

The moving border of prejudice and identity

stories from an Italian Kitchen

IN THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND, *THE SOUTH* IS NEVER JUST A DIRECTION. IT IS A CHARACTER TRAIT.

I grew up in the southern part of the Netherlands, below the three great rivers that split the country. Historically, the Protestant North fought for independence, while we in the South remained under Spanish rule and stayed Catholic. To this day, the cultural climate of the Dutch south remains more open and friendly, yet the north often views the *Brabander* as a bit backward, a bit too frivolous, and certainly less serious.

But move the map, and line moves with you

In Europe, the thrifty north looks down at the lazy Mediterranean south. In Italy, the industrious Milanese businessman sees the Mezzogiorno as a land of chaos and corruption. Yet, cross the water to Sicily and the perspective shifts again. There, they do not necessarily see themselves as the bottom of Italy; they often identify as the North of Africa; a bridge between worlds, looking down at others from a different peak.

This phenomenon has always fascinated me because I have lived it from both sides. Being half-Calabrese and half-Dutch means the map is constantly flipping. To an Italian, I might represent the precision and reliability of the north. To my Dutch peers, I carry the spirit of the south. For me, crossing these moving borders has become my greatest tool as a teacher and a cook. It helps me to balance technique and intuition and blend flavours that might seem unexpected but somehow make sense. In other words: I am using the discipline of one world to speak the language of the other.

