the largest island in the Orkney archipelago. Consisting of eight clustered houses, it was occupied from roughly 3180 BC to about 2500 BC. Despite the harshness of the weather in those latitudes, the site is well curated and visited by large numbers of tourists each year. A hobby farm like Villa Libertà, anywhere near the precincts of that archaeological site would be unthinkable to the British.

John Kaisner posted the following on his web site on February 19, 2018:

“Villa Libertà, was created by my friends Derek and Jehnny”. “Recently their site has come under scrutiny”. (He is obviously referring to my letter in Italian to the “Notiziario delle isole eolie”), “This prompted them to ask me to write a letter on their behalf. They were happy with the content, and suggested that it might be useful to diffuse the message on a broader platform than the local paper (Notiziario delle isole eolie)”, “which is why I’ve chosen to share the letter here.”

From that posting it is clear that he and Derek and Jehnny understand the importance of having a social media platform in the English language reaching a vastly the wider audience than the “Notiziario delle isole eolie”.

From that we can also safely assume that the supporters whose comments appeared in the “Notiziario delle isole eolie” were hand-picked by Derek and Jehnny in much the same way as John Kaisner was enlisted by them for his support. There seems to be no doubt as to who has been calling the shots since my letter was published on the “Notiziario delle isole eolie”. Despite this effective manipulation of comment in Italian media behind the scenes, it seems that they are still confident that their online conversations in English have not reached the Italian reading public of the islands.

It is also interesting to note that these people, who are referred to as “less foreign” than me, communicate with each other exclusively in English. Those communications are, unfortunately, frequently beyond the reach and comprehension of the people whose interests are most at stake, namely, the Italian speaking authorities and the people that they represent.

I urge you and your readers to carefully look at and listen to at all the “Villa Libertà” publicity which is readily available through social media. This does require a knowledge of English but it vital that the people who live on the islands should be aware of it.

There are many links. These are just a few chosen at random:

<https://viaggineisogni.wordpress.com/2014/04/21/lisola-di-panarea/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oov5vQ2ahQ>

[Villa Liberta, Panarea Italy on Instagram: “This morning Surprise :\) at ...](#)

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BJU6fuEBPuR/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QwOn4VR6i4>

[Villa Liberta, Panarea Italy \(@villaliberta\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

<http://tramed.blogspot.com/2004/11/pa...>

<https://euonlyliveonceblog.wordpress.com/2017/03/30/panarea/>

1. www.imgum.net/ImgUserMedia/4259170

1. <https://pansta.net/PandaUserMedia/42591709>

1. <http://helpx.net/host.asp?hostID=17546&network=3>

In John Kaisner’s long “You Tube” video interview with Derek and Jehnny, and in comments of other contributors, they all talk incessantly about “the community” and the importance of “community participation”. The owners of this business (because that is what it is) have ingeniously succeeded in mustering a devoted workforce of

young travellers willing to work for them for no remuneration other than food, shelter and a good time. Such unpaid “community” support has been a vital factor in the extensive development and improvement an asset in which, paradoxically, “the community” has no legal proprietary interest. All the benefit of the work flows to the owner of the asset. For details of how this ingenious system works to the owners’ advantage, have a close look at “Help exchange (HelpX)”. Although money does not change hands, they are actually conducting a business for profit.

If you listen carefully to the John Kaisner “You Tube” interview, you will notice that Jehnny talks about the importance of carefully checking the references of those who want to come and work and be part of the “community”. The working “community” must not be allowed get beyond her control. I wonder if she realises that her strong emphasis on the careful selection of and control over “the right sort of helpers” sounds ominously like the power to excommunicate heretics. One often hears stories of how starry-eyed young Westerners attach themselves to some guru, or some fundamentalist religious sect only to find themselves expelled for being insubordinate. I fear that, if this sort of innocent-sounding scheme were to slide into a far more extreme form, it could develop into a structure not unlike that which enabled that infamous religious fundamentalist of Colorado City, Arizona and Hill Dale Utah to enrich himself by exploiting unquestioning young followers who worked for nothing but their keep.

Vague talk of the “community” has some interesting parallels with the nineteenth century idealistic communities of zealous utopian socialists who tried to create a new world for themselves in Paraguay. Professore Marcello Saija, a resident of Santa Marina Salina and a lecturer at the University in Palermo, has written an interesting book about a Paraguayan colony of Sicilian Socialists from Catania. A similar colony of Australian socialists was founded in Paraguay under the name “Colonia Nueva Australia”. A number of books have been written in English about the failure of these communities.

What distinguishes these Paraguayan utopian communities from “Villa Libertà ” is the fact that, although the rhetoric is similarly idealistic, those who are made to feel that they are part of the “Villa Libertà” “community” have no rights whatsoever. If they do not satisfy the selection criteria determined by Derek and Jenny, they can and will be told to leave. They would be “excommunicated” from the “community”. Unlike the Paraguayans, they have no shares in the asset they have helped to create and they would get nothing in the event of its liquidation.

Derek and Jehnny “have succeeded in creating their “Villa Libertà” by the clever exploitation of social media networks and, in particular, by the use of “Help exchange (HelpX).” This explains how just one man and his wife seem to have been responsible for so much hard physical work, constructing the building, transforming the surrounding land, and turning it into something that, to all the world, appears to be their exclusive domain.

The flow of guest workers recruited by Derek and Jehnny using social media has produced a network of friends who exchange, between themselves, recollections of their stay at “Villa Libertà”. This would appear to be now beyond the editorial control of Derek and Jehnny. As such it is becoming a valuable source of evidence as to

what has really been going on. Your readers and the authorities should take note of the contents.

Considering size of the land that appears to have been turned into a hobby farm, it is reasonable that we should ask Derek to reveal to your readers just how much of the land is he actually his. It would be a very simple matter for him to indicate which lots he actually owns by reference the map I have supplied above. Here is one of the whole of the contrada of the Milazzese.



On a tiny island nothing happens without everybody knowing. On one of my visits many years ago, Derek became aware of who I was and he sought me out to make me a proposal. He offered to buy our property. He told me that because our family are expatriates, we are in danger of having our land taken from us by unscrupulous persons who make use of “usucapione”, (the law that permits the taking of legal title after adverse possession of land for a proscribed time). I was well aware of this danger and in fact it is well known on the island that certain land of ours was acquired with impunity in this very way in the contrada “Supa a Salemma”)

Derek went on to reveal that he had just bought the only other structure standing on the Milazzese (lot 417). He told me he knew that it was forbidden by law to erect buildings on the Milazzese but that, on the other hand it, was legitimate to repair and restore an existing building. “Fatta la legge, trovato l’inganno”, you might say. Over the past fifty years, many people have written to me and made proposals to us about our property with the intention of using our ruins as a justification for building a

habitable structure that would purport to be a faithful restoration an old existing building.

In John Kaisner's video interview, Derek describes how difficult it had been for him to build over and extend his little ruined structure. He describes how vital it is to be able to show that some semblance of the original structure can still be identified even though in his case he revealed that it had no foundations and had actually started sliding sideways as soon as he touched it.

Some years after my meeting with Derek, a cousin of mine who speaks no Italian visited our ruin and Derek managed to catch up with him and open a dialogue. This cousin of mine has the same given name and surname as me. This is not as extraordinary as it may seem. In his "Die Liparischen Inseln", Volume 8

the Archduke Ludwig Salvator notes that in 1890 the population of Panarea numbered 543 souls and that the predominating surname was Tesoriero. (It is also interesting to note that Lot 147 had been originally owned by another Tesoriero who, realising it would be worthless to any law-abiding purchaser, gifted it to another Tesoriero with the same given name, who then turned around and sold it to Derek.) We Tesorieros, both on Panarea and throughout the diaspora inevitably have to resort to nicknames ("nciurie"). So, to avoid confusion, I will refer to myself as "Peter Cremorne" and to the Peter Tesoriero cousin as "Peter Turramurra".

Derek and Jehnny had dealings with Peter Turramurra over a period of time making a number of proposals. I now have copies of those emails which are clear evidence of what they wanted to convince us to do. Peter Turramurra considered the proposals and then he circulated lengthy emails to all of the relations including me. A number of quite unworkable proposals were considered. One of them was that we should allow Derek and Jehnny to "restore" our buildings at our cost, or possibly at a shared cost, and that they would then "look after it" for us so that if, and when, any of us should come to Panarea, it would be available for our use and occupation. Some of the younger and more romantic members of the family became sentimentally attached to this unworkable idea. There were lengthy exchanges of emails between members of the family. They are interesting to read and, if they were to do nothing else, they reveal much about the human condition.

One thing stands out. Not one of our family members wer told how Derek and Jehnny would go about "restoring" the building. Not one of us knew anything of the ingenious method used by Derek and Jehnny to get so many people to work on their property and the surrounding land over such long period. Not one of us was aware of the way this was slowly transforming the Milazzese into the fulfilment of the misguided fantasising of Derek and Jehnny about an eco-farm complete with a menagerie of farm animals straight out an illustrated childrens' story book.

Some of our family members were captivated by the promise that the structure on our property would be "faithfully" restored using all the old building techniques in a way that would make them proud of their heritage. I tried to explain that understanding ruins is a serious subject that has been debated for centuries. As your contributor Michele Sequenzia wisely commented, it first developed when Michelangelo and Raphael became interested in the ruins of ancient Rome. (The English word "grotesque" comes from a misunderstanding of the expression "pitture

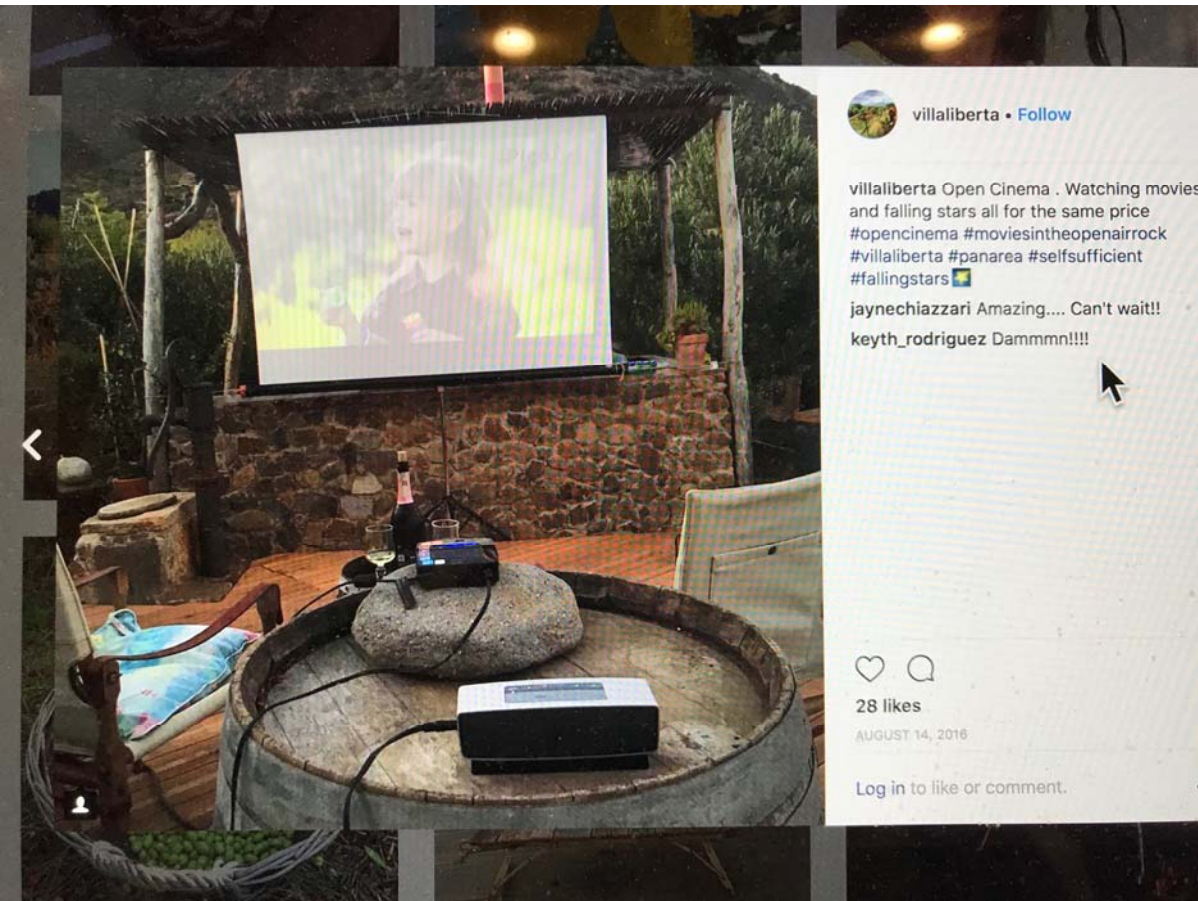
grottesche” when they came upon the buried “domus aurea” without realising what it was. But that is another story). Controversy and debate about what one should do with a ruin of value raged in the nineteenth century. The magnificent medieval ruin at Carcassonne was “restored”, at enormous expense to the French government, by Eugene-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. Famous critics such as John Ruskin and William Morris took issue with his theory of what restoration should be. (John Kaisner now lives in Sicily. I wonder if he is aware that Via Libertà (not Villa Libertà) in Palermo gets its name from William Morris and his “Liberty” designs. But that, again, is another story.) I told my relations that they should consider these things before deciding on the fate of our humble ruin. I told them that no one these days would consider “restoring” the Parthenon or the Coliseum in the way that the Americans “restored” the Stoa of Attalos. Learned scholars still argue about what the best restoration practice should be. Currently, a bitter argument is raging about how to preserve the wooden shack left behind in Antarctica by Douglas Mawson. One thing is certain. If my relations had had any idea of how the willing workforce had “restored” the so-called “Villa Libertà ” they would have been appalled.

John Kaisner has posted the letter that he has sent to Notiziario delle Isole Eolie onto his own website, adding, for the benefit of his readers on social media networks, that he was asked by to do it by Derek and Jehnny. By the use of online social networking platforms, the promoters of “Villa Libertà” reach a vast audience far beyond the readership of the Notiziario delle Isole Eolie. I have discovered that they all make extensive use of Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.


If you listen carefully to the interview with John Kaisner, you will notice that Derek stresses the importance of maintaining the fiction that “Villa Libertà” is an “original” building that has been “restored”. I leave you and your readers to decide for yourselves as to the truth of the matter by looking at photographs that are now in the public domain for all to see.
These are just a few of many.



Inside the villa





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Panarea Island

villaliberta Sunday's at the #villaliberta , food , fun and family #rocketstove #farmlife #outdoorcooking

ace_aka_whadusay Awesome!! @villaliberta food from the soul, filling the heart of family and friends! That's what it's all about.

gabyvanwijk Una arepita per favore 😊

villaliberta @gabyvanwijk reina pepiada ? Con o sin mantequilla ?

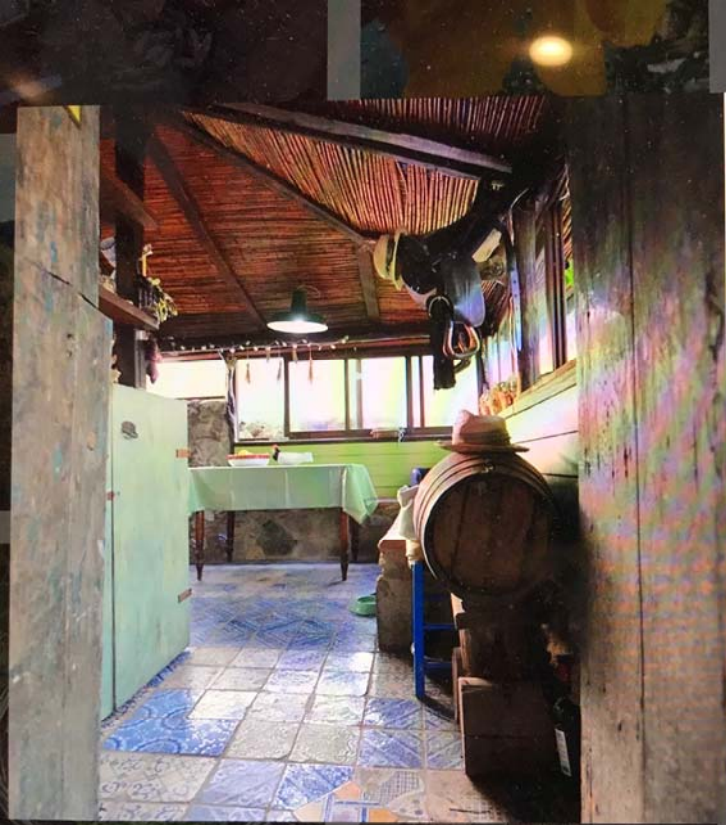
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25 likes

AUGUST 2, 2016

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villaliberta, zotopasta, cardamario, jonegeldenhuys, keyth_rodriguez, moo.lv, carmen_08_86, artofthetable and mckiki27 like this

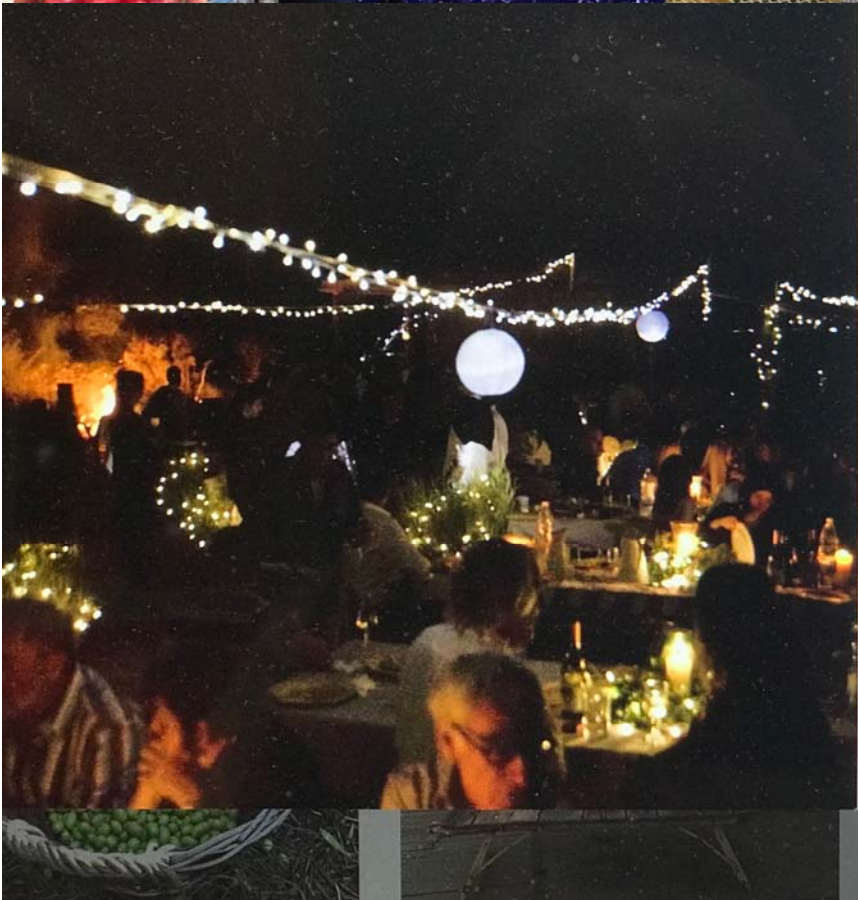
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karijuul Does that say please don't p
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mckiki27 who is the artist!

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15 likes

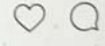
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14 likes

OCTOBER 8, 2015

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OCTOBER 8, 2015

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One thing that I find disturbing from the photography is the obvious “recycling” of the stones that once formed the dry stone walls of the terraces. According a local oral historian, a significant number of the dry stone wall terraces on Panarea were built in the 19th century by Neapolitan convicts in the charge of General Vito Nunziante. But regardless of who built them, those dry stone walls are of historical significance and should not be disturbed. I note that Mr Francesco Rinauro is from “Via Nunziante Stromboli.”

The comments of Francesco Rinauro claim that “Intorno al rudere sono state create delle zone di ombra, tutto con materiali di recupero” (recycled material).” It is also claimed that no new materials whatsoever have been brought onto the site not even cement. This is demonstrably untrue. One only has to look at the cement mortar between the stones in the picture above, the cement mortar of the stonework in the photo with the caption “inside the villa”, the modern internal vertical supports for the new roof and even to the solar cells on the roof (which are clearly visible from satellite imagery), to realise that essential modern and new material has been lifted onto the site using the helicopter. The new roof, built with modern materials is so strong, that it is capable of supporting revelling dancers in the moonlight. (see photo)

Francesco Rinauro identifies himself as a yacht master who, like Derek, skips yachts for the tourists. This sort of activity is fine; but it sends the wrong message to tourists if you take them partying at the Villa Libertà. You should be showing the tourists that you respect our heritage sites. Regardless of whether they have a good time at the Villa Libertà parties, lack of proper respect for a heritage site will leave the tourist with a bad impression of Italy and the tourist operators of the Aeolian Islands.

Francesco Rinauro of Via Nunziante Stromboli might also be interested to know that my great-grandfather Capitano Gaetano Famularo, born in 1848 on Stromboli, was the owner, as was his father before him, of two of the “golette”, those trading vessels under sail that were such an important part of our maritime heritage.

The photograph below was taken just a few months ago in January 2018. We were at anchor on board our own yacht “Aeolus” in the beautiful Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park North of Sydney. The National Heritage Listing of the Park ensures the protection and enjoyment by future generations of its spectacular and rugged landscape, its rich flora and unique native fauna. Ancient rock carvings of the indigenous inhabitants are still to be found there and they are carefully curated by the Park Rangers.

If you look along the shoreline in the photograph below you will see there are many sandstone rocks. Every now and then you might see a large mound, generally covered with moss, which, on closer examination, is not a rock. These are called “middens”. They were formed in selected places where, for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years, the original inhabitants would gather to squat and eat the abundant shellfish that this paradise produced. They are, like the prehistoric village of the Milazzese, a silent testimony as to how people of this area lived in prehistoric times. They remain intact because no private interventions are allowed anywhere in the National Park. This is my native territory that I love just as much as I love Panarea.

In the early days there were a number of structures within the Park area. After the Park was proclaimed, each one of these structures was documented for history and then totally demolished. The result is that the park is once again a beautiful pristine wilderness which can only be reached by water. The beauty and solitude of the area makes it a favourite place for yachtsmen to visit from Sydney. It is probably not much more sailing distance from Sydney Heads to Broken Bay than it is from Portorosa to Panarea.

In their wisdom, the legislators insisted on the demolition of the few structures that European settlers had made within the precincts of the park. Likewise, interventions such as “Villa Libertà must inevitably be demolished to restore the pristine environment of the Milazzese.



I am sorry to say this, but John Kaisner's promotion of "Villa Libertà is like a snake oil sales pitch. Nonetheless, because it will reach and influence so many impressionable young people through social media, his justification of the activities of "Villa Libertà" must not be left to pass unchallenged.

John Kaisner, is an American who describes himself as having been an actor, an architect and, as from 2012, a farm manager at an ashram in Kerala India. In 2008 in San Ramon, California, he had met a powerfully charismatic, but somewhat controversial, lady described on her own website as "a spiritual master". She made a deep impression on him and she invited him to come to her ashram. She is reverently referred to by her devotees as "Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi." She is also called, "Amma, the hugging saint". The organisation which she controls, is vast. It has large centres in three states of India - Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. In 2012 Kaisner, who took the name of the Hindu god, Jagannath, went to India and moved to the Amritapuri Ashram in Kerala, where he began working for Amma. In 2014 Kaisner served Amma as part of the "Amrita SeRVe" team teaching in villages throughout India. Despite her immense power and the wealth of the organisation she controls, her career seems to have been dogged with some controversy. See the following links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kgm92LGI008>

<https://www.telegraphindia.com/1140302/jsp/7days/18036887.jsp#.WrJEzhAjFx4.em>

On his website, Kaisner describes his professional status as “Natural Farmer and Permaculture Designer/Teacher”. He does note that his “profession is fraught with misunderstanding”. That, I can well believe. He has two separate “YouTube” channels – “John Kaisner The Natural Farmer”, and “John Kaisner Permaculture” .

In his video promotion for “Villa Libertà”, Kaisner “discovers” this wonderful island called Panarea. He arrives at the Milazzese, to interview his friends Derek and Jehnny. He is blissfully unaware that there is already a wealth of accumulated scholarship and research about the place. He is unaware that experts have even studied and assessed the soil morphology. He would not have had any idea that the inhabitants of these islands, renowned for the production of Malvasia, might have been able to give him much useful information about the quality of the “terroir” that had produced such successful vintages. He would be oblivious of the fact that these volcanic islands have frequently been visited and studied by famous geologists since the early days of the Enlightenment. The geology of these islands attracted the interest of renowned scientists such as Deodat de Dolmieu from whose name we today have the modern word “dolomite”.

But, like Lewis and Clark, Kaisner looks out to this new horizon and assumes that he is contemplating virgin territory. He then proceeds to paint a picture for his hosts that will inspire wagon trains of naïve young pioneers to come from afar to transform the landscape as directed by Derek and Jehnny.

Kaisner appears to have no verifiable academic standing as a scientist. Backed by the persuasive authority of the words of his self-description as a “Permaculture designer and teacher”, and by his overwhelming air of confidence, he proceeds, with all due gravitas, to sound the alarm of our impending doom. “Global Desertification” is at hand! The proximity of the Sahara Desert means that “Desertification” is “literally at Panarea’s back door!”

Really?

As any reasonably educated person would know, the Sahara started drying out more than 7 million years ago. The vastness of Sahara is comparable in area to China or the United States. We know that it was already an immense inhospitable desert in prehistoric times when the earliest Egyptians, (who were what Kaisner would probably call “refugees from Desertification”), began to settle on the flood saturated banks of the river Nile. As a self-proclaimed expert, he should be aware that the composition of the paleosols in the Mediterranean basin, and of Italy in particular, are largely made up of red mineral dust from the Sahara. Has he never heard of “Blood rain”? The myths of blood falling from the sky can be traced back as far as Homer’s Iliad. The red soil retained by the dry stone walls in terraces all over southern Italy is a paleosol composed predominantly of deposits of Saharan dust gradually accumulated over thousands of years. The underlying crotons are not particularly fertile, but the red Saharan dust in the paleosols contains potassium, phosphorus and, of course, iron. All of these are essential nutrients for plant life.

Some years ago I attended a public lecture at Sydney University where a geologist explained that Italy was losing a lot of this precious soil by virtue of the fact that some of the dry stone walls have been disturbed to allow modern mechanical rotary hoes to be brought onto the terraces. This had resulted in rain erosion and the

consequent permanent loss of the precious Saharan dust that had taken thousands of years to accumulate by falling from the sky.

Undeterred, Kaisner posits that it is none other than Villa Libertà that holds “the design key to our planet’s future.” Gosh! What a relief! For a moment I was starting to get really worried. You see, Derek and Jehnny harvest water and they practice water sustainability. Ergo, their Villa Libertà is an “indispensable” learning site. This, their revolutionary solution, should, according to Kaisner, be “integrated into the island’s existing infrastructure for generations to come”. And everybody will live happily ever after. Does he really believe that anyone but most naive could take all this seriously? If this is to be the new orthodoxy, then those poor deluded conservationists and archaeologists had better abandon the Milazzese, because there is gold in the Black Hills and General Custer is on his way.

We might laugh at this, just as we used to laugh at Trump. But we may well come to rue the day. I am truly apprehensive of the power of social media to mislead the unsuspecting, idealistic, but poorly educated, young. I do not believe in the censorship of free speech, but we should not be apathetic when it comes to criticising what we know to be misguided and wrong.

About 53 years ago, probably before John Kaisner was born, I spent three months travelling the length and breadth of India. I travelled by third class rail. I took a trip down the east coast from Calcutta to Puri in Orissa state. I was curious to find and see the great temple car used in the annual chariot festival (Rathayatra). This enormous temple chariot is pulled along by hundreds of devotees. It is similar to, but even bigger than, the “Vara” of Messina. Occasionally, a Hindu pilgrim would fall, or might even deliberately throw himself under the giant wheels of the wagon. This led the British to create a new word, “juggernaut”, by which they mean “an infernal machine that consumes its user”. I think it might well be a good metaphor for “Villa Libertà”. The Hindu god in question was, as you might have guessed, Jagannath, the god whose name John Kaisner has adopted.

When all is said and done, my criticism, of John Kaisner’s comments are not crucial to this discussion. Even if his snake oil arguments about the benefits of “Villa Libertà” were valid, which of course they are not, they would merely be a distraction.

Putting all distractions aside, the only important issue in this discussion is that no intervention, of any kind whatsoever, inconsistent with what is permissible by law, should be allowed to remain on the Milazzese.

I will leave you with this one last photograph



The comment on it is:

“Villa Libertà Derek who makes everything possible”

It is a posting from one of the globe-trotting workers who would fondly remember sipping wine with him at sunset on the western edge of the cliffs and the wild nights of bacchanalian revels that we have seen in other photos above. They, no doubt, do believe that he could do (or get away with) anything. From many of the photographs it looks as though they believed that the whole of the Milazzese was actually his--- “tutta roba sua”. But the day will surely come when his “fattoria” will have to close down and Derek, like Mazarò, must accept the inevitable.

“Sicché quando gli dissero che era tempo di lasciare la sua roba,uscì nel cortile come un pazzo, barcollando, e andava ammazzando a colpi di bastone le sue anitre e i suoi tacchini, e strillava: - Roba mia, vientene con me!”
(Giovanni Verga)

E così sia.

Peter Tesoriero