

INTRODUCTION

Italian Diasporas Share the Neighbourhood (in the English-speaking World)

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The articles published in this Special Issue of *Modern Italy* were originally presented as papers at a symposium entitled ‘Italian Diasporas Share the Neighborhood’, sponsored by the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of Western Australia in July 2003, and were part of the year long Europeans Program. The purpose of the symposium was to consider how Italian migrants and their descendants constructed neighbourhoods within different nationalist frames alongside, and often in competition with, other ethnic or migrant communities, as well as among different types of Italians. All the articles in this Special Issue consider the significance of living and working in polyethnic and multiracial societies for the local constitution of Italianness, or *Italianità*. This issue contains a selection of those papers presented that addressed the centrality of space, place and alterity in the construction of *Italianità* in English-speaking societies. We wish to thank the other participants for their inspiring papers and spirited comments.

Even the most preliminary reading of Italian history over the last century quickly reveals that the social space of Italy stretches beyond the borders of the Italian peninsula to encompass the places of migration that Italians have worked in, helped shape and through which their own identities, and the nationalist projects of Italy and the host societies, have been moulded.¹ Hence, the presence of the term diasporas in the title, a concept to which we will return later in this Introduction. Italian officials and ordinary migrants have coined phrases that seek to represent the conditions of Italians abroad and each of these reinforces this expanded space of the nation: *gli italiani nel mondo*, *Italia fuori d'Italia*, *Italiano all'estero*, *lavoratore all'estero*, or *apaesamento*. Yet, these Italian spaces were neither constituted nor imagined only through the perspectives and desires of Italians themselves, or, that is, from the peninsula outward. The publics and politicians of receiving societies also formed their own notions about Italianness, and in some but not all instances, as

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Gabaccia notes in this issue, located Italians in those places, part fictive and part real, popularly known as Little Italies.

Italians were not alone, whether as sojourners, migrants, immigrants, settlers, adventurers, ‘white ethnics’ or translocals, but joined others who were also searching the globe for an opportunity to make a better life. Wherever they settled over the last century, Italians encountered and interacted with migrants from other lands, racialized minorities already in place and nationalizing projects embedded within gendered and ethnoracial hierarchies. The intercultural contact occurred on street corners, in workplaces, union halls, schools, churches and neighbourhoods, and through sport and in public culture. In this process of urban mixing, Italians attempted to define what it meant to be Italian, often through the process of differentiating themselves from others, and they did this most visibly through the making and remaking of urban space.

Jerry Kruse (in this issue) notes that the central organizing construct for studies of urban neighbourhoods has remained, in one form or another, ‘space’. Therefore, explaining how these real and imagined spaces are used, contested and transformed by different social groups is a central task of urban studies. Indeed, all of the papers in this issue deal explicitly with space in urban contexts. Furthermore, reformulations of the notions of space and place, and their relationship to identity, have become the focus of migration studies in recent times, in light of the re-examination of immigrant incorporation in the context of transnational social fields, diasporas, and related global and local processes.

In fact, it is the quality of visibility that animates the papers here. The usefulness of visibility as a term stems from its ability to encompass both methodological practice and conceptual issues. As Kruse suggests in this issue, by joining visual sociology with spatial semiotics in his investigation of vernacular architecture in New York, he can observe and analyse both the agency of ordinary migrants and the larger structural forces within which they live, and which limit their choices. In his article here, Kruse fuses visual sociology and spatial semiotics with the virtues of a reconstructed urban ecology tradition from the Chicago School of sociology, with a focus on ethnic competition, to consider Little Italies in New York. Kruse further urges scholars to consider American urban ecology models of ethnic succession within the context of contemporary transformations in European cities, in this case, Rome, Italy, which is an urban destination for migrants from a remarkable variety of source countries. Kruse’s article implicitly explores Gabaccia’s argument that ethnic neighbourhoods are constructed in the context of hostility from the host society.

The ethnic succession model has resonance, as well, in Canada. In this issue, Harney considers the multiple ways Italian Canadians use space to make claims to neighbourhoods that are multiracial and polyethnic. The visual, material and physical presence of Italians is addressed in several papers through the transformation of urban space by vernacular and ethno-institutional architecture (Fortier, Harney and Kruse), or, for example, the establishment of monuments that attest to the presence of Italians in these cityscapes (Baldassar, Harney and Kruse).

The English-speaking countries the authors use as research sites in the geography of Italian diasporas—Australia, Canada, the USA and the UK—while similar institutionally and culturally in many ways, offer striking comparative differences in the way Italianness is expressed within each national context and hence in the

process of constituting a sense of belonging for Italians. Gabaccia's lead historical article considers the diasporic/transnational processes of the remarkable century of Italian migration, 1876–1976, but cautions the reader to temper enthusiasm for the flows of diaspora by observing the determinative national logics that framed the insertion of Italian migrants and the constitution of Italian neighbourhoods around the globe. The relative lack of Little Italies in Latin America, or in continental European cities, leads Gabaccia to argue that the presence of 'Little Italies' in English-speaking countries attests to the enduring relevance of Italophobia, a form of racialization, that marginalized and located them within observable, territorial places in cities.

The use of the word diaspora has become *de rigueur* in migration studies in the past 15 years. Some scholars offer up typologies of diasporic practices or objective criteria for determining the 'diasporic' status of a migrant or ethnic community overseas from its putative homeland, whereas others might prefer to use it as a heuristic device or limn its radical potential to disrupt naturalized narratives about belonging, often refracted through masculinist discourse (Hall 1990; Gilroy 1993; Cohen 1997; Harney 2002). The term diaspora implies a certain cultural continuity, transmission and recreation of an ancestral culture in a new land. As Clifford's (1997) seminal paper on the term suggests, this theorizing needs to be considered within 'particular maps and histories' not only to discern its variety of meanings, but also to observe the crowded space it shares with other terms such as minority, immigrant and ethnic.

Fortier's article offers a subtle demonstration of this intermixing of terms—community, émigré, ethnic, diasporic—even as the Italians in London that she studied are enmeshed in the Scalabrinian religious order's global Catholic discourse about migration and its universal effect. In Harney's article on the politics of urban space, transnational linkages and diasporic discourses are key features in community institution building and calendrical diasporic practices such as saints' feasts. Similarly, Baldassar's article details the Italian regional associations that undergird much of the activities of Italian diasporas in Australia, and for that matter, elsewhere. In its emphasis on the identity of origin, diaspora can lead to a neglect of the everyday realities of living in a new place and the possibilities for constructing new identities, ways of belonging, outside of an ethnic or nationalist claim, which may privilege other forms of community. The authors in this Special Issue of the journal would agree, by no means, on the most productive way to use the term. Yet, diaspora seems inescapable in our field sites, present, for example, as rhetoric emanating from the peninsula itself, ethnic leaders, mediatized popular culture or in the everyday experiences of migrants and their descendants living physically and/or imaginatively in more than one place.

Baldassar's work illustrates the multiple layers of transnational connections occluded under the rubric of Italian diasporas in Australia, especially the resurgent Italian regional identities and the associational infrastructure that assures their force. Even so, the debates surrounding these projects firmly support Gabaccia's argument about the force of national discourses on the process of forging identities and framing debates. Through a close reading and analysis of the production of migrant monuments in suburbs in both east and west Australia, Baldassar engages the methods of visual studies to read the monuments as sites that reveal community

politics, intergenerational tension and, as a result, manifestations of debates over identity and belonging. These monuments also speak to the metanarratives produced and circulating about the migration process that achieve hegemonic status such as the migrant as pioneer or the migrant as new citizen. Lurking in the discourse about pioneers and citizenship are questions about the whiteness of Italians, their visibility, and their suitability for membership in the commonwealth. Baldassar insists that research entwines emigration and immigration into the same social field for analysis. To do this, Baldassar focuses on monuments in northern Italy, Lombardy and the Veneto, to reveal the perceptions of the migratory project from the perspective of the stay behinds or those intent on return. If the monuments in Australia reveal the unremitting pressure of some sort of integration into Australia, the monuments in Italy emphasize the requirement for reintegration. In this frame, migration must be temporary or minimally circular. Homecoming is the necessary, desired end in the ideology underpinning the icons chosen—the reinsertion of the migrant into the natal community.

The politics of race and visibility are central to the positioning of Italians within a multicultural Britain. Fortier argues Italians are a racialized, invisible white minority within the national discourse and, as a result, forge a project of visibility to unify the Italian British community. Fortier's article forces us to rethink visibility and invisibility in myriad ways through her discussion of ethnic intimacy and community as effect or common ground. In this sophisticated conceptual paper, Fortier considers ethnic organizations as both physical sites that offer the 'architecture of reassurance' for Italians as well as scenes for performing and creating collective belonging. Through an '(infra)structure of feeling' nurtured in the Scalabrinian Centro in Brixton, south London, Italians conjure up an ethnic intimacy that revitalizes the homogenized, fixed concept of community into something more, something not named in the gathering together. As a 'common ground', argues Fortier, a community of feeling emerges as an effect of interaction at the Centro and creates alternative imaginings and community possibilities rather than performing one that already exists. Community is always in the making. Moreover, the Centro attempts to use the drama of emigration as the universalizing force that unites Catholic migrant communities while, at the same time, sustaining a particularistic Italian community. Fortier demonstrates that an ethnic identity is protected from erasure as an invisible white ethnic in multiracial Britain while, at the same time, pan-migrant experiences are posited as meta narratives by the Scalabrinian order as ways to unite Italians with newer Filipino migrants using the Centro, as well as the next cohort of younger Italian migrants, socialized very differently than the emigrants of a previous generation. The visibility or materiality of these imagined communities is evidenced not only in the physical site of the Centro, but also through the materiality of the Centro's newspaper and the calendrical events that re-enact, represent and reproduce the community.

If Italians in London struggle over visibility, Italians in Toronto, as Harney notes in his contribution to this Special Issue, have a surfeit of visibility in comparison with other migrants and minorities, as the largest migrant community for much of the postwar period to settle in that multicultural city, only challenged recently by Chinese migration. Even so, the representations and images of Italian Canadian neighbourhoods are bounded in part by metanarratives of pathology or exoticism

common to immigrant communities, but particular in their forms for Italians, that limit the collectivity's power over self definition and representation. While not generally exhibiting any of the violent encounters between different ethnicized or racialized communities over competition for space noted in accounts of some American cities, Harney argues that even the quotidian practices of place making enacted by Italians in Toronto might be seen as forms of colonization and thus assertions of power. Harney details three forms of place making performed by Italians in Toronto, which speak to the politics of place in urban Toronto. These forms vary in scale and temporal duration and consider quotidian, calendrical and monumental practices that provide a sedimentation of presence and a variety of assertions about belonging to and claims over urban landscape. In this sense Harney's article addresses the localization of ethnicity in city space. These claims to urban landscape and, by extension, the implications of these practices for ethnic succession and competition, link his article with Krase's concern for the relevance of urban ecology to understanding ethnic vernacular architecture. Further, while the paper localizes ethnic practice, it also situates these activities within transnational networks and diasporic imaginings.

Together, the articles in this Special Issue of *Modern Italy* offer a fugue like statement about a series of contemporary conceptual terms that have been animating academic writing—diaspora, visibility or racialization and multicultural societies. The papers reveal how the experiences of Italians overseas can offer much to these contemporary debates given Italy's extensive history of migration. Further, this special issue seeks to place migration firmly within the ambit of Italian studies and encourage others to consider the field worthy of study.

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Notes

[1] Of course, there is also the story of Italian colonialism; see *Modern Italy* (2003), vol. 8, no. 1.

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