

GENDER, ETHNICITY AND POWER
Identity formation in two Italian
organisations of London

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Abstract

This thesis is the study of two Italian organisations in London and their role in constructing an Italian 'community', at a time when the Italian population is fragmented and dispersed. In order to understand the languages of solidarity expressed in the two research settings, I use the concept of 'identity formation' and show that institutional practices of identity combine competing definitions to project meaning onto the indeterminate character of the Italian population of London. The essence of my argument is that within these settings, new forms of identity are developing which defy simple notions of 'community' and continuity based on a primary ethnicity. Similarly, models of radical pluralism are inadequate to grasp the complex articulation of roots and routes in the formation of group identities for immigrant populations.

Languages of solidarity, in the two organisations, are generated by a group of claims about the historical, political and cultural presence of Italians in Britain. Multiple meanings group around the central symbol of (e)migration, representing a combination of essentialist and pluralist tendencies. Foundational ideas of national culture intersect with a diasporic consciousness of multi-local ties, trans-national networks and displacement, generating new geographies of identity that break open the seams of national boundaries.

London Italian subjectivity is highly localised in relation to the family. Though emphatically patriarchal, the Italian emigrant family is represented as decidedly post-national: it constitutes a stage for the rehearsal of ethnicity, at a time when the nation is no longer the site and frame of memory.

The relationship between family and cultural continuity is mediated through generations, while authenticity is configured around gender. Definitions of local particularity are drawn from deeply held ideas about gender differences and sexual behaviours, which provide some form of ontological security that fixes the relationship between family, ethnicity and community.

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Introduction

This is what I call cultural identity. A questioning identity, where the relation to the other determines the self without paralysing it under a tyrannical weight. We see this the world over: each wants to name her/himself.

Edouard Glissant

This thesis is a study of two Italian organisations in London and their role in constructing an Italian 'community', at a time when the Italian population is socially fragmented and geographically dispersed. I analyse languages of solidarity generated within these organisations and how they work through ethnicity, gender and power. The essence of my argument is that within these settings, discourses of community are developing which defy simple notions of discrete identity formation. Crude models of 'the traditional', or of primordial ethnic definitions are of little use when applied to the ambivalent social and political ground inhabited by Italian leaders and members of two London social clubs. Nor is the radically plural model of identity adequate, for it neglects the sense of coherence identity narratives provide. Informed by recent theoretical discussions of diaspora, I contemplate the constitutive potency of 'in-betweenness', that is, moving between three regions, Italy, Britain, and Europe, and identifying to a space between the immediately local and the inflated global. I want to suggest that the kind of solidarity evoked in traditional notions of 'community' has been broken down. Community, here, is about a mobile, dispersed, multi-local and diverse population. New grounds of identity are constructed from memories, re-defined links with Italy, migration, evocations of shared values and common experiences; these terrains of communality will be scrutinised throughout the thesis.

The project of community formation for London Italians is to be viewed in the context of nineteen-nineties Britain, three features of which are significant for my immediate concerns. First, languages of a London Italian identity emerge at a time of absence of effective channels of solidarity linking this dispersed and divided population. Second, they evolved in the context of populist angst over the definition of Englishness/Britishness that has been systematised in the 1960s within a neo-racist discourse that makes culture, rather than skin colour, the key referent for difference. Tied to this new racism is a neo-liberal discourse that locates the family as the cornerstone of society: what Martin Barker has labelled 'familyism' (Barker 1981: 44).

A distinctive feature of the early nineties is that issues of national integrity, social stability and unity are configured around personal behaviour, which has been increasingly targeted in legislative reforms, political debates and the media. Proper personal conduct has become a site for discussing issues of civility, social cohesion and stability. This is tied up with the increased currency of communitarianism. This political discourse speaks of civic responsibilities by calling upon local communities, which are represented in terms of the ideal typical and highly localised 'friendly neighbourhood'. In this discourse, mobility and multi-locality are not easily accommodated.

Thirdly, the British 'identity crisis' is further fuelled by populist animosity towards the European Community. Issues of national autonomy and integrity, in this context, are wheeled out in debates over border controls, where foreigners are represented as criminals and deceivers. Images of 'bogus asylum seekers' and 'Euro-scroungers' feed into a conception of Englishness that is enclosing itself within increasingly rigid borders.

In this context, Italian immigrants find themselves at the threshold of difference and sameness in their relation to British national culture. In Britain, they constitute an immigrant, multi-generational population, a linguistic and religious minority, which is also absorbed within the white European majority. This ambivalent position has led a leading figure in Italian emigrant politics of identity to speak of Italians in Britain as 'invisible immigrants'. Padre Graziano Tassello¹ explained that in the context of recent migration of people from Third World countries, and of the ensuing re-configuration of British society, Italian immigrants have become invisible. He then reflected on the new meaning of the Italian presence in Britain. Its economic contribution (namely in the catering industry) was no longer sufficient, he argued, to represent the present experience of Italian immigrants. He concluded with these words:

[T]here lies within you a legitimate fear about the future of Italian emigration in Great Britain: the fear of losing your own ethnic and national identity. There exists a difficulty in grasping an Italy which has deeply changed. There is a difficulty in spreading your values within English society. We need to open the debate. We need to discuss the role of the newspaper, in a changing community; the role of the

¹ Padre Tassello is a Scalabriniano Father who writes regularly in the London Italian newspaper *La Voce degli Italiani*, on issues concerning politics of identity. He is president of the *Centro di Studi Emigrazione in Rome*. The Scalabrini Order runs one of the two organisations studied here. More details on this congregation are given later in the chapter.

associations, which are not only nostalgic returns to the past, but instruments for a new identity...²

'Invisibility', in the British context, is a notion caught up with 'race' struggles that makes its appropriation by Italians both arrogant and challenging. At one level, its meaning emerges from the very racialisation of immigration and 'multicultural' politics, and its adoption by Italians may be read as a gratuitous claim for equality by a population whose invisibility is the product of its integration and acceptance within British society, rather than from conditions of marginalisation and imposed silence, which is what the 'invisibility' of blacks in Britain is about (Mercer 1994: 7). Though Italians in Britain have been subjected to discrimination and ostracism during the war years and before (see Sponza 1988), 'invisibility', in their current project of recovery, does not ride on this past. It is deployed in discussions about multi-racial and multicultural Britain, and about the organic integration of Italians in the British social landscape. They represent themselves as 'invisible immigrants' to emphasise the political indifference they come up against in this country, and to describe the quiet, non-disruptive nature of this collectivity (see chapter 3).

On the other hand, the project of 'visibility' is couched in a politics of difference that calls into question the 'invisibility' of whiteness (Dyer 1988). Indeed, this self-labelling brings to the fore the very assumption that white immigrants, and more broadly, Europeans, have no 'ethnicity', not only as whites, but as culturally diverse people with a variety of backgrounds. Although I do not set out to deconstruct whiteness, my study will hopefully provide some insight into the construction of white 'normality' and universality.

I want to use the discourse on invisible immigrants as the starting point of my enquiry, for it captures the complexity of the issues running through the construction of a 'new' identity for London Italians. One of the tasks of this study is to investigate how the project of redeeming Italians from their invisibility is signified and formulated in the two organisations. This project is located in the struggle for control over historicity, that is, "the [symbolic] capacity [of an 'ethnic group'] to produce its own social and cultural field, its own historical environment" (Touraine 1977: 16). But historicity, in this context, is charged with a specific political burden because of the kind of group Italians constitute in Britain. Historicity is about the social actions undertaken to recover the Italian presence and the meanings projected onto them. Meanings which, in turn, inform and produce their community.

² Reproduced from a speech given in 1983 in *La Voce degli Italiani*, #831, October 1990: 15, under the headline "The Future of the Invisible Immigrants".

Historicity is neither idea nor material situation; it is the specific characteristic of social action, which constitutes its experience through the meaning it gives it. (idem: 17)

This process includes the construction of a "system of knowledge together with technical tools" which can be used to intervene in the very functioning of the Italian 'community' (idem: 15). In what follows, I will explore how different versions of 'community work' create an Italian identity and invest it with its own historicity.

At the theoretical level, this study is placed at the cross-roads of ethnic studies, contemporary cultural studies, and diaspora studies. It sits alongside recent theoretical developments that attempt to theorise cultural identity formation without entrenching absolute difference. I conceive identity as an ongoing process that involves necessary moments of closure. Though cultural identity is always-already hybrid, it is lived as coherent and integral. In the words of Stuart Hall,

I think cultural identity is not fixed, it's always hybrid. But this is precisely because it comes out of very specific historical formations, out of very specific histories and cultural repertoires of enunciation, that it can constitute a 'positionality', which we call, provisionally, identity. It's not just anything. So each of those identity-stories is inscribed in the positions we take up and identify with, and we have to live this ensemble of identity-positions in all its specificities. (1996: 502)

Identity is the creation of a sense of coherence, the outcome of a 'narrative of the self' (Hall 1992: 277) which unifies the multiple and variegated threads of our individual or collective stories. This is what I refer to as identity formation: a process which necessarily involve moments of closure and points of suture that momentarily arrest the ongoing movement of becoming. "Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (Hall 1990: 225). The reluctance of some social theorists towards analysing the formation of particularistic identities is tied up with the anti-essentialist critique of identity formation. Yet too often the multiplicity of narratives that compose identity formations are brought together as mere juxtapositions, mere additions, with the result that identity is reduced to fragmentation and dislocation. The suspicion for anything that might smack of essentialism radically refuses to consider identity in terms of coherence and rootings: consequently, the opposition between pluralism and essentialism has become absolute. In this respect, black intellectuals have alerted us to white supremacist arrogance in celebrating uprootedness, decentered selves and fragmented identities (hooks 1990; West 1993; Glissant 1981; also Gordon and Newfield 1994). As bell hooks notes, "Its easy to give up identity if you've got one"

(1990: 28). Although some theorists suggest that we are in a transnational era which undermines any concern with roots, immigrant populations often project themselves in relation to a specific origin that does not necessarily undermine multi-locality or transnational connections (Calhoun 1994a: 19). I adhere to Edouard Glissant's critique of the tendency to celebrate "nomadology", where "nomadism 'goes beyond' those peoples whose torment it is to root themselves", as is the case for the Martinicans. Glissant refines the idea of the rhizome by specifying that it roots itself "even in the air" and that:

the fact that it is not a *stock* makes it prone to 'accept'
the inconceivability of the other: the new bud always
possible, which is there, next to it. (1981: 197;
emphasis original)

Without denying the importance of thinking identity in a way that does not seal it into a closed entity, it is equally important to think of identity formation as a process that also involves "contingent closures of articulation" (Hall 1987: 45). In sum, I define identity as a social construct constituted of a series of organising principles that are related and mutually enforcing. It is such organising principles, and the nature of their relationships, that I intend to unpack in the following chapters. But first, I will trace a brief portrait of the Italian presence in Britain and London, and a description of the research settings. This will be followed by methodological considerations and an outline of the thesis.

A brief portrait of the Italian presence

It is in the years following the Italian Unification that important numbers of immigrants from the Italian peninsula started entering Britain (see table 1.1), though the first 'colony' in Clerkenwell, central London, is said to have existed since the seventeenth century (Colpi 1991a).³

The nineteenth century immigrants were part of a massive movement of emigration from Italy. In 1869, 134 865 left their country, with the numbers continually rising until the peak of 1913, when 872 598 Italians went to Europe or America (that is one person in every forty; Mack Smith 1959: 239). They were 'pushed' by the impoverishment of the Italian rural areas — resulting from a complex

³ As we will see in chapter 2, some stories about 'Italian' immigration to Britain trace the paths of migration back to the Roman Empire (Palmer [1977] 1991; Marin 1975). In the Middle Ages, an important trade industry led to the settlement of a Venetian colony in London which minted its own currency (Palmer [1977] 1991: 244). In 1581, an 'Italian' (sic) church existed in London, with a congregation of 66 (idem: 244).

combination of factors such as unemployment, soil erosion, and heavy taxation — and 'pulled' by the industrialisation of many western countries (Romano 1977: 93-94).

In Britain, immigration flows from Italy followed a similar growth. In 1861, the Italian-born population was estimated to be 4 608. By 1891, this population had more than doubled, to reach 10 934. It had doubled once again by 1901, with 24 383 Italian-born in Britain, after which this population stabilised, the immigration being partly impeded by two British government Acts.

Table 1
Italian-born population in Britain 1861-1981⁴

| YEAR | GREAT BRITAIN | ENGLAND & WALES | | SCOTLAND- |
|------|---------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------|
| | | (% of total) | London (% of total) | |
| 1861 | 4 608 | 4 489 (97%) | 2 041 (44%) | 119 (3%) |
| 1871 | 5 331 | 5 036 (95%) | 2 533 (47%) | 268 (5%) |
| 1881 | 6 832 | 6 504 (95%) | 3 504 (51%) | 328 (5%) |
| 1891 | 10 934 | 9 909 (91%) | 5 138 (46%) | 1 025 (9%) |
| 1901 | 24 383 | 20 332 (83%) | 10 889 (45%) | 4 051 (17%) |
| 1911 | 25 365 | 20 771 (81%) | 11 668 (46%) | 4 594 (18%) |
| 1921 | 26 055 | 20 401 (78%) | — * | 5 654 (22%) |
| 1931 | 24 008 | 18 792 (78%) | — | 5 216 (21%) |
| 1941 | — | — | — | — |
| 1951 | 38 427 | 33 159 (86%) | — | 5 268 (14%) |
| 1961 | 87 250 | 81 330 (93%) | — | 5 920 (7%) |
| 1971 | 108 930 | 103 510 (95%) | 32 530 (30%) | 5 420 (5%) |
| 1981 | 97 848 | 93 059 (95%) | 30 752 (31%) | 4 798 (5%) |

* — indicates that data was unavailable

The first was the Aliens Act. Adopted in 1905, the Act was introduced to curb the immigration of 'undesirable' aliens, but used to "check the influx of Jews from Russia and Russian-ruled Poland." (Sponza 1988: 13). This Act also policed 'itinerant commercial activities', and was used to expel foreign prostitutes and convicted criminals. The Act, however, only slightly affected Italian immigrants, who were less

⁴ Compilations from Colpi 1991: 48, 72, 135, 167; Sponza 1988: 13; Bottignolo 1985: 165, 181, all of whom use data from the British census. For a more detailed study of the data covering the years 1851-1911, see Sponza (1988: 12-14). There is sometimes considerable discrepancy between British and Italian official estimates of the Italian population in Britain. Bottignolo notes that the differences between British and Italian estimates are due to the fact that: "the English census groups all residents in GB by birthplace [whereas] Italian data... is based on parentage and citizenship which, for the children of immigrants, is their parents' municipality of origin where they are registered through the Italian Consulate." (1985: 27)

likely to be expelled than Russians/Poles, Germans or French (Sponza 1988: 237). Hence migrants from Italy continued to arrive in Britain in great numbers until 1913, through *padroni* sponsored channels of migration (see below). In 1920, a second Act, the Aliens Order, introduced the work permit. This Act, joined to Mussolini's reluctance to encourage emigration to Northern Europe (de Grazia 1981: 98), considerably obstructed the entry of Italian immigrants to Britain. It is not until the late 40s that new immigration waves from Italy were to re-appear.

The immigrants of this period came essentially from northern Italy, mainly from Lombardia, Emilia and Toscana. An important contingent came from Campania (Southern Italy) at that time, but the biggest emigration movement from southern Italy occurred after the 1939-45 war (Colpi 1991a). Though a small number went to Glasgow, Liverpool, Cardiff and, to a much lesser extent, Ireland (750 in 1927)⁵, London was their main place of settlement (1 726 in 1871⁶ and 14 800 in 1927).⁷ At the turn of the century, Italian migrants were settling predominantly in the areas known today as Soho (in the then 'district' of Westminster) and Clerkenwell ('district' of Holborn), both in central London. In the 1900s, the poorest parts of Holborn "had been *the* area where most Italians clustered" (Sponza 1988: 20; emphasis original), attracted by the cheap rents and the convenient location for their itinerant occupations (organ-grinders, chestnut sellers, costermongers) or artisan workshops (statuette makers).

At the turn of the century, the mushrooming of restaurants and food shops run by new Italian immigrants signalled a change in the 'community's' occupational structure. From hawking and street entertaining activities of earlier times, Italian immigrants turned to catering services: ice-cream trading or working in restaurants, hotels and clubs. Itinerants virtually disappeared after 1905, due firstly to restrictions spelled out by the Aliens Act, forcing foreigners to enter the formal economy, and secondly to the decline of this section of the Italian population (Sponza 1988: 13).

Chain migration was an important channel of emigration for Italians. In the period 1830-1930, the most prominent path was run by a system called *padronismo*.

The *padrone* transformed the process of emigration into a business; he offered work contracts to people in Italy, sought volunteers to fulfil them, organised transport and employed people himself once at the destination. (Colpi 1991a: 34)

⁵ Colpi 1991a: 74.

⁶ Marin 1975: 168.

⁷ Colpi 1991a: 74.

This type of *padrone* differed from its North American counterpart, who acted as sort of a broker by recruiting, hiring and controlling fellow Italians on behalf of an indigenous employer (such as the Canadian National Railway Company), often collecting a fee from the recruits apart from the commission paid by his employer. In Britain, however, the *padrone* was the employer and he most often recruited children, generally young boys. The early *padroni* (1830-1880) controlled boys involved in itinerant commercial activities, namely organ grinders. Later (1880/90 to late 20s), the *padroni* employed boys in their own small businesses, following the transition between informal to formal economic activities. This new type of *padronismo* was said to be more personal than the previous one, since most *padroni* recruited boys or young men and women from their home village in Italy. However, along with the formalisation of the economy came a more family-based migration, thus undermining the *padrone*-based channels.

The post-war era was notable for the migratory movements from Italy to Britain (as to other parts of the world), particularly from 1949 to 1962. During that period, between 6 000 and 11 000 Italians entered Britain each year (with the exception of 1950 and 1952). There was another peak in 1965 and 1967, but in the following years, immigration dropped and stabilised to one or two thousand annually (Bottignolo 1985: 209). Once again, London was the preferred place of settlement, but cities such as Bedford and Bristol were hosts to significant numbers of Italian immigrants recruited under Volunteer Worker Schemes.

Post-war immigrants were of three categories: 1) prisoners of war; 2) caterers; 3) industrial workers. There were more or less 1 000 POWs who stayed in Britain under 'civilian workers' contracts or, later, the European Volunteer Workers Scheme. New immigration, on the other hand, brought new workers in the flourishing catering industry. It was in the post-war years that London saw its first coffee bars, and subsequently its first *trattorie*, all of which "sold Italianness", as Terri Colpi puts it (1991a: 141).

Industrial workers, for their part, arrived in Britain under bulk recruitment schemes. The reconstruction of Britain after the last war required a vast amount of labour resources, which the country recruited from many parts of Europe, notably Italy and Poland. The rapid growth of the Italian-born population in the 50s is largely due to such schemes. Women were solicited for the textile, rubber and ceramics industries of central and northern England. Many were also hired as domestic servants or hospital orderlies. Men, for their part, were predominantly recruited as foundry workers, miners, tin-plate workers, and brickworkers (Colpi 1991a: 145-152).

The third category of immigrants is said to be "responsible for the change in the structure and orientation of the Italian presence in Britain" (idem: 136), constituting what is known as the 'new' Italian communities, by contrast to the 'old' communities established before the 1939-45 war. The 'new communities' were more diversified in terms of geographical origin than the 'old communities'. Although they were predominantly from southern Italy, they were not as much village groupings as in the case of their predecessors, having migrated through impersonal networks run by British recruitment schemes, rather than through *padrone*-run chain migration.

Since the mid-1960s, immigration from Italy has waned considerably, and since 1969, returnees to Italy outnumbered those entering Britain (Marin 1975), except for 1984, when the balance falls in favour of migrants to Britain by 648.⁸ The characteristics of these migrants are unknown, but it is possible to presume that a number of them include individuals who came to Britain on a temporary basis, in contrast to earlier migrants who 'fled' from severe economic conditions in Italy.

In London, in 1983, the Italian-born population was said to be 65 300 (Colpi 1991a: 169). As for the total Italian population of the UK — including 'second' and 'third' generations — numbers are not very accurate, for they come from Italian official sources who rely on estimates calculated as multiples of the number of family or individual records in the archives of the local Consulates. Nevertheless, the approximations move between 150 000 and 196 000 of Italian residents of the UK in 1981 — less than 1% of the entire population — and between 100 000 and 150 000 for Greater London. In 1987, 34% of the Italian population worked in the Hotel and Tourism industry (including 32% that were either self employed or entrepreneurs), 23% in the industrial sector (99% of which were employed labourers).⁹

In London, the dispersal of Italian residents from Clerkenwell and Soho began in the 1920s and 1930s, though these areas remained important Italian neighbourhoods until the war years. Today the population is scattered in the Greater London area, north and south of the Thames: Islington, Westminster, Camden, Enfield, Barnet, Haringey, Wandsworth, Lambeth, to name a few of the boroughs where Italians are most highly concentrated (see appendix 1). It is to this dispersed population that both St Peter's and the Centro Scalabrini offer liturgical and cultural services.

⁸ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #831, October 1990: 13.

⁹ Data from the Italian Foreign Ministry, compiled in *La Voce degli Italiani*, #831, October 1990: 15.

The research settings: St Peter's church and the Centro Scalabrini

The post-1945 wave of immigration from Italy led to significant changes in the institutional structure of the 'community'. Industrial workers and professionals arrived at a time when earlier immigrants were more and more integrated in the local environment, and under conditions that differed greatly from their forerunners. Being employed on arrival under government schemes, new immigrants had little need for 'middle men' to arrange for personal matters. It is in this context that parish priests began acquiring a new role. The priests and the 'ethnic church' were increasingly recognised as leaders and organisers by both Italians and their employers (Colpi 1991a: 152). Today, the churches play a leading role in London Italian associative life. In addition, they are at the forefront of the construction of a distinctly 'Italian' community that would include and transcend regional differences. In this section, I briefly introduce the two establishments. A fuller account of their respective characteristics and daily life can be found in chapter 4.

St Peter's and the Centro are part of an organisational structure that includes approximately 100 associations and clubs in the Greater London area. A large part of these are defined according to the geographical origins of their members (such as the Piacentini, Parmigiani or Parmensi Associations).¹⁰ Centred around cultural, professional, sports, and welfare activities, many of these organisations are members of a federation established in 1975, the *Federazione Associazioni Italiane England* (FAIE). According to the 1993 Italian Directory¹¹, the FAIE counts 38 members, most of which (at least 30) are based in London.¹²

London Italian associative life is closely related to the two socio-religious centres that are the focus of this enquiry: St Peter's church, in Clerkenwell, and the Centro Scalabrini, in Brixton.¹³

St Peter's church is the oldest of the two. It was founded in 1864 by two Pallottini fathers, Raffaele Melia and Giuseppe Faà, who had been sent to London twenty years earlier, by San Vincenzo Pallotti, patron of the Pallottini Order. At the time San Vincenzo sent his missionaries, a Catholic church called the *Cappella Sarda* already existed in central London, on Sardinia Street. This chapel, subsidised by the government of the *Regno di Piemonte* since 1817, was the

¹⁰ For more details, see Colpi 1991a and Marin 1975.

¹¹ Published yearly by *La Voce degli Italiani*.

¹² Appendix 2 lists the associations and committees named in this thesis.

¹³ Apart from these two establishments, there are fourteen non-affiliated Italian missionaries and chaplains in Britain, eight of which are in London. One of them is linked to St Patrick's International Centre, in Soho Square, which was an Italian parish in the 1920s, and is now a social and educational centre for foreign youths.

oldest centre in London for pastoral activities concerning Roman Catholics (and suffered for this during the Gordon Riots), and had a keen interest in both the Irish and the Italian poor; but few of the latter must have attended the Chapel services if sermons, as it seems, were only rarely delivered in Italian. (Sponza 1988: p. 22)

The Pallottini Fathers came to London to build a church for Italians, fearing that they might be converted to Protestantism if they were not provided with a place of worship of their own. The site of the church was obtained in 1852, destined for an international Roman Catholic cathedral. The architect, Sir John Miller Bryson¹⁴, drew the plans for the church, modelled on the Basilica San Crisogono in Trastevere, Rome.

The project of building the church did not receive overall approval. Fund raising initiatives were met with resistance from different sources. As Father Faà himself expressed in an issue of *The Tablet*, he travelled to many parts of Europe in order to collect a "little sum to begin with".

The plan was adopted, I started from England and combating against many difficulties of language, of hot, snowy, rainy and frosty weather, of sickness, of disappointments and oppositions, of privations and inconveniences of all kinds, and even of persecution and incarceration, sometimes in want of lodging or proper nourishment, I travelled for three years in Italy, in Austria, in Poland, in Prussia, in France, and Spain, and succeeded in spite of the bad times, in collecting a little sum to begin with. Three months ago, with the sanction and encouragement of His Eminence Cardinal Wiseman, the foundations of the church were laid and the work since then has rapidly progressed, and the building is rising up as if it were by enchantment.¹⁵

Soon after Fr. Faà's article, on December 25th 1862, the crypt was opened. The solemn opening of the church took place on the 16th of April 1863, "under the most auspicious circumstances, there being present... twelve Prelates of the Church and a very large number of the Clergy Regular and Secular."¹⁶

In 1883, St Peter's organised the first procession of the *Madonna del Carmine*, the first of its kind to be held in Britain since the Reformation. The procession is still an important annual event for London Italians (see chapter 4). Another event is the

¹⁴ Sir Bryson was a pupil of Norman Shaw and W.E. Nesfield, and the chief initiator of the English Baroque revival in the 1890s.

¹⁵ *The Tablet*, August 30, 1862.

¹⁶ *The Tablet*, April 18, 1863.

Olimpiadi della Gioventù Italiana, which gathers 'young Italians', every second year, to compete in athletic sports.

Linked to St Peter's church are a social club, *Casa Pallotti*, a youth club, and a number of small religious groups such as the *consorelle*, women who meet for mass one Friday a month. There exists a male counterpart: the *confratelle*, who can be seen seated in the nave during special religious ceremonies. Two parish priests are appointed to the church: Padre Carmelo di Giovanni and Padre Roberto Russo, each of whom have been living in London for over 20 years.

St Peter's publishes its own monthly magazine, *Backhill*. Subtitled "magazine of the Italian community" (*Rivista della comunità italiana*), *Backhill* was created in 1977. Vittorio Heissel, who runs Casa Pallotti and the youth club, approached Francesco Giacon, son of the prominent community leader Giuseppe Giacon, to ask him to start an "extended parish bulletin". Both men agreed that there was a need for a new type of Italian magazine, one which would not be as political as *La Voce* (see below) or as high-brow as *Londra Sera*.¹⁷ They established "a more family type magazine".¹⁸ The articles are in Italian or English and provide general information on the latest activities of the collectivity. The pages of *Backhill* cover parish announcements (weddings, baptisms, special masses), general information for Italians abroad, local activities, news from Italy (headlines or petty news rather than political or economic affairs), news from the Vatican and another 'religious page', news from the EEC, entertainment, leisure, sports, and a history of 'The Hill', the pet name for former 'Little Italy' in Clerkenwell.

The second institution is the *Centro Scalabrini* in Brixton. Apart from the administration offices, the building houses the Italian Women's Club (*Club Donne Italiane*), a club for retirees, a youth club, and the *Chiesa del Redentore* (Church of the Redeemer).¹⁹ The church is much smaller than St Peter's, and has recently undergone important renovations in order to "make it look more like a church", as a club member told me. The organisation also runs two hostels for students (one for men, one for women), a nursery, and a home for the elderly in Shenley. The retiring home is the location for one of the biggest annual picnics of the Italian 'community'.²⁰ Four priests

¹⁷ *Londra Sera* is a small broad sheet that publishes artistic events such as exhibitions, cinema, literature, opera, etc. It also has a financial page and news from Italy. The articles are predominantly in Italian. In 'community' circles, *Londra Sera* is known as the *London Italian* version of *Hello* magazine.

¹⁸ Personal interview with Francesco Giacon, February 1993.

¹⁹ In what follows, I will occasionally use the label *Centro/Chiesa*, when speaking of the socio-religious institution as a whole.

²⁰ It competes in popularity with the picnic of the prestigious Mazzini-Garibaldi club for men. This club was founded in 1864, at the time of Garibaldi's visit to London, and succeeded a society of Italian workers which had existed since 1840, the *Unione degli Operai Italiani*, founded by Giuseppe Mazzini.

reside at the Centre and share different religious and social responsibilities, namely officiating masses not only at the Chiesa del Redentore, but also in the parishes of Sutton, Lewisham, Croydon, Epsom and Walton on Thames.

The *Centro* is part of the Scalabrini congregation, a missionary order founded in 1887 to minister to Italian emigrants and their descendants around the world. The Scalabrini order may be defined as diasporic: Scalabriniani fathers and sisters are individuals whose very lives combine routes and roots. The order is by definition devoted to migrants and issues concerning migration. Apart from establishing 'ethnic churches' world-wide, the order is also very active in research. Two important research centres are directed by the Scalabriniani: the *Centro studi emigrazione* (CRE) in Rome, and the Center for Migration Studies in New York, each of which has an impressive list of publications, mostly about Italian immigrants in Europe or the US. In addition, the journal *Studi Emigrazione/Études migrations* comes from the CRE.

The *Centro Scalabrini* in Brixton has played, since its foundation in 1968, a leading role in London Italian institutional life. Most of the existing organisations and associations were founded in the years following the 1939-45 war and many have emerged from the *Centro*. Apart from being a meeting place for a number of regional or other clubs and associations, the premises are often used for meetings or conferences about the life and destiny of the Italian 'community', gathering representatives from a number of different organisations.

One of the resident priests of the *Centro* is always the editor of the most widely distributed local Italian newspaper, *La Voce degli Italiani*. Founded in 1948 by Father D. Valente of the San Paolo Society, *La Voce* has been based in Brixton and run by the Scalabrini Fathers since 1963. *La Voce* is published fortnightly, and reaches a readership of approximately 25 000, including over 5 000 subscriptions. It is written almost exclusively in Italian, apart from the occasional English piece. In contrast to the more parish oriented *Backhill*, *La Voce* adopts a distinctively political direction. In this respect, leaders of *La Voce* were involved in the foundation of two federations claiming for the recognition of press organisations that are distinct from Italian based ones; a journalism *by* Italians abroad as opposed to *for* Italians abroad.²¹

Since the 50s, *La Voce* has turned to the concerns of 'new' immigrants — as opposed to the pre-war 'old community' — offering them social assistance and legal advice (it published a regular feature on legal questions). Although it claims to be the paper for Italians in Great Britain (sic), *La Voce* is much more centred on London

²¹ FEDEUROPA, i.e. *Federazione dei giornali italiani in Europa* (1965) and FMSI, i.e. *Federazione mondiale della stampa italiana all'estero* (1971). *La Voce* is still represented on the directing committee of the FMSI.

affairs than anything else. It does include, however, a 'Northern voice', as well as a few pages for 'Italian life in Great Britain': recent social gatherings and activities of various organisations or *prominenti*, in different locations around the UK.

This concludes the presentation of the two Italian organisations. I now turn to methodological considerations, which address different aspects of the research process: methods, politics of fieldwork, and anonymity .

Methodological considerations

I want to begin with an explanation of my decision to disclose the identity of the research settings. First, as communal spaces, these churches are part of a public realm that is independent of my research. It follows that the activities I attended and journals I read were public events open to a large number of people. In addition, I want to take seriously the importance of 'authorship'. These are lived places that evolved under different conditions and that play different roles in the London Italian 'community' life. All their vitality would be lost under the veil of anonymity. Furthermore, revealing the names of the research settings opens up the possibility of other interpretations by those who are familiar with one or both places.

In contrast, the identities of some individuals with whom I had regular contacts with have been changed, while others have not. I use the real names of interviewees who are well known in the Italian community and whose biographical details would be immediately recognisable. The information these men provided me with during our conversations concerned their organisations, and was thus available to the public. Also, the beliefs and politics of these men are known to the readership of *La Voce*, which regularly publishes their views. Where I have chosen to protect the anonymity of individuals, is in the occasional reference to private and informal conversations which I use to support an argument. The informality of the contexts from which I draw these quotes — where there is no clear understanding that I may eventually use them — prescribes that I keep the interlocutors unknown to the readers. It is worth pointing out, however, that interviews and conversations are only secondary sources of information in this research, and as such, have not been used extensively.

The research was conducted between February 1993 and May 1994, and involved semi-structured interviews, participant observation and textual analysis. The 'community' events I took part in include activities organised by one or both of the institutions, for the Italian population at large as opposed to gatherings of regional associations (such as the Parmigiani, or the Luchenesi nel Mondo), or other groups such as the football club or the Alpini association (an organisation of war veterans). I

spent fifteen months doing field work in order to cover all of the annual events. I attended Sunday lunches to celebrate Father's Day, Grandparent's Day, Valentine's Day, the annual picnic, the annual remembrance Ceremony in Brookwood cemetery, the annual pilgrimage to the monastery of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Aylesford (Kent), the annual Procession della Madonna del Carmine in Clerkenwell, and the annual dinner dance of the FAIE.

Apart from these yearly ceremonials and festivities, I also participated in the religious life of St Peter's. I attended Sunday masses, first communions, confirmation celebrations and, towards the end of the fieldwork, I went to wedding ceremonies and funerals. My visits to the Centro Scalabrini, for their part, revolved around the weekly Women's Club meetings, and the weekly rehearsals of the Scalabrini choir — of which I was a member — set up especially for the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the Centro Scalabrini in December 1993.

For the textual analysis, *Backhill* and *La Voce* provided valuable information that I have integrated into my study. I have also analysed a small body of literature on Italians in Britain, for I conceive them as textual versions of self-representation and as such, they are part of the communal project of recovery (see chapter 2).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with a number of 'community' leaders and intellectuals, in their offices or in their homes. A total of 16 men and women were interviewed, some of whom up to three times. At the initial stages of my research, these meetings were essentially aimed at acquiring information about the London Italian organisational structure: the 'who's who' and 'what's what' of Italian associative life. In this respect, conversations with two academics and observers of the 'community' — Lucio Sponza and Arturo Tosi — were most useful. Seven other interviews were conducted with leaders, volunteers or employees of the two research settings. The rest of the interviewees included an Italian language teacher working with Italian children, the author of a book on Italians in Britain, two leaders of an organisation involved in the administration of Italian language classes, two non-affiliated Italian priests, and one president of a *patronati*, also heavily involved in Italian 'community' politics. Among these 16 individuals, only 2 were women, 4 were 'second generation' (3 born in London, one in Scotland), and one 'third generation'. It was these interviews that led me to focus my attention on St Peter's and the Centro Scalabrini, for they confirmed that these socio-religious centres play a leading role in the construction of a community. Later in the course of the field research, additional conversations took place with the leaders of these institutions, usually to get an appreciation of how they formulated their notion of identity, and how they defined their

role in the 'community'. Apart from the tailored questions to suit each individual's speciality, all of the interviews addressed similar themes (see appendix 3).

The rationale behind this flexible methodology was to try to get a sense of what was said about the Italian presence in Britain and the construction of a community, and of how practices of collective identity were performed within communal activities. Furthermore, I hope to render a more textured account of institutional practices by including personal observations or comments collected throughout my fieldwork. This is meant to avoid a univocal, smoothed-out rendition of community practices that obscures the multiple meanings that may be produced through collective practices of signification. On the other hand, by gathering information from a variety of sources, contradictions and consistencies between activities may be drawn out. For my analysis of different versions of 'community work', I identified a number of themes, and examined how they are deployed in different practices of collective identity.²²

In terms of the way in which the research was conducted, it is important to point out factors that were influential in determining the kind of access, observations and interrogations that took place. Establishing contacts with research subjects is usually a long process of patient negotiations, introductions and mutual familiarisation. The first person I interviewed — a UK-born Italian woman — predicted that my being a woman might hinder my access to the male dominated local Italian leadership, though my looks would be an asset: I could 'pass' as an Italian. What concerned her was that being a non-Italian woman might be a liability. As it turned out, being Italian did not really matter. Initially, it did come as a surprise to the people I came in contact with that I, a non-Italian French Canadian, was doing a research on Italians in London. But this was not a basis of exclusion. Even when I apologised for my poor knowledge of the Italian language, this was usually shrugged off by comparing me to the English born children of immigrants: "Bah! Just like my daughter", I was told, indicating that there is no uniform way of 'acting' that would display 'Italianness'. Some speak Italian fluently, some don't. My ethnic identity was part of negotiations between myself and the men and women I interacted with in order to 'locate' me in relation to them. The outcome was that we met on the terrain of our common status as foreigners in Britain — being from Quebec, with a Catholic background, I was included within the folds of this minority. What struck me was that my Italianness was not assumed — I was asked about my background and positioned as a foreigner — but my Catholicism was. It struck me because *I* tended to ascribe a certain agnosticism or non-practising faith to

²² For example: emigration, settlement, fatherland or 'land of origin', Italians Abroad, familistic religion.

some members of these groups, while it eventually occurred to me that the assumption was rather the opposite from their point of view. This might seem obvious, but the absence of overt attempts by club members to confirm my religious faith allowed me to presume it was not an issue. Indeed it was not, because it was *assumed* to be. Our mere involvement in these centres is read as a statement of religious identification. And this seems to override ‘Italianness’.²³ The point is that my insertion as ‘one of theirs’²⁴ bears methodological implications for the research practice in ‘ethnic studies’, where studies on minority cultures are commonly conducted by presumed members of these groups. Apart from the practical aspects that may have to do with the ‘cultural capital’ acquired from having grown up in a particular ‘ethnic’ culture, the ‘ethnic’ division of labour in ethnic studies is indicative of the persisting assumption that posits ethnicity as the primary ground of identity formation. It elides a number of social differences of class, sexuality, gender, even ethnicity, that exist within ‘ethnic groups’, as well as obscuring the very particular context that is created from the relationship between the researcher and the individuals whose lives he or she is documenting.

The most decisive factor in giving me access to ‘community’ events, however, was my membership of the Italian Women's Club (*Club Donne Italiane*; CDI). After months of regular appearances at St Peter's, and of phone calls at the Centro Scalabrini, I finally had an interview which was crucial to the outcome of my research: I met the president of the CDI. That day, I joined the organisation and began attending their weekly meetings, where I was introduced as Anna-Maria — ‘italianised’ again! Thanks to these women, I found out about the different ‘community events’ and more importantly, grew closer to some women who became my regular companions in these outings.

Though my being a woman facilitated a particular kind of access to the daily life of the Centro Scalabrini, my interactions with these women were fraught with negotiations, masquerades, assumptions and positionings that became important ‘sources of knowledge’ (Back 1993) in the outcome of this study. I will return to these questions in the concluding chapter. The argument I want to make at this stage is that my position in the clubs had to be negotiated from the very beginning, and was continually redefined. Participant observation, in this respect, should not be read in terms of the ‘I was there’ version of credentialism that allows researchers to claim some

²³ I return to the significance of religion as the foundation for a new ethnicity in chapter 4 and in the conclusion.

²⁴ On the night of the choir concert for the 25th anniversary of the Centro Scalabrini, the master of ceremony introduced us as ‘our people’, ‘our voice’ and ‘the voice of the community’, while a Greek choir-member (married to an Italian) and I nudged and winked at each other.

form of 'insider' knowledge. A number of factors shaped the nature of my involvement in the research settings, including the contrasts between my personal politics and beliefs and the ones expressed by the different people I interacted with. As James Clifford points out, the ethnographer deals with "partial truths" which are met through "an open-ended series of contingent, power-laded encounters" that reflect personal and ideological characteristics of both the researcher and the researched (1986: 8).

This thesis should be read in a space that lies somewhere between a simplistic account that follows the rules of empiricist orthodoxy and a theoretical discourse that could be no more than a reification of the very 'categories' I want to scrutinise. I have written this dissertation out of a commitment to engaging with the immediate experience of identity formation. Which is not to say that I am advocating some form of experience-based knowledge that renders it somehow more authentic (Scott 1991). Rather, I am arguing that in order to avoid abstract analytical procedures, it is necessary to examine how ethnicity, gender and power manifest themselves in the formation of identity at the local level. In the account that follows, I navigate on the very tension between the general and the particular, at once trying to search out the details of how certain meanings are encased in institutional practices of identity, to render these practices as faithfully as possible, and to relate them to broader theoretical questions. I do not assume to tell the 'whole story', nor do I claim to produce an alternative theoretical protocol to identity formation. I want this thesis to be read as a contemplation on the social dynamics of identity formation, in a community of Italian immigrants in contemporary Britain and 'New Europe'.

Structure of the thesis

The following study is structured along different forms of 'community work': written histories, political issues, everyday life, and popular religion, all of which are examined in relation to broader national and religious discourses. My account of these practices is interlaced with two threads: the 'imagined community', and the 'imagined emigrant'. 'Imagined community' concerns the construction of closure, communality, shared grounds of identification and continuity for a collectivity that can no longer be defined in traditional terms of solidarity based on the neighbourhood or on a primary ethnicity. In immigrant populations, 'community' is often configured around three poles: links with a national culture located in the 'homeland'; a distinctive culture, often defined in terms of language and religion; and particular kinship/family structure (Bhatt 1994; Wiervorka 1993). My objective is to examine how these poles are deployed in community discourses, rather than accepting them as primary grounds of communality.

I am interested in how a 'we' is created out of a number of claims that can be political, cultural or moral. These claims, moreover, exist in relationships that are not necessarily straightforward and harmonious. Community discourses do not form a singular, unified collective subject, but, rather, generate and emerge from practices and motifs that are highly dispersed. In other words, I am not concerned with creating the image of a unified community, nor am I seeking to over-emphasise the coherence within the symbolic repertoire that constitutes the community boundaries (Cohen 1985). In the following chapters, I examine the limits, thresholds, tensions, discontinuities, contradictions and strategies of coherence and stabilisation involved in the formation of London Italian identity.

The 'imagined emigrant', for its part, refers to the construction of subjects. As will become apparent in the next chapter, my analysis assumes that imagining communities necessarily involves the production of particular subjects and subject positions. Though this thesis is primarily about institutional practices, I consistently examine how these practices work differently for men, women and 'generations'.

The thesis includes six chapters. The first chapter outlines the theoretical problematic framing my analysis. My conception of identity as founded upon a set of organising principles that are related and continually redefined, underscores my theoretical concern for speaking of cultural identity formation without entrenching absolute difference. With this in mind, I review, in chapter 1, the main approaches in ethnic studies to conclude that the multiple, ambivalent political and cultural positions Italian immigrants occupy in Britain cannot be adequately apprehended in terms of ethnicity alone. Moving beyond ethnicity, I look at theoretical discussions of diaspora, mainly in the work of Paul Gilroy. Diaspora offers a useful heuristic means to explore the formation of local particularity in relation to broader national and transnational contexts. Diaspora allows me to think of continuity without reproducing a model of identity that is defined in terms of primordial ethnicity, tradition or the family.

Chapter 2 looks at textual renditions of the Italian presence in Britain. In short, this is about historicity and community; that is, about how these narratives make sense of the Italian presence in Britain through the meanings they give it. I shall be considering the literature on Italians, by Italians, as part of a broader project of communal memory and self recovery. Informed by the insights of Benedict Anderson and Michel de Certeau, I conceive these texts as specific instances in the creation of an imagined community: these written histories provide a partial solution to the indeterminacy of the London Italian collectivity, by authorising its existence and legitimating the actions undertaken to create an 'Italian community'. The question I

address in this chapter is: what *kind* of imagined community and ‘imagined emigrant’ do these texts speak of?

In the third chapter, I turn to the politics of identity of current Italian emigrant leaders of London. These politics are expressed in the language of citizenship that includes political, cultural and generational concerns. Though they emerge from a multiplicity of locations — Europe, Britain, Italy — they are essentially directed at Italy, and in this respect, constitute some form of return to the nation/homeland. This raises a number of issues, namely about: the articulation of the homeland with local particularity; the relationship between diasporic and nationalist consciousness; the impact of the latter on definitions of culture. My analysis reveals the emergence of transnational geographies of identity located between ‘here’ and ‘there’, which are stitched together through renewed appeals to origins and kinship narratives.

Following the analysis of political issues, the everyday life of St Peter's and the Centro/Chiesa are the subjects of chapters 4 and 5. This includes ceremonies, rituals, festivities and textual recollections that take place in the two socio-religious institutions. My interest, here, turns to localised practices of identity formation. I begin, in chapter 4, with a close look at the specific dramas that are re-enacted in each setting. This is about the ways in which ‘memory work’ may be localised and the different forms this localisation may take. I argue that new terrains of identification are produced from activities that are said to be expressive of a shared identity. Temporality, spatiality, geography and genealogy articulate differently in each location, creating new soils of belonging.

In chapter 5, I conclude my ethnographic account by stripping Italian ‘popular religion’ to its barest bones: sexuality, gender, generations. Theoretically informed by the work of Gayle Rubin, I explore how the construction of particular subjects relates back to the community. Rites of passage such as First Communion and wedding ceremonies are conceived as typical of London Italian religious practice. My interest in these rituals stems from my assumption that they are not only about (re)producing local particularity, they are also about producing differentiated subject positions. In short, I pay attention to the ways in which Italian specificity in London is drawn from deeply held ideas about gender differences, sexual norms and generational responsibility.

Finally, the closing chapter looks back at the central findings of this dissertation and examines their implications for theorising the entwinement of gender, ethnicity and power in group identity formation.

Chapter 1

Ethnicity, diaspora, culture and solidarity

Is it still analytically fruitful to think about the world in terms of ethnicity?

Thomas Hylland Eriksen

As I establish in the opening chapter, this study is located at the intersection of ethnic studies, contemporary cultural studies, and recent theoretical discussions of diaspora. In what follows, I will sketch out the broad theoretical problematic framing my research, leaving more specific and contingent questions to each of the subsequent chapters.

Identity has always been at the core of theoretical and political debates over ethnicity and the definition of ethnic groups. Ever since its popularisation in the nineteen sixties, 'ethnicity' has been subjected to numerous definitions and questions about its nature, and there still remains considerable confusion over what constitutes ethnic groups. My central concern is that despite the widespread consensus about the constructed, multifaceted and political nature of ethnicity, it tends to take on the appearance of an autonomous, determining force in communal identity formation. By looking at the main currents that have dominated ethnic studies since the nineteen sixties — ethnic boundaries, structuration, new ethnicities — I explore the 'substance of ethnicity', as Werner Sollors (1986) would put it, that is, how its objectification, naturalisation or determining character may emerge from *within* the concept of ethnicity itself. More accurately, the way ethnicity has operated both in political and theoretical discourses has consistently reproduced a model of enclosed cultural groupings positioned as minorities in relation to national cultures. In essence, I conclude that both 'old' and 'new' ethnicities are of limited use for a study of a migrant population such as Italians in London. Without rejecting ethnicity altogether, I propose to displace it from its predicative position, and to examine how it works in the identity formation of London Italians.

In this respect, diaspora constitutes a heuristic means of conceiving identity, continuity, solidarity, without reinstating ethnicity as its primary ground. Studies of diaspora emphasise the constitutive character of memory, displacement and multi-locality in identity formation. In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the principle vectors of diaspora that inform my analysis. I suggest that the concept of diaspora is more appropriate for the analysis of emigrant identity formation because it locates it in that space of negotiation between 'where you're from' and 'where you're at' (Gilroy 1991). Diaspora is useful for it allows me to proceed

from the constitutive potency of this in-betweenness in the formation of local particularity.

From ethnic boundaries to new ethnicities: enclosing diversity within

The field of 'ethnic studies' gained its credentials in the context of the sixties 'ethnic revival' and civil rights movements in the United States. The British 'ethnic school', for its part, gained prominence in the midst of public debates over the incorporation of immigrant workers recruited largely in former British colonies in the aftermath of the 1939-45 war. In both cases, ethnicity was conceived — and had been prior to its institutionalisation — as a social relation inherent to multicultural or multi-'racial' settings. Ethnic identity referred to the definition of, and the basis for, social mobilisation in contexts of inter-group relations.

The increased currency of ethnicity was largely an outcome of the black American, anti-assimilationist response to the 'melting-pot' ideology, which set out to erase ethnic differences within an idealised American way of life. One source of irritation for black Americans was that this ideology enshrined the European immigrant as the exemplar of standards, values and experiences of minority collectivities. The civil rights movement challenged the 'colour-blind' society, and was at the forefront of the affirmation of the durability, legitimacy and dignity of 'ethnic consciousness'. Consequently, it played a major role in transforming the heathen liability of ethnicity into a sacred asset, a desirable, groovy feature of one's identity. Quickly, ethnic minorities from various backgrounds followed suit in claims for the political recognition of their 'ethnicity'. In this respect, the 'ethnic revival' formed a dialectical relationship with crises of national identities: while the revival of ethnic consciousness was part of a number of social movements contesting national institutions, 'ethnic politics' was nevertheless oriented towards the acquisition of some form of recognition within national policies and institutions (Hall 1992; Gleason 1993).

Ethnic identity emerged as a property of ethnic groups, to be protected and valued, and the link between the individual and the collective converged in the equation between 'ethnic consciousness' and identity.¹ By the nineteen seventies, ethnicity was in true vogue in the United States. In this respect, Glazer and Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963) was also influential in the rise of a new

¹ It is worth pointing out that the parallel development of both concepts of ethnicity and identity set the conceptual grounds for their merging in the revival of ethnic consciousness. Identity first appeared as a distinct analytical concept in American social sciences and humanities in the nineteen fifties (Gleason 1993). A decade later, Erik Erikson's notion of *identity crisis* played a key role in putting the concept of identity into circulation. Moreover, Erikson argued that the defence of one's identity is a universal and 'natural' behaviour, inherent to all living beings (Mol 1976: 2). Identity was established as an intrinsic 'thing' that can develop from a multiplicity of locations, but without which an individual, or collectivity, is dysfunctional.

form of self-awareness based on origins and common culture. Their work paved the way to consolidating the notion of ethnicity as a primordial quality of ethnic groups, that is to say that ethnic ties will always exist alongside other forms of social affiliations and will be 'passed on' from generation to generation.

These primordialist views have been widely criticised and their theoretical potency has been seriously undermined.² A most influential figure in the development of a more complex conception of ethnicity was Frederick Barth. Barth (1969) argued that ethnic groups move across boundaries and develop mutual dependencies (through trade, for example) but that cultural contact does not necessarily lead to the lessening of cultural diversity. Indeed, Barth emphasised the continual existence of ethnic boundaries, and the changing nature of ethnic markers. For Barth,

ethnic categories provide an organisational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of contents in different socio-cultural systems. (1969: 14)

In Barth's view, ethnic boundaries emerge in situations inter-group relations as a means of delimiting 'ethnic groups' and of regulating their markers. Barth stresses that the focus of investigation is the "ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses." (idem: 15; emphasis original).

So when one traces the history of an ethnic group through time, one is not simultaneously, in the same sense, tracing the history of 'a culture': the elements of the present culture of that ethnic group have not sprung from the particular set that constituted the group's culture at a previous time, whereas the group has a continual organizational existence with boundaries (criteria of membership) that despite modifications have marked off a continuing unit. (idem: 38)

Barth's major contribution was the insistence that ethnic groups are essentially social constructs; categories of ascription and identification. Ethnic boundaries are mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion policed by selected "criteria of membership". This is what is commonly defined as the Barthian legacy in ethnic studies. A less noted feature of Barth's' argument is that it implies that ethnic boundaries are normative constructs: indeed, if they rely on "criteria of membership", this means that they construct norms of behaviours through which the ethnic subjects are also defined. However, his theory relies on the assumption that cultural identity is discrete, enduring and at the basis of the continuing marking of boundaries, the latter resulting from the concerted action of individuals who

² Different versions of primordialist definitions of ethnicity are found in Shils 1957; van den Berghe 1979 (using a socio-biological approach); Smith 1986 ("ethnicity... [is one of] the basic organising principles and bonds of human association throughout history: p. 12).

share, by definition, this identity and whose differences are obliterated within the 'vessel'. Despite the changes in the cultural forms it takes, the very process of marking ethnic borders is conceived as the expression of an inherent identity.

Similar criticism may be addressed to subsequent uses of the Barthian theory of ethnic boundaries. 'Situational ethnicity' (Wallman 1979; Cohen 1974) emphasises the strategic factors in fostering ethnic identifications. Ethnicity is seen as a resource which is strategically managed for social and material gain, the value and definition of which depends on both structure and perception (Wallman 1979). Abner Cohen, for his part, contends that Barth's perspective neglects differences in 'degrees of ethnicity' (1974: xv), which refers to the degree of conformity of members of social collectivities to patterns of behaviour (idem: ix-x). Cohen defines ethnicity in the following terms:

The concept of ethnicity throws into relief, or rather dramatizes, the processes by which the symbolic patterns of behaviour implicit in the style of life or the 'sub-culture' of a group...develop in order to articulate organizational functions that cannot be formally institutionalized. (1974: xxii)

When other forms of solidarity (such as class) cross-cut ethnic boundaries and break down their internal consistency, he continues, ethnic identity is liable to disappear, or, in situationalist terms, be discarded. Here again, Cohen highlights, without exploiting it, the normative character of ethnicity, conceived as a form of social action through which patterns of behaviour are constructed as meaningful. However, implicit in Cohen's argument is that behaviours are expressions of an ethnic identity, rather than producing such identities. Furthermore, Cohen seems to deny the possibility of multiple alignments and the articulation of different social categories in definitions of social identities, by always seeking to establish one predominant social force (class *or* ethnicity, for example). Finally, his notion of degree of ethnicity leaves no room for diversity of ethnicities, but rather suggests that one more or less conforms to a single, unitary and coherent 'ethnicity'.

As in most of the literature in ethnic studies, Cohen and Wallman conceive ethnicity in a static way, as "something which is either active or inactive" (Solomos and Back 1994: 145), as an eternal referent to which individuals always turn for their cultural identification, whether overtly or covertly. Another limitation of the 'Barthian school' is that cultural identity seems to stem from internal forces that occur in the context of immediate, local dynamics of social relations. This underplays the articulation between local and national political and economic structures. In short, the authors discussed so far view ethnic identity as a locally produced, strategic response to inter-group relations that serves to preserve an enduring cultural identity.

Some scholars have insisted on the importance of locating ethnic relations in broader structural context. Informed by a Weberian theory of social action, these writers argue that ethnicity constitutes the basis of a distinct system of social differentiation that intersects with others systems based on class, 'race', and/or gender (Rex 1970; 1983; 1986; Juteau 1983; Simon 1983; Breton 1979; 1984). As such, ethnicity is reproduced materially and symbolically through the political, economic, and cultural spheres of social activity. The focus of analysis shifts onto structural factors affecting and reproducing ethnic and 'race' relations. As Rex suggests, "any realistic account of what brings racial and ethnic groups together must refer to the structure of the polity and the economy." (1986: 35-36). In other words, economic and political structures constitute *necessary* but not sufficient conditions for the existence of ethnic and racial division (Hall 1980). Although ethnic or racial ties will facilitate the unity of interest groups or the opposition between them, they require structural factors to be activated and (re)produced.

Even insofar as race and ethnicity are, of themselves, potentially important sources of in-group unity and intra-group division, their potential does require a structural content if it is to become activated. Racial and ethnic differences might very well be latent for long periods. When, however, groups or quasi-groups thus differentiated come into economic or political relations with each other, such latent relations become salient in a new way (1986: 36)

This body of work integrated ethnic relations within a broader problematic of social relations. The emphasis is on the intersection of relations of domination based on gender, class, 'race' and ethnicity, that generate social groupings which make the belief in a shared origin the basis of their communalisation (Juteau 1979; 1996). An original use of this framework is found in Danielle Juteau's writings, where she insists that the process of ethnic boundary construction is doubled by the process of socialisation, which is inseparable from sex/gender relations of domination (1983; 1996). I will return to her contribution later in the chapter. At this stage, I simply want to point out that running through the structuration theory of ethnicity is the implicit assumption that a common culture exists in the daily life of individuals, and that some of its features are mobilised as ethnic markers in situations of inter-group contacts. As such, it brings to the fore the political character of ethnicity and ethnic conflict. However, a primordialist idea of ethnicity lingers on, supporting the conception of cultural identity as emerging from "some kind of informing spirit that is sociologically and even politically meaningful" (Solomos and Back 1995: 23).

This is tied up with the tendency to describe ethnic identity formation as the outcome of the actions of fully formed subjects whose concern it is to preserve and

reproduce their cultural identity. The ethnic studies paradigm underplays the creation of cultural meanings themselves (Back 1991: 16), and the construction of subjectivities. As I will show throughout the following chapters, identity formation is not only about cultural *re*production; it is also about producing a particular kind of common culture (Italian emigrant culture), and about creating a specific Italian subjectivity.

These culturalist definitions became objects of criticism in the 1980s research agenda of Contemporary Cultural Studies. Associated with English literature, history and New Left politics, this new paradigm shifted our academic gaze from cultural forms and processes to the politics of racism. The culturalist perspective dominating the previous decade was rejected on the basis that it did little more than blame the victims of racism or ethnic discrimination, and confine them into enclosed and unified 'cultures' (Lawrence 1982b). Culture, it was argued, became the determining factor explaining the different positions occupied by given ethnic groups within the social structure. Moreover, the racism inherent in the research agenda was also questioned: who are the 'ethnic groups'? In Britain, the imbalance between studies on Caribbeans and Asians compared to those on Italians, Greek Cypriots, Polish is indicative of the fact that culture is defined in racial terms (Lawrence 1982b: 135-136n7). It is in the context of such debates that a new body of studies emerged, including the work generated by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham. The Centre produced seminal writings on 'race' and racism, with a focus on 'race struggles' and social action. Not only was the political construction of 'race' scrutinised, but the contestation of the meaning of 'race' in black political culture was also emphasised. Furthermore, monolithic definitions of racism were undermined and replaced with historically situated racisms (Hall 1980).

A key feature of this theoretical shift is the will to counter the idea that socio-cultural groups — including nations — are essentially unchanging entities. These new developments were prompted by the emergence of what came to be labelled the new racism of British politics. Martin Barker's book on 'New Toryism' illustrated that one of its central parameters is a new form of racial discourse. Barker unveiled how characteristics of social groups are formulated in a way that circumvents any reference to 'race', yet that fixes and naturalises them within a pseudo-biological definition of culture. As Mark Duffield writes,

It is held to be *human nature* to form groups based on similarity which then set themselves apart from other groups perceived as different. The cement which binds a group together is its shared way of life: its culture. It is only by following a shared way of life that an individual obtains a sense of belonging and security. This shared culture,

moreover, is the essence from which individuality is itself defined. (Duffield 1984: 29; my emphasis)

What stems from this is the notion of an invisible ethnicity as well as the idea that ethnic identification is somewhat intrinsic. Ideas that people naturally socialise and group with 'those of their own kind' implies that they share a sentiment of a deeply incorporated unified identity. An identity which will ultimately re-emerge given the opportunity. It is within this conception of culture as a inherent part of our beings, as a possession (we 'have' cultures) that the blurring of nature and culture occurs. Within British new racism, the naturalisation of culture diffuses 'race' and racism in ethnic-related discourses of differentiation. This is what Paul Gilroy calls "ethnic absolutism" (1987: 59).

[C]ulture is conceived along ethnically absolute lines, not as something intrinsically fluid, changing, unstable, and dynamic, but as fixed property of social groups rather than a relational field in which they encounter one another and live out social, historical relationships. When culture is brought into contact with race it is transformed into a pseudo-biological property of communal life. (Gilroy 1993b: 24)

Culture, in contemporary pseudo-pluralism, is used as a measuring stick for the integration of minorities and 'foreigners' into the national culture. Ethnic absolutism constructs cultural factors as elements of differentiation, thus underlying the idea of 'ethnic groups'. Ethnicity is the nodal point that mediates culture and race and allows them to congeal in pseudo-biological underpinnings. As 'race' is culturalised, 'ethnicity' is essentialised. Moreover, social inequality finds justifications and operates on these absolutist grounds, that is to say that the 'inherent cultural nature' of ethnic groups explains their different positions in the social strata, if not the impossibility of the insertion of minorities into mainstream national cultures (Gilroy 1987: 61). In other words, ethnic absolutism is the process of constructing culturally essentialised groups, of reifying cultural differences as absolute differences and bases for social mobilisation. Culture and difference, not biology and hierarchy, are the organising principles of ethnic absolutism and of 'new racisms' (Barker 1981; Duffield 1984; Gilroy 1993b).

This opens onto the complex and fraught issue of essentialism. If we are to take seriously the need to scrutinise the ways identity formation includes moments of closure, we need to problematise essentialism. How is ethnicity essentialised? Does it appeal to human nature, or does it appeal to biology? Are all absolute definitions of culture biologically based? My interrogations are partly inspired by an article on languages of descent in Jewish identity formation written by Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin. Generations, they argue, can be used to speak of a sense of

kinship between people who do the same things or who relate to the same past, without necessarily claiming a biological pre-disposition for certain practices (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 704). The biological connections that filiation provides may symbolise the biological status of cultural identity — that it is predicated on blood relations — but not in the sense of a biological difference between groups. The signification of ancestry and generations is central here. For the Boyarins, there would be a difference between saying that I am Italian because I have Italian ancestors, and saying that I *behave* like an Italian because I have Italian ancestors. One question informing my analysis is whether all languages of descent necessarily imply cultural endowment and biologically based notions of difference. The Boyarins compel us to problematise biologism, and by extension, to question the different forms essentialism may take.³ In this thesis, I speak of essentialism in relation to culture (chapter 3), and to sexuality/gender (chapter 5) as the postulation of a fixed, unchanging essence. Essentialism may resort to naturalism or biologism (Grosz 1994: 212n15). Biologism establishes a biological universality: a common genetic baggage, used to explain cultural behaviours. Naturalism calls upon some kind of ‘nature’: divine providence, ‘human nature’, or some informing spirit that dictates cultural behaviours. A questions that runs through this thesis concerns the circulation of essentialism in the construction of local particularity. How are essentialist conceptions of culture deemed ethnically specific?

New racism has been exposed as a national discourse that naturalises culture as an inherent, felt, if not biological feature of all human beings. Pushing the critique further, Errol Lawrence has cogently revealed how this ‘human nature’ is made ethnically specific. The ‘rediscovery’ of human nature, he argues in reference to Martin Barker's work, is embedded with ‘new familyism’, whereby the family unit is the natural, primary, building bloc in the construction of the nation (1982a: 82). In ‘ethnic studies’, culturalist definitions of ethnicity go hand in hand with familyist conceptions of culture. Family life, household organisation, child-rearing practices and marital arrangements have been closely scrutinised to determine the extent to which black and Asian communities could integrate in Britain (Lawrence 1982b: 116f). These family-based models of ethnicity constituted the backdrop for discussions of Asian and black youths. The ‘generation gap’ is commonly presented as exacerbated in immigrant families, with images of children of immigrants caught between two incompatible cultures (*idem*: 122f): the ‘old’ and

³ Feminism has a long tradition of debates over essentialist definitions of ‘woman’, from egalitarian feminism, through *l'écriture féminine*, to debates over sex/gender differences. More recently, feminist philosophers have problematised essentialism in the context of furthering the project of women's emancipation (Grosz 1994, 1990; Spelman 1988; Fuss 1989; Braidotti 1994, to name a few).

the 'new', the 'traditional' and the 'modern'. In short, culturalist definitions of ethnicity are drawn from family-based images of cultural (re)production.⁴

The implications of this for gender have been taken up by feminists such as Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Juteau 1983 & 1996; Brah 1992 & 1993. The thesis running through these writings is that collective expressions of identity often involve the excavation of family values that underscore and naturalise the different position of men and women in society. In turn, the reproduction of culture is not left to chance: women turned mother in the institutional setting of the family, become the custodians of culture and the sites of struggles over ethnic particularity (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992: 113; also Gilroy 1993a; 1994a). As Danielle Juteau argues, this, in turn, supports the naturalisation of ethnicity, because it is produced in the invisible domestic sphere.

Because ethnicity is produced in the context of a work process which is invisible, it is considered as a given, as something natural. When ethnicity is separated from historical trajectories and memories and from social relations which produce it, it becomes easy to argue that it consists of fixed dispositions which inevitably lead to conflict. (1996: 7)

The major contribution of these works is to illuminate how ethnic boundary construction intersects with sex/gender relations of domination. They show how the naturalisation of women's role as carers and custodians of culture is tied up with the naturalisation of ethnicity, and in doing so, point to the way cultural survival is configured around women's bodies. However, the argument remains caught within a family-based model of ethnicity, whereby the family is the primary ground for the production and transmission of ethnicity; the 'first ethnic network' (Juteau 1983). Furthermore, it risks overemphasising the position of women as wives and mothers, neglecting their active part in constructing ethnicity beyond the family realm (di Leonardo 1987; McKee-Allain 1996). We need to be cautious of our assessment of the relationship between family, ethnicity and cultural identity if we are to avoid reproducing a model which posits the family as the primary ground of socialisation and social reproduction. I return to these questions in my discussion of diaspora.

The reclaiming of culture as the locus of critical analysis widened the theoretical concerns. From the study of ethnic groups and their

⁴ This tendency was pervasive in 1970s North American and British ethnic studies alike, though it operated slightly differently in each case. In the United States and Canada, given that the main subjects of enquiry were white Europeans, family life was observed from a romantic ideal of cultural preservation. Changes within family structures – usually estimated in terms of changes in women's lifestyles – were indicative of the loss of traditional cultural values. Though integration, and indeed assimilation were deemed desirable, their 'natural' process was defined in terms of the gradual, three generation time scale.

integration/assimilation, research questions turned to issues of power, politics, nationality and identity. A number of studies were produced, namely on the role of the press and other media in shaping images of minorities (Hall *et al.* 1978). However, little attempt has been made to see how these discourses manifest themselves at the local level (*pace* Frankenberg 1993; Solomos and Back 1995; Back 1996; Hewitt 1986). How pervasive is the new racism? In the opening chapter, I point out how the self-ascribed label of 'invisible immigrants' used by Italian intellectuals comes out of the racialised politics of nationality and identity in Britain and in Europe. In this regard, my analysis of the Italian project of recovery is set against the backdrop of British new racism (see chapter 2), the parameters of which may be summarised as follows: difference, culture, and family-based definitions of community. If we may conclude that the Italian new identity emerges out of its racialisation — in the effect that in Britain, 'invisible immigrants' has a meaning only in relation to the racialisation of immigrants — a thorough analysis of the construction of this identity needs to question if and how the neo-racist rhetoric is worked into this process.

'Race' and ethnicity, however, were not conceived by cultural critiques as simply confined to processes of state regulation. The meanings of 'race' and ethnicity were challenged in the 'ethnic resurgence' of the 1980s. Oppressed groups, cultural minorities or Third World societies resisted (inter)national homogenisation through affirming and re-inventing their cultural roots. These movements differ, however, from their sixties' forerunners. Mobilised around claims for ethnic distinctiveness, these new social movements emphasised difference rather than identity in a new language of solidarity that separates ethnic membership from the body politic (Bauman quoted in Hall 1992: 313). In other words, the programme of cultural conformity was contested by powerful demands for the right and respect of difference. As Cornel West puts it,

[d]istinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing. (1993: 4)

These new cultural politics led to the construction of new identities that Stuart Hall coined 'new ethnicities' (1987; 1988; 1991). Often cited as a groundbreaking moment in the development of alternative conceptions of ethnicity, Hall's notion of 'new ethnicities' re-thinks definitions of cultural identity and of discrete, homogeneous cultures. Commenting on the new black cultural politics, which have

shifted from a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself, Hall (1988) examines how the latter rests on the construction of new ethnic identities. The point of contestation, Hall argues, is relocated not only

between anti-racism and multiculturalism but *inside* the notion of ethnicity itself. What is involved is the splitting of the notion of ethnicity between, on the one hand, the dominant notion which connects it to nation and 'race' and on the other hand what I think is the beginning of a positive image of the ethnicity of the margins, of the periphery. (1988: 29; emphasis original)

This shift marks the "end of innocence", the end of the essential black subject (idem: 28). 'New ethnicities' constitute a significant move beyond deterministic and essentialised definitions of ethnicity and of 'race'. Hall argues that new ethnicities fracture the boundaries constructed between racial groups by puncturing the link between race and culture: the new black ethnicity refers to shared experiences of discrimination and racism within white, English national culture. Black subjectivity, for its part, needs to be articulated with references to gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity. Hall's theoretical project is to build a positive "ethnicity of the margins" proceeding from, but not reduced to, a re-theorised conception of difference, which is "positional, conditional and conjunctural" (idem: 29; also 1991). In addition, new ethnicities acknowledge the impact of local and transnational forces in shaping identities. This relates to hybridisation, identified as a key dimension of identity formation, and associated with the process of "diaspora-ization" (idem: 29-30).

The challenge posed by new ethnicities reaches far beyond the experience of blacks in Britain. Not only does this concept call into question what it means to be British, but it points to a range of theoretical issues concerning definitions of identity, belonging and authenticity (Back 1996: 4; see Gilroy 1987; 1993a). If a population as diverse as the one encompassed by the 1970s label 'black' is not defined in culturalist or racial terms, how is solidarity established? New ethnicities problematise the meaning of 'roots', which "cannot be simple or unmediated" (Hall 1988: 30) for a population whose common grounds are not defined in terms of culture, origins, 'race' or ethnicity.

Ethnicity is thus displaced from its predicative position and conceived as a necessary moment of closure "required to create communities of identification" (Hall 1987: 45); a tactic for survival, not an end in itself (Clifford 1994: 322). Ethnicity has become a positionality against the assimilationist — and therefore exclusionist — national politics of identity.

Ethnicity has become one of the many categories or tokens, or 'tribal poles', around which flexible and sanction-free communities are formed and in reference to which individual identities are constructed and asserted. There are now, therefore, [many] fewer centrifugal forces which once weakened ethnic integrity. There is instead a powerful demand for pronounced, though symbolic rather than institutionalized, ethnic distinctiveness. (Bauman quoted in Hall 1992: 313)

As stated earlier, new ethnic movements differ from their sixties forerunners insofar as they claim distinctiveness rather than integration in the national body politic. However, both the old and new ethnicity paradigms uphold the distinction between national and foreigner by emphasising the minority position of 'ethnic' groups and locating them in a social space separate to the nation. Yet the limits of this duality between national/foreigner, majority/minority become apparent when we speak of black/white British youth culture (Hewitt 1986; Jones 1988; Back 1996), or when we approach groups that can be viewed as simultaneously part of majority and minority formations, such as Italian emigrants in London. The problem is further compounded in the context of the political consolidation of the European Union and concurrent solidification of the Fortress Europe. As European citizens, who remain 'foreigners' in Britain⁵, how do Italians fit into the new ethnicities paradigm?

The way that both 'old' and 'new' political ethnicities positioned themselves in relation to the nation is indicative of the constitutive nature of national definitions of culture in the development of ideas of ethnicity. Indeed, ethnic studies traditionally works from the premise that ethnicity and nationalism are part of a same continuum. In short, the formal definition suggests that nationalism is a version of ethnic politics that demands a state (Eriksen 1993: 118; Simon 1975; Smith 1986). Though they may be seen to share common features — that they both rely on narratives of origins and descent that construct the 'ethnie', or the nation, as trans-historic persons — in the last instance, the initial confusion between the terms is ruptured as they part along the line of state formation. This definition does little more than reify ethnicity as a universal feature of human collectivities and reinstate the distinction between minority and majority, national and foreigner.

This, it may be argued, is in direct continuity with the anthropological approach to tribal societies and their 'modern' equivalent, ethnic groups (Jenkins

⁵ 'Foreigner' is what many Italian immigrants feel they are, in Britain, on the basis that a large number of them have no voting rights in this country. This illustrates how, at the national level, European citizenship operates more as an economic category than a political one. In addition, recent debates in British politics over tighter rules for social security services have been justified by claims of abuse from unwanted Europeans or 'Euro-scroungers'.

1986). A product of colonialism, this approach separates and hierarchises cultures into discrete and coherent systems of norms, values, organisational structures, behaviours and ways of life. It follows that ethnicity is commonly defined as the attribute of minority populations. What is more, the way ethnicity operates both in theoretical and political discourses proceeds from

the unthinking assumptions that cultures always flow into patterns congruent with the borders of essentially homogeneous nation states. (Gilroy 1993a: 5)

As Les Back points out, the unintended consequence of the movements at the forefront of the new politics of representation was "a tendency to homogenize cultural, class and sexual difference within blackness" (1996: 4). Consequently, the black political subject of the seventies is, in the nineties, fragmented into identities based on cultural differentiation and ethnicism (Solomos and Back 1995: 36). Equated with local identities, new ethnicity hems in diversity within a 'whole' circumscribed by shared experiences of existence. Despite its "indefinite substance" in cultural terms, ethnicity still retains a "definite appearance" (Cohen 1994: 120). To put it differently, even if conceived as the product of historical and political forces, ethnicity

tends to take on the 'natural' appearance of an autonomous force, a 'principle' capable of determining the course of social life (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 60).

The ensuing question is: what are the organising principles of this naturalisation of ethnicity? How is this definite appearance achieved? For Werner Sollors, moving "beyond ethnicity" (1986), in this respect, does not mean to erase ethnicity from the map (*rayer de la carte* as the French phrase goes) nor to deny its political relevance as a moment of closure. It rather entails laying bare the strategies and narratives of its construction as natural and eternal foundation of ethnic groups. The essence of Sollors' argument is that languages of descent act as community building devices both within and between groups from diverse cultural background in the United States. What Sollors unveils are the strategies of closure and solidarity that naturalise and universalise ethnic difference. Moving beyond ethnicity is a step towards revealing how it articulates with broader national discourses. In other words, Sollors invites us to explore how particularistic definitions of identity may refer to universalist ideas of culture. The question is to illuminate how all this is articulated into a coherent narrative of selfhood.

Moving beyond ethnicity, then, entails a sensitivity to the formation of particularistic identities without entrenching absolute difference. New studies of diaspora, in this respect, offer fruitful theoretical insights for an enquiry such as

mine. These studies clear a space between localism and transnationalism and propose a conception of identity as a positionality that "is not a process of absolute othering, but rather of entangled tensions" (Clifford 1994: 307) that weave new, multi-local webs of belonging. In the next section, I look at how using the concept of diaspora allows me to explore identity formation in a way that does not reinstate ethnicity as the primary ground of continuity and solidarity within a socially diverse and geographically dispersed immigrant population.

Identity in diaspora: transnational belongings, local particularity, and the changing same

The term *diaspora* has acquired renewed currency in anti-absolutist critiques of identity formation which attempt to account for the complexities of culture in a transnational, postmodern, postcolonial world. It converses with other terms such as border, transculturation, travel, creolisation, *mestizaje*, hybridity, locality (Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1994a). Once used to describe exile and forced dispersion of Jews or Armenians, it is now widely used to describe transnational networks of immigrants, refugees, guest-workers, etc.

When thinking of diaspora, we must bear in mind that the present circulation of the term in social theory derives from the historically specific experience of the 'black Atlantic' (Gilroy 1993a) and of anti-Zionist critiques of the return to Israel (Marienstras 1975; Boyarin and Boyarin 1993). In the work of Paul Gilroy on black responses to modernity, the themes of suffering, tradition, spatiality, temporality and the social organisation of memory have a special significance resulting from their association with ideas of dispersal, exile and slavery (Gilroy 1993: 205).

Diaspora is not about travel or nomadism. Central to its definition are 'push factors', that is, forced migration or displacement (Gilroy 1994a: 207; Clifford 1994; Safran 1991). Slavery, pogroms, genocide, famine, political persecutions, wars, or economic constraints may be sources of the dispersal of populations. Paired with the emphasis on push factors is the stress on conditions of settlement within countries of immigration, which involve the rearticulation of multiple locations, temporalities and identifications.

The mass emigration of Italians over the last century is largely the outcome of severe economic conditions and drastic changes in the economic structure that have compelled the majority of them to seek work elsewhere. To some extent, this can be viewed as forced migration — and as we shall see in chapter 2, it is remembered as such. But Italian emigration cannot be compared to the exile of millions of Jews, the enslavement of African populations, or the flight of thousands of Cambodians, nor can it be equated to the voluntary migration of individuals —

usually professionals or highly skilled workers — between countries of the overdeveloped Western world. Similarly, their settlement in different parts of the world, if marked by histories of discrimination and abuse, differs from slavery, indentured labour, or pervasive anti-black racism and anti-semitism. In short, the ‘diasporic mode of existence’ (Marienstras 1975) is not lived in equal ways or with the same resources for all these populations, nor does it rest on similar historical backgrounds.

This being said, diaspora constitutes a rich heuristic device to think about questions of belonging, continuity, and solidarity in the formation of an Italian community. Theories of diaspora are useful here because they problematise a space of identification located between the confining ‘local’ and the pretentious ‘global’, as well as the constitutive potency of space, memory, and displacement (Gilroy 1993a; 1994a; Clifford 1994). Because it denotes multi-location and border crossings, it is easy to privilege notions of the multiple-positioned subject and to overemphasise hybridity, difference and diversity (Helmreich 1992), without any considerations for continuity, for what is “persistently there” (Clifford 1994: 320) beyond the retention of food and folkways. Rather than engaging with a radically pluralist approach, I attempt to move beyond pluralism and essentialism by “dealing equally with roots and routes” (Gilroy 1993a: 190) or, more specifically, by scrutinising the social dynamics of rootings and routings in the construction of a London Italian community. In this respect, my study is not about the circulation, transformation and hybridisation of cultural forms within a multi-national and transnational Italian diaspora.⁶ It is more humble than that: my main focus is on the construction of local particularity, which I examine in relation to a transnational mode of existence. I want to consider the extent to which identity in immigration is lived and represented in terms of diaspora, and to illuminate how a diasporic consciousness manifests itself and converses with other forms of consciousness (such as nationalism). Diaspora, in this respect, is a distinct form of transnational experience that cannot, as Clifford rightly argues, “become a master trope or ‘figure’ for modern, complex, or positional identities” (1994: 319).

The following thoughts are organised around two points that are central to my immediate concerns. The first has to do with the constitutive potency of transnational belongings and ambivalent relations to the ‘homeland’. My second concern is about apprehending local particularity and continuity without recourse to

⁶ Only recently has the term diaspora been appropriated by Italian emigrant intellectuals or students of Italian emigration. Yet it still refers to the dispersal of Italians living in different parts of the world, isolated from each other. Studies of the inter-connectedness of these communities remains to be done. There is still no systematic attempt – including the present study – to examine the flows and exchanges between these communities, and the similarities and differences that might connect the dispersed Italians (*pace* Tomasi et al. 1994, who point the way in the third section of their anthology).

ethnicity or family as their primary ground. This ties in with the question of the social relations of power that inscribe differentiation: at what point and in what terms is the specificity of the London Italian community expressed in essentialist terms?

Transnational belongings: ambivalence, nation and the diasporic mode of existence

I want to begin by taking issue with the tendency to expunge immigration from theoretical definitions of diaspora. In his nuanced and cogent account of diaspora as a theoretical formation, James Clifford writes:

Diasporas are not exactly immigrant communities. The latter could be seen as temporary, a site where the canonical three generations struggled through a hard transition to ethnic American status. (1994: 311)

This assimilation narrative has never worked, he continues, for African Americans or for "peoples of color" immigrating to Europe. I agree that indeed, the assimilation trope posits white European immigrants as the exemplars of standards, values and experiences of minority collectivities. Yet Clifford seems to accept that immigration still relies on the worn out assumption of a linear process of integration, acculturation and assimilation, whereby immigrants move *from* one culture *into* another. However, his warning occludes the resistance to assimilation that a number of white, European immigrant communities struggle with in the will to claim distinctiveness: they have not been oblivious to the politics of difference! In addition, a large number of *immigrant* populations — not only *migrant* ones, as Clifford states — share "forms of longing, memory, (dis)identification" (idem: 305) with displaced peoples.

I want to suggest that diaspora may help us problematise immigration anew and differently. I propose to hang on to immigration if only because it relates to a distinct version of migration, one which involves emigration, settlement (whether originally intended or not) and an ambivalent relationship to the country of origin. What needs to be called into question is the conception of immigration as an end in itself. Diaspora, in this regard, allows the relocation of immigrant populations within multi-local mappings of identification. Diaspora also offers an alternative understanding to the sometimes fraught, often equivocal relationship of immigrants to their 'homeland'. Richard Marienstras' phrase 'transnational mode of existence' (1975: 179) neatly captures this predicament.

Marienstras' political project aims at rehabilitating diaspora by defining it as a fruitful and original mode of existence (idem: 184), where ambivalence is

accommodated as constitutive of diasporic identifications.⁷ In his reflections on the nature of the links between Jews of the diaspora and Israel, Richard Marienstras seeks to free diaspora from the pathological connotations invested in it by the Zionist project. Marienstras' anti-Zionism aims at displacing the centrality of the nation-state in Jewish historicity.

The ideology of the centrality of Israel, is the attempt to bring the diaspora to admit that it is of secondary importance in Jewish history; it is proclaiming that the Jewish state is the accepted and assumed destiny of the diaspora. In other words, it is requiring that the diaspora denies itself and that, ultimately, destroys itself. (idem: 54)

For Marienstras, the creation of Israel is not the only way of developing an original Jewish culture. He argues that the Jewish people were created in exile and that it is because of, not despite, their dispersal, that they have survived against all other nations (idem: 182-183; also Boyarin and Boyarin 1993). The originality of diaspora, for Marienstras, is its "transnational mode of existence" (idem: 179), characterised by the condition of being "rooted simultaneously here and there." (idem: 176) This is what Clifford qualifies as the "empowering paradox of diaspora":

dwelling *here* assumes a solidarity and connection *there*. But *there* is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation. (1994: 322)

The question is how this connection elsewhere is remembered and rearticulated in the location of settlement. The emphasis diaspora puts on memory and transnationality challenges nationalist discourses which establish a congruence between ethnic groups and national cultures, confined within common time and territory. Nationalist discourses are uncomfortable with multiple allegiances, connections with other places and peoples, outside the borders of the nation-state. As James Clifford suggests, diasporic networks and attachments constitute a menace to the nation-state.

Whether the national narrative is one of common origins or of gathered populations, it cannot assimilate groups that maintain important allegiances and practical connections to a

⁷ The reconciliation with ambivalence is a distinctive feature of post-modernity, according to Zygmunt Bauman (1991), a feature that modernity, despite its obsession with order and its promise of transparency, did not manage to eradicate. In relation to identity, Jane Flax engages with this vein of thought, suggesting a postmodern reading of Freud. She reveals that his notion of ambivalence is not equated with a symptom of weakness or of confusion. It is rather conceived as "an appropriate response to an inherently conflictual situation." (Flax 1990: 11) "It is often a strength to resist collapsing complex and contradictory materials into an orderly whole." (idem: 50) Hence, problems arise not from ambivalence itself, "but rather in premature attempts to resolve or deny conflicts." (idem: 11).

homeland or a dispersed community located elsewhere. (1994: 307)

Consequently, ideas of nation, nationality, national belonging and nationalism are paramount in examining the way that connections ‘over there’ make a difference ‘over here’ (Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1993a). In line with Paul Gilroy, my concern here is not to explain the enduring appeal of nations and nationalism in identity formation, but rather to critically appraise the problems that may arise when ‘nation’ and culture are brought together (Gilroy 1993a-c). What happens to the definition of ‘national culture’, for example, when emigrants rearticulate their allegiance to the homeland while refusing to physically return there? Alternatively, how is the nation written into diaspora (Gopinath 1995)? The ambivalence about physical return and attachment to the *patria* is one vector of the ‘drama of emigration’ which Italian intellectuals seek to resolve by recovering the Italian presence in Britain and re-articulating their Italian citizenship (see chapters 2 and 3). The intersection between nation and diaspora, moreover, is mediated by gender. I return to this question below.

In sum, diaspora troubles the congruence between identity, culture and territory that nationalism insists upon. Rather, it suggests ways of thinking of transnational mode of existence as constitutive of identity formation. But the term diaspora, as stated earlier, refers to more than a site of migration and transnational connections.

[T]he term *diaspora* is a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive of community, in historical contexts of displacement. (Clifford 1994: 306; emphasis original)

The creation of a localised identity sits alongside and converses with the creation of a transnational community based on the experience of emigration. The question I now turn to is the definition of continuity in the construction of local particularity. This concerns the construction of identity/difference in diaspora, and is configured around the relationship between continuity, change and authenticity.

Defining local particularity: the changing same and the social dynamics of differentiation

In a study such as this, circumscribed within the confines of two local institutions, my second concern is to examine languages of solidarity and continuity by paying particular attention to their deployment in different versions of ‘community’ events. My objective is to unwrap the formation of solidarity without entrenching absolute difference, and to conceive continuity without relying on the foundational appeal of ethnicity or family.

'Ethnic social clubs' are typically conceived as spaces for cultural reproduction, thus implying that they ensure the maintenance of a fully formed, pre-existing culture. Culture, in this perception, is reified and objectified into a transmittable object. By contrast, I suggest that social gatherings, rituals and commemorations in the London Italian community *produce* cultural meanings, and it is these meanings that I intend to illuminate. As such, I view the activities of St Peter's and the Centro Scalabrini as practices of collective identity. What I mean by using this phrase is that community events are not only about cultural reproduction but also about producing a shared cultural identity. The ensuing question is: how am I to think about continuity?

Our understanding of cultural processes juggles between seeing them as expressive of an essential, unchanging self, and as the product of the endless play of signification conceived "solely in terms of the inappropriate model of textuality." (Gilroy 1991: 10) Yet the vitality of 'community events' and the popularity of St Peter's for the celebration of rites of passage such as weddings, complicates in either/or definition of identity formation. Despite what radical constructionists may say, identity is *lived* as a deeply felt and coherent sense of self (Gilroy 1993a: 102).

Paul Gilroy offers a suggestive avenue for conceiving continuity, by redefining tradition as the "changing same", a notion he borrows from Leroi Jones and which allows him to

comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in breaks and interruptions which suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilising flux of the post-contemporary world. (idem: 101)

In other words, sameness is not the outcome of the accidental re-enactment of a pristine original culture. Tradition, viewed in this light, is not about cultural reproduction, but rather, cultural re-processing: the telling and re-telling of stories simultaneously maintains and modifies the same, without reifying it. Tradition, in Gilroy's diaspora discourse, is not used to identify a lost past. It refers, instead, to "the living memory of the changing same." (idem: 198) For the purpose of my argument, I want to discuss the relevance of this concept by specifying the theoretical implications of the notion of "living [or embodied] memory".

Memory, in diaspora consciousness, becomes a chief ground of identification. In the black Atlantic, for instance, continuity is crucially defined by the "still open wound of slavery and racial subordination" (Clifford 1994: 320). In chapters 2 and 4, I probe texts, rituals and commemorations in order to extract the events, moments, and experiences of the past that are rearticulated into the present, and that symbolically aggregate Italian emigrants into a space of communality that

does not emanate from primordial ethnic ties. Memory, here, is not defined as something to be retrieved, but rather as a constant process of revision to suit the current processes of identification. It is used to make sense of the world we live in. This is what John Gillis calls "memory work" (1994: 3). To put it differently, I intend to scrutinise London Italian historicity, that is, the construction of experience from the meanings invested in it (Touraine 1977). Which dramas are enacted in St Peter's church or at the Centro Scalabrini? What are they presenting? What stories are they telling?

But there is more to memory work than story telling. That is to say that identity, in diaspora consciousness, is not simply focused on memories. It is, rather, woven through "the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration" (Gilroy 1994a: 207) that are embodied and lived as expressions of an inherent, core and enduring identity. Informed by Foucault, the changing same is a concept defined along the lines of theories of signifying practices according to which subjectivities are produced through "practices that supposedly derived from them" (Gilroy 1993a: 102).⁸ Gilroy's reading of music and its rituals illuminates how signifying practices are mediated through the body and produce the substantiating effect of an essential racial subjectivity.

These significations can be condensed in the process of musical performance though it does not, of course, monopolise them. In the black Atlantic context, they produce the imaginary effect of an internal racial core or essence by acting on the body through the specific mechanisms of identification and recognition that are produced in the intimate interaction of performer and crowd. (ibid.)

Theories of signifying practices are useful because they allow me to consider how identity may be lived as coherent and authentic, without falling back on essentialist grounds. Though my study is not on individuals but on institutional practices, I want to avoid assumptions that the latter emanate from fully formed subjects. In order to side step this premise, we need to consider the way that practices of collective identity construct particular subjects, and how, in turn, the latter link back to the former.

One of the strengths of Gilroy's work is to relate the black subject back to cultural practices that connect the dispersed and divided blacks of the Atlantic. His insistence on the lived experience of coherence compels us to look beyond political and social categories, and into the political construction and regulation of subjectivity. The scrutiny of the social dynamics of the changing same is to be

⁸ The work of Judith Butler comes to mind when thinking of identity in such terms. See Butler 1990, 1993.

accomplished by revealing the social relations of power deployed in practices of differentiation. Tracing the construction of London Italian identity includes unpacking the kind of Italian subjectivity it speaks of.

Throughout *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy brings to light the way crises of self-belief and the uncertainty of racial identity are solved by projecting the symbolic reconstruction of community onto an image of the patriarchal family. This has prompted accusations against him of reproducing a kinship-based model of diaspora that is masculinist and deeply androcentric (Helmreich 1992; Gopinath 1995). This critique, in my view, is founded on a radically pluralist approach that refuses to consider any proposition that would locate cultural practices or motifs that might connect dispersed peoples. The changing same allows us to understand tradition as a lived response to the inherent transience of modern identity. Rather than limiting our analysis of tradition as nothing more than an invention, we need to account for how and when tradition is evoked. At what point are particular cultural forms or performances said to be expressive of group identities? What practices, in the life of the London Italian socio-religious centres, are said to be typical of an Italian way of life? At what point and in which terms is the specificity of the London Italian community expressed?

In diaspora, these questions take us back to kinship systems, family and gender. From his study of the black Atlantic, Gilroy concludes that the family, in diaspora, valorises "an implicit conception of supra-national kinship and an explicit discomfiture with nationalism" (Gilroy 1994a: 210). On the other hand, it is related to a post-national essentialism where

definitions of authenticity are disproportionately defined by ideas about nurturance, about family, about fixed gender roles and generational responsibility. What is racially and ethnically authentic is frequently defined by ideas about sexuality and distinctive patterns of interaction between men and women, which are taken to be expressive of essential difference. (Gilroy 1993d: 197)

This begs the question, then, of the existence and the nature of new conceptions of kinship and their relationship with group identity and particularism. How pervasive is the new familyist version of cultural essentialism? In turn, how pervasive is the post-national version of the family in immigrant communities? Is it ethnically specific? One of the questions of the present enquiry concerns precisely the relationship between ethnic authenticity and family-based kinship narratives. I propose to scrutinise the formation of collective referents of identification and to uncover if and when they are derived from patterns of sociality couched on family-

based forms of kinship, and the implications of this for definitions of identity/difference.

My challenge in accounting for this phenomenon is to avoid reproducing a family-based model of London Italian identity formation. A mere dismissal of the family would only reveal a deep contempt for those who find in it a way of appeasing social insecurities and collective indeterminacy. I propose that there is a difference between establishing that the family is the primary ethnic network, and examining how the family may be the stage for trials of identity. Following Jonathan Boyarin, I shall consider the family as a "strategic cultural linkage... that [is] chronotopically specific — that is, neither generalized nor eternalized." (1992: xviii) For a population such as Italians in London, whose transnational family ties break open the seams of national borders, how is family put into discourses of community building? How does it articulate with a diasporic mode of existence? How does it relate to local particularity?

These considerations require us to view the family as more than an institution that naturalises and de-historicises heterosexual relationships and the irreducibility of gender differences. Similarly, gendered and generational systems of differentiation need not be confined to the family realm. How do gender and generation circulate in the constitution of London Italian identity? Apart from revealing how various versions of London Italian self-representation work differently for men, women and children, I uncover how ideas of gender, sexuality and generation are summoned by broader discourses (nationalism and Catholicism), and how they manifest themselves in the construction of local particularity.

Concluding remarks

My review of theories and critiques of ethnicity was framed by two concerns: first, to account for identity in terms that counter the idea that socio-cultural groupings are essentially unchanging. Second, to conceive identity formation as a combination of open-endedness and points of closure.

The essence of my argument is that ethnicity remains used to speak of minority cultures, enclosed in a highly localised timespace. This definition does not accommodate the experience of peoples such as Italians in London, who may be viewed as 'familiar strangers' (Hall 1996: 490) whose experience is to be simultaneously inside and outside national borders. The ambivalent social and political ground Italians occupy — being Italian, European, residing in Britain — gives rise to specific negotiating strategies to solve this uncertainty in the construction of a new community. There exists a range of sites of identity formation and mobilisation that Italians resort to, that cannot be solely understood in terms of 'ethnicity'. The works of Errol Lawrence and Werner Sollors were informative in

this respect, for they reveal the strategies and mechanisms supporting the ossification of ethnicity, and in linking them to languages of kinship and descent. Both of these constitute good examples of what is meant by moving beyond ethnicity if we are to understand identity formation as an ongoing, unfinished, composite process that produces particular subjects.

I propose to use diaspora as a heuristic means to study the identity formation of London Italians because it moves between local and transnational spaces of identification, and integrates the constitutive power of this in-betweenness. In diaspora, settlement converses with transnational networks and multi-local ties. Furthermore, diaspora allows me to explore the significance of memory, spatiality and displacement in identity formation.

In the following pages, I probe different versions of 'memory work', political debates, and religious rituals, all of which are conceived as practices of collective identity. I attempt to move beyond pluralism and essentialism by dealing equally with the social dynamics of routings and rootings. How does local particularity articulate with multi-local identifications? How and in what terms are the practices that connect the dispersed and divided Italian population of London deemed expressive of its distinctive identity? What are the social relations of power that inscribe difference?

I now begin my account with an analysis of the literature on Italians in Britain. These histories first appeared relatively recently and were clearly aimed at initiating the communal project of recovery for the 'invisible' Italians of Britain. As such, they are entangled with political and cultural practices of identity formation, examined in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2

Historicity and community: recovering the Italian presence in Britain

[E]very story that relates what is happening or what has happened constitutes something real to the extent that it pretends to be the representation of a past reality. It takes on authority by passing itself off as the witness of what is or of what has been... Historiography acquires this power insofar as it presents and interprets the 'facts'. How can readers resist discourse that tells them what is or what has been?

Michel de Certeau

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I asked some interviewees: "What is the Italian community?" Each paused, looked at me, perplexed, and uttered something about the impossibility of defining it, about it being an "amorphous mass", before complying with my request and attempting to describe its configuration. Emerging from these interviews, was an image of a community characterised by diversity: differences of class, regional origins (in Italy), place of residence, generations. As the interviewees spoke, the community's boundaries remained blurred. The 'community' described to me did not consist of a geographically confined area, or of a life of daily contacts between individuals. It was not a neighbourhood, nor a 'street corner society' such as the one we might have know in former Little Italy.

A similarly picture surfaces from the literature on Italians in Britain: these texts also depict a collectivity characterised by a high degree of diversity *within*. The Italian population is differentiated along class and status lines, regional origins in Italy, generations, time of arrival and place of residence in England. So how do the different authors create a coherent narrative for such a diverse and dispersed population?

In this chapter, I examine monographs produced by, and about, Italians in Britain. I look at these social histories and unwrap what they say about the origins of the Italian presence in Britain, and how they say it. In other words, this is about historicity and community; that is, about how these narratives make sense of the Italian presence in Britain through the meanings they give it. I shall be considering this literature as part of a broader project of communal memory and self recovery. Following on from Benedict Anderson's insights on printed language as a site for the production of national identities, I conceive these texts as specific instances in the creation of an imagined community (Anderson [1983] 1991). Moreover, the



problem of naming and enclosing an 'Italian presence' in Britain is partly solved by writing its history, which authorises its existence and legitimises the actions undertaken to produce an 'Italian community' (de Certeau [1980] 1990: 182-183). So how, then, is the Italian presence qualified? What languages of communality gel together the imagined community of Italian immigrants? What are the founding moments allowing languages of solidarity to develop? To use the metaphor of information technology¹, what *formats* languages of community of Italian emigrants? How is the terrain prepared for holding, storing and processing signifiers about Italian immigrants to Britain?

These questions surround my scrutiny of textual practices that substantiate the existence of an Italian 'community' in Britain. I will draw out the sets of interests invested in these self narrations and will examine not only what, but how the stories construct the 'community', because

[t]he story does not express a practice. It does not limit itself to telling about a movement. It *makes* it. (de Certeau 1984: 80; emphasis original)

In other words, these stories *produce* what they claim to be *re-presenting* and *re-covering*. The making of the community is examined here as a "performative act of organising what it enunciates" (idem: 155). By identifying the common threads running through these 'community' stories, I hope to reveal the organising principles of these narratives and of the 'community' they instantiate. In short, I will look at how these narratives invent a community by periodising it, stabilising it and objectifying it. Periodisation is about making sense of the present by dividing the past into significant moments in its construction. I unpack three moments in the periodisation of the 'community': foundations (constituted around tradition), settlement (configured around continuity), and the immigrant condition (which is about identity and difference). Stabilisation is about 'points of suture' that secure the incessant movement of the 'community identity': kinship narratives and systems of gender differentiation and generational responsibility constitute such stabilising principles (Gilroy 1994a). These will be examined in the last section of this chapter, in relation to the family trope that pervades these histories. Finally, objectification is about making 'culture' and 'community' into a thing that we can stand back from and look at as an undeniable entity (Handler 1988). These interlocking processes, in short, create a sense of particularity from which terrains of solidarity can emerge.

The literature on Italians in Britain is to be considered in relation to the social and political context affecting their production and use. I intend to disentangle what are commonly read as 'specialist' writings on the 'community', and the politics of community and identity. What are the issues involved in recovering the story of

¹ I am grateful to Paul Gilroy for suggesting this analogy.

Italian immigration and settlement in Britain? What are the historical conditions surrounding their production?

John Gillis (1994) points out that new forms of 'memory work' appear at times when there is a break with the past. When reading the monographs written by and on Italians in Britain, it is important to bear in mind that these publications first appeared when a geographically locatable 'Little Italy' had gradually disintegrated, and when particular lifestyles (in England and in Italy) were now merely spectres in the shadows of a distant past. The dissolution of 'pockets of Italianness' within the English social landscape goes hand in hand with a movement of distancing from Italy: the 'origins' of Italians in Britain are now multiple and faded as a result of the relentless passing of time and inevitable fragmentation of the collectivity. Finally, the social character of the collectivity is undergoing significant transformations as 'younger generations' are now more visible, and as new Italian migrants are disturbing the still waters of this 'established' community.

These accounts developed in the context of new racist discourses of nationality and identity that altered the position of Italian immigrants within the British multi-ethnic social fabric. In the next section, I provide a brief summary of the literature on Italians in Britain and the contexts of its development.

The literature on Italians in Britain: a brief overview

"Emigration from Italy", wrote Robert Foerster in 1919, "belongs among the extraordinary movements of mankind." He continues:

In its chief lineaments it has no like. Through the number of men it has involved and the courses it has pursued, through its long continuance on a grand scale and its role in other lands, it stands alone. (1919: 3)

Foerster was amongst the first scholars to write about Italian emigration. Since that time, a vast number of works have been produced, particularly in the United States, about Italian immigrants and their settlement.² It is not before 1975, however, that the first attempt to write a general history of Italians in Britain appeared.³ Published by Father Umberto Marin, a Scalabriniano priest who spent a

² On the topic of Italian Americans and religion alone, Tomasi and Stibili (1975) have compiled a bibliography of over 1000 titles. These include all types of documents, from parish publications to scholarly work, but the great number may nevertheless suggest that Italians, in American ethnic studies, have for a long time been positioned as emblematic of ethnic and immigration studies. Moreover, the number of publications emanating from Italian organisations also suggests the energy and effort spent in 'historicising' their presence in the US.

³ There are a large number of articles or small publications about Italians in Britain preceding this date and going back to the early twentieth century. Whether included in journals, books covering a broader range of issues and/or populations, or whether publications on their own, these pieces always concern a specific aspect of Italian immigrants' lives, rather than a broader description of the population. For a list of earlier publications (i.e. pre-1970), see Marin 1975 or Sponza 1988.

number of years in England, *Italiani in Gran Bretagna* was published in the aftermath of the integration of Britain within the EC. This, according to Marin, incited politicians and sociologists to turn their attention toward *Invisible Immigrants* in Britain (Marin 1975: 5)⁴, that is, immigrants from European countries.

Umberto Marin focuses on the post-1945 Italian immigration to Britain, which he sets against a sketchy historical background tracing the heritage bequeathed by immigrants and sojourners who have come to Britain from the peninsula, at different times since the Roman Empire.⁵ For Marin, this journey is about the cultural contribution of Italy to Great Britain. This is not done, he argues, in a chauvinistic spirit. His aim is rather

[t]hat Italian *emigrati*, forced out of necessity to leave their own fatherland (*patria*), are convinced that the streets of the world are not only paved with wretch, loneliness, weariness and nostalgia, but also with an incomparable cultural patrimony. By recovering this patrimony, the *emigrato* redeems himself [sic]. (Marin 1975: 7; my italics)

This first monograph concerns, in short, the meaning of the historical presence of Italians in Britain. As such, it inserts itself within the stream of 'ethnic studies' that dominated social research at the time. As mentioned in the previous chapter, American and British 'ethnic' and 'racial' studies effected a shift, in the mid seventies, from the study of migration as a phenomenon in and of itself, to issues of power, and politics of culture and ethnicity.⁶ Also, studies were less concerned with histories and more with historicity: making sense of the historical presence of ethnic minorities.

The concern for the historicity of Italians in North America and in Britain appeared at a time when 'Little Italies', namely in metropolitan areas, were becoming tourist attractions and trading spaces rather than residential locations for an Italian population. In this respect, Umberto Marin's recovery of the legacy of early Italian immigrants to Britain instigated an interest in the Italian presence in Britain (Sponza n.d.) and a few writers subsequently published their versions of British Italian historicity. As we will see in more detail below, the general objective

⁴ This label was first used – in reference to the Italians at least – by J.S. and L.D. MacDonald (1972) in a booklet about Italian, Spanish and Portuguese immigrants to Britain.

⁵ It is interesting that he traces the 'Italian' presence so far back, echoing the strategy of Italian national socialism in the early twentieth century. A similar path was also followed by Robert Palmer ([1977] 1991).

⁶ With regards to the studies about Italians in the United States, this shift was formalised in a new research agenda inaugurated jointly by the Center for Migration Studies (run by the Scalabriniani Fathers) and the Agnelli Foundation. The inaugural conference took place in 1979. See Pacini 1994: xix.

uniting these different authors is the redemption of emigrants from the liabilities of foreignness.

In Britain, this interest expressed itself partly around concerns over the politics of representation. Umberto Marin, Bruno Bottignolo (1985) and, to a lesser extent, Terri Colpi (1991a), examine the organisational structure of the 'community' and ponder effective strategies for its future, which Marin and Bottignolo set against the backdrop of British politics of nationality and immigration. Umberto Marin wrote his history of Italians in Britain in the context of debates about the social and economic incorporation of black and other ethnic minorities. At one level, Marin's project of redemption, a project of claiming the 'right to difference', is licensed by the British government's recognition of Europe as a political and economic unit. Marin intends to use this platform to rehabilitate the Italian presence in Britain. At another level, the 'invisibility' he wishes to uncover is located within the racialised politics of nationality in British society, whereby 'immigrant' means black.⁷ This point merits some attention, for it concerns the broader political and social climate surrounding the emergence of the literature examined here.

In the aftermath of the 1939-45 war, a large number of workers from Europe and from the British colonies were recruited to fill the need for labour. During that period, there was much public debate around immigration policies, which led to the prevention of the entry of British citizens from the colonies.⁸ The discussions revolved around the integration of immigrants and consolidated the foundations of 'new racism'. The problems associated with the immigration of people from the Caribbean and from the Asian subcontinent, became no longer a matter of quantity but rather of quality; concerns revolved around the compatibility of foreign cultural values with English national culture. These debates were permeated by a discourse of 'race' that was used as much to signify European migrants as migrants from British colonies, but that functioned in a hierarchical manner: European immigrants (most of whom came from Eastern Europe) were signified positively, while 'coloured people' were presumed to be unable to 'assimilate' to the 'British way of life' (Miles 1993: 165). A pathological image of black immigrants was substantiated in a complex narrative that gives different accounts of the dysfunctional character of immigration (Lawrence 1982a-b):

⁷ If white immigrants are 'invisible' in Britain, it is people of colour who are 'invisible' in Europe (Back and Nayak 1993). While in Canada, for example, immigrant and cultural minority, in the bureaucratic jargon, mean white European. There, the concept of 'visible minorities' emerged in the late seventies-early eighties, to refer to the more recently arrived immigrants from the Caribbean (French and English), Africa and South-East Asia. There is a fascinating play of images that revolve around ideas of visibility and invisibility: seeing and naming are deeply embedded in the constant displacement of bodily inscriptions of identity/difference.

⁸ About British politics of nationality and immigration control, see Fryer (1984), Miles (1989), Carter et al. (1987).

housing conditions, promiscuity, family life and generational conflicts were all construed, at different times, as emblems of the cultural incompatibility of immigrants from the Caribbean.

This political context frames the shifts that have occurred in representations of Italian immigrants. The image of the enemy alien of the war years (see below), and that of the gang-land club owners of Soho in the fifties (Sir Harold Scott in Gilroy 1987: 80; Colpi 1991a), gradually subsided and moved to a less menacing and negative representation. An illustration of this is John Brown's study of different immigrant populations of Bedford, focusing on the households of Asians, Caribbeans, Italians and other immigrant populations. This book — a right-wing, neo-racist essay entitled *The Un-Melting Pot* — is about the changing face of the modern city, presented as a fragmented community, a life of co-existence, rather than of communal bonding, all of which appear as consequences of immigration (Brown 1970: 12). Brown illustrates this by exploring the following areas: living conditions and the organisation of family life; education, health and criminality. He concludes that criminality and youth delinquency result from 'loose' family ties that signify weak cultural cohesion. In Brown's view, West-Indians lack this internal social control, which he notes as being very cohesive in the Asian population. As for the Italians, they rise as the epitome of the good, clean, discrete, law abiding immigrants.

So from the early seventies, the redemption of Italian immigrants had been partially initiated.

The Italian collectivity in Great Britain is considered a privileged collectivity. Favoured by a liberal immigration policy... it would have harmoniously integrated within British society and constituted a kind of Eden within the troubled emigration front. For the British state, it is an exemplary immigration sediment, the best integrated, the most successful, which acts as a model for other national collectivities that are more alienated and worried. (Marin 1975: 104)

This, along with European unification, paved the way for a fuller rehabilitation of Italians within British society. Umberto Marin's goal is to redeem Italians and give them a positive image of themselves without, however, neglecting the difficulties of settling in Britain. Language differences, political indifference, labour market constraints and expectations of the Italian immigrants are major stumbling blocks which Marin makes a point to emphasise in order to dismiss the assumption that things were easy for Italian immigrants. Bruno Bottignolo holds a similar view:

The absence of limitation and differences such as to bring about [sic] situations of open conflict

alone [e.g. racism], does not create easy social interaction. An Italian in Great Britain finds no great obstacles to his insertion into the new society, but neither does he find many realities to help his insertion or to favour the active practice of the limited rights of citizenship which are conceded to him... The Italian immigrant's invisibility is ultimately also an expression of his limited socio-cultural relevance. (Bottignolo 1985: 71)

Both Bottignolo and Marin are measuring the plight of Italians in Britain against the racist politics of this country. Without denying the privileged position of Italian immigrants, these authors suggest that this does not guarantee the absence of difficulties or of alienation.

In short, the new racism of 1970s-Britain was a discourse with which Italian immigrant writers conversed in their own accounts of Italian immigration to Britain. Difference, not hierarchy, is the organising principle of new racism, where ethnic groups are fixed and essentialised within absolutist definitions of culture. Furthermore, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, new racism ties up with familyism in the nativist discourse of national identity prevailing in Britain. Such discourses must be acknowledged as the grand narratives of culture, identity, and nationality which were dominating at the time of the production of the books examined here. If these Italian authors did not have racist or absolutist intentions, the circumstances in which their descriptions were produced and read constitute "conditions of continuing racism" that interpellate them and influence their narratives of self-representation (Lawrence 1982a: 74). It is possible to argue that the project of freeing Italians from their invisibility, in Britain, became feasible when ethnic identity was re-configured around cultural rather than racial difference. Ideas of origins and kinship are tantamount to this new racism, where rootedness and descent are identified as a prerequisite for the forms of cultural integrity that could guarantee the identity that Italians seek to recover in order to occupy a position of equality in relation to Britons. The literature examined below seeks to explore how these ideas are worked into the creation of an imagined Italian community.⁹

The body of publications on Italians in Britain is rather small. Three monographs cover a history of the Italian presence in Britain (Colpi 1991a; Marin

⁹ The reconfiguration of ethnicity is not the doing of state regulations alone. New ethnicities discussed in chapter one challenged cultural conformity of nationalist discourses by making strong claims for the respect of difference. I strongly suspect that Italian writers were informed by these struggles, but the extent of this intertextuality needs to be further explored. Bruno Bottignolo only mentions in passing that Italians in Swindon were involved in the local Commission for Racial Equality, without providing further details about the circumstances of this involvement (1985: 59). Such cases would be worth documenting, if only to reveal how 'race struggles' and 'race' politics inform the politics of identity of white populations such as Italians.

1975; Sponza 1988), one of which is limited to the 19th century (Sponza 1988). Other studies focus on an area where residents of Italian descent have established themselves (London, Bedford, Bristol, Scotland, South Wales)¹⁰ and/or on a specific sub-group of this population (Calabrese, 'Abbazini'¹¹, women, youth or so-called second generation). Many topics are covered: social histories (Colpi 1991a & b; Marin 1975; Sponza 1988), perceptions of space and time (Cavallaro 1981), chain migration (Palmer [1977] 1991), 'second generations' (Tassello & Favero 1976; Vignola et al. 1983), Italian POWs (MacDonald 1987), Italian wartime internees (Gillman & Gillman 1980; Rossi 1991), language maintenance and education (ATI¹² 1982; Tosi 1991, 1984; Baldwin et al. 1980; Cervi 1991), organisations and community politics (Palmer 1981), Italian women (Chistolini 1986), spatial distribution (King & King 1977), return migration (King 1977; King et al. 1984), kinship networks (Garigue & Firth 1956), religious practice (Parolin 1979), or (auto)biographies (Goffin 1979; Cavalli 1973; Rossi 1991).

In view of my concern about the construction of an Italian community that breaks down regional differences, I focus my attention on the three monographs about Italians in the British isles (Colpi 1991a; Marin 1975; Sponza 1988), as well as on two monographs of Italian 'communities' in the Bristol region and in Bedford respectively (Bottignolo 1985; Cavallaro 1981). In contrast to the rest of the literature, these five books speak of an entire population of Italian immigrants, rather than focusing on only one section. They are of interest to me because, each in their own way, they attempt to solve the indeterminacy of the Italian population by identifying its common grounds. Finally, these books are all produced by Italians who have in one way or another, a personal commitment to the British Italian community — except for Renato Cavallaro, whose study is nevertheless considered by some Italian emigrant leaders as the best study on Italian emigrants in Britain published to date.¹³ Bruno Bottignolo is a priest from the diocese of Padua, who was serving in an Italian mission in Bristol at the time of his study. His book is the published version of his doctoral dissertation, which he conducted under the supervision of Mary Douglas, at Cambridge University. Umberto Marin is a Scalabriniano father. Though now residing in Milan, he is to this day a prominent figure in the London 'community'. He lived in Bedford from 1960 to 1966, and in London from 1966 to 1979, where he was involved in the foundation of the

¹⁰ London: Palmer [1977] 1991. Bedford: Brown 1970; Cavallaro 1981; Sarre et al 1989. Bristol: Bottignolo 1985. South Wales: Hughes 1991. Scotland: Chistolini 1986; Rodgers 1982; Rossi 1966; Colpi 1979 & 1986.

¹¹ A pseudonym used by Palmer in his article on emigrants from a village in the Emilian Apennines (Palmer 1980).

¹² Association of Teachers of Italian.

¹³ Personal conversation with a prominent leader and promoter of an Italian emigrant identity, July 1992.

Scalabrini Centro. Marin took over the editorship of *La Voce degli Italiani* in 1963, until he returned to Italy in 1979. He was awarded the distinction of *Cavaliere* (the Italian equivalent of knighthood) in 1973, for his services to the Italian Republic. Lucio Sponza, for his part, immigrated to England over twenty five years ago. An academic and historian, Sponza is dedicated to researching the Italian presence in Britain which, in his view, has a very rich history that remains to be documented. Terri Colpi is a self-identified Italian Scot, "[b]orn into one of the oldest Italian business families in Scotland" (1991a: book jacket). She has produced a number of publications on Italian immigrants, but has gained some notoriety in the Italian community with *The Italian Factor* and *Italians Forward*. Colpi recently joined the ranks of *Cavaliere* as a tribute to her contribution to the advancement of the community (see chapter 3).

Within this selection, as well as within the whole body of literature on Italians in Britain, Renato Cavallaro's *Storie senza Storia* is unique. Cavallaro is a sociologist, attached to the Sociology Institute of the University of Rome at the time of his research. He conducted a type of ethnographic fieldwork: residing with Italian families in Bedford and complementing the life stories he based his book on with observations of the daily lives of his subjects. Cavallaro used individual life stories to reconstruct the itinerary of the collective consciousness of Calabrese¹⁴ immigrants in Bedford. More specifically, he examined narratives about changes and displacements in the immigrants' spacio-temporal horizons, and the type of knowledge produced in these stories. The freshness of this study is that it explores the constitutive effectiveness of memory and the power of enunciation in identity formation. Yet Cavallaro's account is little more than a content analysis of narratives that appear to exist outside of any historical context. His study is deeply entrenched in a dualistic framework that opposes Italian peasant, traditional and cyclical culture, to British working class, industrial, linear culture. Consequently, Cavallaro ends up reproducing a family-based, rural image of 'Italian culture' that is no different from representations found in other works.

Lucio Sponza's book, for its part, aims to dispel images of Italians as a homogeneous ethnic group or a sub-class. He reveals the open-ended character of the emigration process by emphasising the importance of the economic structure as an explanatory factor to the immigration and settlement of Italians in nineteenth-century Britain. The originality of Sponza's account is that he relates the attitudes of British society towards Italians to wider debates and class conflicts around poverty, hygiene, foreigners, etc. He identifies four issues where these concerns congealed: the living conditions of the organ-grinders, especially the children; the

¹⁴ From Calabria, a region in southern Italy.

annoyance with street music; the overcrowding and alleged sanitary hazard within the Italian Quarter; and the suspicion of the immoral practices of Italians (1988: 140). What his research reveals is the ethnicisation of social or political issues, and some of the operations through which ethnic identities are given substance. In Sponza's words, Italian immigrants of the nineteenth century, popularised in the image of the organ-grinders,

acted as a sort of litmus paper, revealing the degree of social and ideological polarization and antagonism of mid-Victorian London (and Britain) (idem: 179).

Umberto Marin and Bruno Bottignolo, for their part, emphasise the political organisation of identity as a constitutive force of a 'community'. For Marin, the redemption of Italian immigrants will ultimately be political, while Bottignolo's concerns revolve around the

nature and the meaning of the community activities of the Italians in the Bristol region, with particular reference to their political position. (1985: 38)

Finally, Terri Colpi's book provides an impressionist view of the origins and characteristics of the present day Italian community. In turn, *The Italian Factor* stands out as a highly normative and objectifying representation of the community. The Italian 'Comunità' (always with a capital C) is given as a unified 'thing', the membership of which is policed by the degree of conformity to its cultural contents.

This book is not directly concerned with those who have opted or drifted out of the Community; it is concerned with those who have an Italian way of life, are linked with Italy and who feel at least partly Italian. (1991a: 16)

What this 'Italian way of life' *means* is spelled out along the lines of settlement, migration, and memory, through which Colpi asserts the undeniable presence of an *Italian Factor* within British society.

Although only around a quarter of a million people resident in Britain today are either Italian-born or of Italian origin, they are a distinct presence within British society. Their long history in this country, their specialist development of the catering industry, their continued contact with Italy, their ever evolving migration picture and finally their strong Italian 'ethnic memory', which makes them cling even after generations to aspects of their Italianness, all contribute to Community traditions. In this era of closer European integration the Italians in Britain are probably the most European section of British society – a position which is giving them increasing prominence. *The Italian Factor* in British life has

truly come of age. Let us see how this has come about. (idem: 22)

The texts examined here produce a historicity for an Italian community in the making. They trace and link up threads of histories, constructing a narrative through which a 'community' can emerge. None of the authors claims that the community is a homogeneous unit. But by seeing how the Italian presence in Britain 'has come about', they are tracing lines of closure. I now proceed to unpack these lines and to look at them in relation to the social and political context surrounding their production and use.

Foundations

In his book on Italian immigrants in 19th century Britain, Lucio Sponza traces the origins of Italian immigration to this country back to "an old tradition of seasonal and vagrant migration" (1988: 24) or to "an ancient custom" (idem: 36) which took Italians to different parts of the Italian peninsula (for summer transhumance, or displacement to plains for intensive cultivation), or to France, Austria and Germany and, little by little, to Britain. Migration, then, appears as a characteristic of traditional Italian ways, tied to agricultural practices.

Sponza provides a structural explanation for the forced migration of Italians: it began during the Napoleonic wars when agriculture was reorganised "along capitalistic lines", which consequently dispossessed small farmers. This, added to continuous harassment from the French armies, forced many to leave.

The evidence of the worsening conditions of the rural population is continuous from the mid-eighteenth century through the nineteenth century. Migration became vagabondage, as families finally collapsed under the weight of debt, took to the road and became beggars. (E. Sori quoted in Sponza 1988: 26)

Vagrancy, vagabondage, is a recurring theme of Sponza's account. And it is out of this 'old tradition' of vagrancy that the 'founders of the Italian colony' (idem: 24) set foot in Britain in the early 1800s.

Sponza pays particular attention to itinerant street musicians and street traders, whom he includes in what he calls the "traditional sections of the colony" (idem: 260), by contrast with the political immigrants whom he isolates from "the bulk of the Italian immigrants" (ibid.) Political refugees appear as marginal characters in both Sponza's and Colpi's histories, even if they played an influential leadership role within the "embryonic Italian Community" (Colpi 1991a: 32). So the story of the present day community begins with the emigration of poor, unskilled peasants forced into vagabondage. As Umberto Marin puts it, during the nineteenth century

popular emigration joined the secular emigration of elite Italians; along with the artists and political refugees arrived the first *real* emigrati in Great Britain. (Marin 1975: 27; my emphasis)

This statement begs the question about what makes the authenticity of the 'popular emigration'; what makes it 'real'?

In these stories, the contrast is sharp between the *élite* and the *paesani*. The former are isolated, presented as more individualistic, and the latter, more gregarious. The typical opposition between urban and rural, signifying the opposition between tradition and modernity, supports the foundations of the present day Italian community. Only Umberto Marin offers a panorama of the earlier migration of the *élite* and other noteworthy men, in order to reveal the "incomparable cultural patrimony" bequeathed to Italian emigrants who, by recovering this heritage, will redeem themselves (Marin 1975: 7). To paraphrase Michel de Certeau, Marin evokes ghosts of the past to create a habitable (and gendered) space for his contemporaries (de Certeau [1980] 1990: 162). But in other histories (namely Sponza and Colpi), the *élite* are marginalised and obscured. This exclusion was also expressed by some active members of St Peter's church or other leading Italian men I interviewed in 1992 and 1993. While the community is generally conceived as an 'amorphous mass', its boundaries are defined in the moral terms of 'good' and 'bad' Italians, where the 'good' are those involved in the 'community' or interested minimally in their Italian background. The 'bad' Italians, excluded from the 'community', are the *élite* and members of the Italian officialdom — said to be out of touch with the grass-roots London Italian *immigrants* — and contemporary Italian migrants, mostly young, single, here for an indefinite period of time. The question of time of residence in Britain is another marker of distinction that supports the idea of settlement: *élites* are usually here temporarily, and thus have no idea of the experience of settlement the immigrants go through, so the argument goes. And settlement, as I argue below, is a central signifier that distinguishes *immigrants* from migrants. The point here is that class distinctions feed into Italian immigrant historicity, and correlates with the opposition between authenticity and disingenuousness: true emigrants were poor, male, peasants. They were forced to leave Italy for economic reasons.

Emigration is associated with rupture and discontinuity. Emigration is an event that starts from Italy. It is a move away from, a breaking away, a caesura:

[e]migration constitutes the great caesura, the parting line that separates the remote past, absolute, closed and compact like a circle where all the points are equally distant from real time, from the near past, relative, tightly linked to the present by uninterrupted passages of time. Emigration is the zero moment [*momento zero*] of

social growth, an individual and collective product of time, not always located in a definitive historical process, but always brought into focus by a date which initials [*sigla*] a fundamental moment in the personal, family memory. (Cavallaro 1981: 41)

Hence emigration separates the remote past of a tradition from a nearer past of 'forced' displacement. In this respect, *emigration* is different from *migration*.

Whether in the views of Sponza, Colpi, or Marin, migration emerges as an ancient tradition, whose character changed over time. The discursive strategies of these authors locate their stories in the timeless continuity of an ancient tradition of migration — what Stuart Hall labels the 'foundational myth' in narratives of national culture (1992: 294) — as well as grounding the community in an original folk or peasant society, which arrived 'way back' in the 1800s. *Campanilismo*, *paesanismo*, *comparaggio*, recur in these stories as expressions of such a traditional culture, the custodians of which are the peasants. It is worth noting that Colpi's systematic use of these Italian words is part and parcel of the objectification of Italian culture and the 'ethnicisation' of the Italian community.¹⁵ Furthermore, the emphasis on the bucolic origins of the 'real' immigrants adds an additional layer to the construction of an integral culture that mimics nationalist discourses about the link between cultural heritage and soil (Boyarin 92: 2; Handler 1988).

The timeless tradition of migration is, however, interrupted by *emigration*. From a 'natural' phenomenon, migration turned *emigration* became a socio-economic one, which incurred a substantial change of meanings. The "old tradition... became for many more people the only option" (Sponza 1988: 24). Emigration is indeed the zero moment of collective social growth, from which the original peasant, vagrant immigrants moved forward into a 'new life'.¹⁶ The subtle addition of the prefix indicates a break, a move out of the national borders, a change of location or position. This demarcation is most striking in Cavallaro's analysis: his argument that emigration is the zero moment of social growth rests on a linear conception of time and displacement, the initial moment being marked forever in the increasingly remote past. In this respect, emigration is conceived as static, confined

¹⁵ *Campanilismo* refers to 'bell-tower' mentality, *paesanismo*, to a similar system of social relationships between co-villagers. *Comparaggio* is the principle according to which close family friends are honorary members of the family and are *compadre* (god-parents) to one of the children. Terri Colpi refers regularly to *campanilismo*, conceived as the basis for internal division among Italian 'communities' abroad. Colpi's conception objectifies *campanilismo* as a thing which is active or inactive (one chapter section is entitled "*Campanilismo* in operation" (1991a: 188), and she ethnicises it by referring to it only in its Italian version. Colpi resorts to the same strategy to identify particular trades: for example, she uses the term *figurinai* to speak of nineteenth-century Italian makers and vendors of plaster statuettes, thus suggesting that they might have been typically Italian.

¹⁶ In this respect, Terri Colpi's book on the Italian presence in Britain using a compilation of photographs, is appropriately entitled *Italians Forward* (1991b).

to the moment of departure. Hence a distinction between migration as foundational, and emigration as zero moment is significant. Migration as foundational opens a *theatre of action*: it founds a terrain of legitimacy for action (de Certeau [1980] 1990: 182-183). The meaning of *emigration* as breaking point is deployed upon this terrain. It is distinguished from migration in terms of temporality, while both remain spatially located in Italy.

The question now is: if migration and emigration are the linchpins with Italy, how is the relationship with England integrated in Italian community languages? To put it differently, Italy and tradition are integrated as foundational, that is, as where Italians *come from*, through stories of migration and emigration. How is the space Italians *moved to* and now *live in* integrated in their project of communal memory?

Settlement

Foundations do not rest on migration and 'diasporisation' alone. As James Clifford points out, the term diaspora is a signifier not simply of transnationality, movement and forced migration, but also of settlement, dwelling and the "struggles to define the local" (1994: 306). In this section, I examine how languages of settlement enclose the 'community' within a system of representation that combines particular images of conquest, family and gender.

It bears repetition that during the second half of the nineteenth century, important numbers of immigrants from Italy began migrating to Britain. In addition, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are characterised by a change in the occupational structure of the Italian collectivity. From itinerant trades, they entered the more formalised economy. In historical accounts of Italian immigration in Britain (Colpi 1991a; Sponza 1988), the turn of the century is represented as the period when Italian immigrants changed from being sojourners to settlers; the period when the community became more internally cohesive, stable and sedentary. It is at this time that the 'early community' is identified as a settler community.

Changes in the occupational structure are rightly emphasised by Lucio Sponza as significant in shaping the character of the 'community' of the time. Interestingly, the stabilisation of the founding community is associated with this shift: the first moments of settlement appear when Italians begin occupying less vagrant occupations organised around smaller working-units (some of which were family run). For example, ice-cream vendors, who were also itinerant, began working in more formalised environments. This shift meant the demise of the *padrone*-run hawking groups, which were less formal and perceived as more exploitative (particularly of children). So here again, a new organisation of labour

along capitalistic lines (smaller, more formalised working units) determines another change in the patterns of mobility of Italian immigrants. Their labour is stabilised and more controlled. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in a discussion about the relationship between capitalism, mobility, 'free' labour, and social diversification. I simply wish to point out how capitalism emerges from Sponza's and, more strikingly, Colpi's portrayals of Italian life in Britain. A thread running through these accounts links the formalisation of labour and the emergence of Italian small catering businesses as the conditions of possibility for the maintenance and reproduction of ethnic identity. It is not only a question of making a trade of one's ethnicity. It is subtly more than that.

[T]hose families who have remained in business, ethnic or otherwise, have retained an *Italian factor* and indeed are normally extremely proud of it. Secondly, since one of the main avenues to progress in Scottish society involves entering the public sector and local government, many Italians have followed this path. This, however, has led in most cases to an '*institutionalised assimilation*'. The capitalistic drive to progress has been lost amongst this group but, more importantly, *so has their Italianità*. (Colpi 1991a: 197; my emphasis)

As the histories of Sponza and Colpi unfold, the businesses Italians engage in become increasingly ethnicised. In other words, the economic journey of Italians appears as the slow conquest of occupational niches through which they assert and reproduce their ethnicity.

It took a very long time for the boy of 12 or 13 arriving in the early 1900s to climb his way up the employment hierarchies from the back kitchens into the salons and the dining-rooms. But it could be done, and not only did the majority achieve this, but to such an extent that soon the best hotels sought and would employ only Italians, thereby clinching the catering niche entirely for their compatriots. (Colpi 1991a: 62)

The colonising metaphor colouring this passage conveys and enhances the relationship between economic expansion, conquest and settlement. A metaphor Colpi also uses in her description of the movement of nineteenth century 'pioneers'.

Gradually, pioneers began to move further and further afield, until the season was spent abroad in many different locations. Migrants thus began to spread out across Europe and indeed the world. Owing to the increasing distances involved in these migrations, it became inevitable that the communities these migrants established became more permanent and less seasonal or temporary. This became true for London as much as it did for

Moscow or San Francisco in the middle of the nineteenth century. (idem: 33)

This language evokes European imperialist discourses. In Italy, as we shall see in chapter 3, Mussolini integrated emigration in his expansionist ideals of international fascism. Without imputing similar intentions to Colpi, her use of the colonising metaphor nevertheless maintains the conditions of continuing imperialism enduring in contemporary political discourses in Europe.¹⁷

The settlement of Italians in Britain is not only signified by a new occupational structure. It is at this time, also, that women appear as significant members of the immigrant population. In Terri Colpi's *The Italian Factor*, the first chapter about pre-1880s Italian immigration contains seven sections, but only in the last one does she introduce "the early Community". This section begins as follows:

In the 1830s and 1840s the male-female ratio of the Italian presence in this country was very imbalanced and it was not until the middle of the second half of the century, the 1860s and 1870s, that women began to arrive in sufficient numbers to balance the sex-structure of the Colony in London... Apart from the three groups of semi-skilled craftsmen described in the previous section, the general immigration of the poor Italians with no trades, training or skills continued to be the largest portion of the flow and in the late 1870s this began to follow a more classical pattern of chain migration where the *padrone* and others began to bring over female members of the family. The Community thus became more sedentary and stable... (idem: 41)

Colpi's way of introducing the 'early Community' suggests an equation between settlement and the immigration of women. Here, as in the foundation narratives above, the distinction between sojourners and settlers suggests a masculinist conception of mobility and movement: stability, sedentariness is the doing of women and families (see also Marin 1985: 57), *brought in* by the men who have moved into more fixed occupations. The presence of women and families is presented as incompatible with the earlier community of 'vagrants'.

As long as the majority of the Italians were street musicians and statuette vendors (by and large involving temporary migration), it is reasonable to assume that there was not much scope for women to join their men in Britain. (Sponza 1988: 59).

¹⁷ An illustration of this is found in a speech given by Margaret Thatcher in Bruges in 1988: Too often the history of Europe is described as a series of interminable wars and quarrels. Yet from our perspective today surely what strikes us most is our common experience. For instance, the story of how Europeans explored and colonised and - yes, without apology - civilised much of the world is an extraordinary tale of talent, skill and courage. (in Solomos and Back 1994: 154)

Lucio Sponza's analysis suggests that women street musicians were non-existent (as does Colpi's label 'travelling craftsmen'; Colpi 1991a: 38) and that they would only migrate with 'their men'. However, in a recent conference on 'New Perspectives in the History of Italians in Great Britain'¹⁸, Sponza pointed out the need for more research on Italian immigrant women, past and present. In this respect, a conference participant mentioned a survey of households in 1880s Edinburgh, where one was inhabited by Italian women only. Moreover, these women also appear to have been street musicians. Even if small in number, this contingent of nineteenth century Italian immigrating women is obscured in the existing literature. Their particular story goes untold, while their arrival is diluted within the broader settlement narrative, where it is positioned as a signifying moment.

The relationship between stability and women can be further unpacked from the accounts about post-1945 immigration. In the 1950s, Italian women entering Britain outnumbered Italian men. According to the 1951 census, there were 62 men for 100 women (in some places the proportion was 1 to 3; Marin 1975: 93). Entering under bulk recruitment schemes, these women, the majority of whom were single and in their twenties, were employed predominantly in the textile, rubber and ceramic industries. They went to Norwich, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Many women returned to Italy after having completed their work contract, but hundreds settled (Colpi 1991a: 146). Many of these "pioneers" of the "new" immigration from Italy (idem: 145) married other 'European volunteer workers' coming from Poland, Ukraine, Latvia and former Yugoslavia. In the course of my field research, I met a few such couples, and one of my closest acquaintances immigrated on her own in the 50s and married an Englishman.

How is the migration story of these women told by Marin and Colpi? Umberto Marin was the first to provide a detailed compilation of census and other data on post-1945 immigration from Italy.¹⁹ However, he is quick to trace the 'masculinisation' of the population, which he "proves" (1975: 93) in a table on the outnumbering of men over women immigrants from 1962 to 1970 (table XIII, p. 176). No table is provided for the preceding period, when women outnumbered men.

Women migrants are represented as wives, mothers and agents of cultural reproduction and stability. Moreover, while the mother figure is reified as the guardian of the family nucleus and "the symbol of what is most sacred within a

¹⁸ Institute of Romance Studies, London, 19 May 1995.

¹⁹ No less than 35 tables inform us of different details about this population: from their region of origin, through their occupations, to the nationality of patients admitted to the Italian hospital in 1973.

family" (Bottignolo 1985: 59; Colpi 1991a: 216), the Italian 'woman' (Marin 1975: 106), through her participation in the labour market and subsequent integration in English society,

has considerable merit in the much acclaimed
serenity and social promotion of our community
(ibid.).

For Marin, Italian women in Britain, unlike those living elsewhere (such as in Belgium), have not confined themselves to the household, thus avoiding the negative effects that such a lifestyle might incur on immigrant women and their families. For the good of the family, according to Marin's logic, women should integrate into the host society, one channel being through the labour market. Though he positions women as active agents in the formation and stabilisation of the 'community', Marin systematically locates them within family-based kinship networks. It follows that the image of women as custodians of culture is constituted through their repeated positioning as wives and mothers. In short, the definition of local particularity is, to an extent, feminised, but its feminisation is entwined with the production of gendered systems of differentiation that emphasise the family. Discourses of migration and settlement ride on a gendered sense of locality that distinguishes men-migrants from women-wives/mothers-agents of settlement.

The association between women, mothers and settlement reveals that the stake in the shift from 'founding' to 'settling' the community is the issue of continuity. The first moment of settlement is the one of stabilising the gender ratio in order to found families. "As the Italians settled down and the number of those engaged in vagrant occupations decreased", writes Lucio Sponza, "the family unit would be reconstituted, or formed" (Sponza 1988: 59).

Indeed, it was not until this second stage of
development [between 1880-1918] that the
Community was assured of a future: an Italian
factor would become an enduring facet of British
life. (Colpi 1991a: 47)

The implicit difference between foundation and settlement is the difference between tradition and continuity. Foundations are elaborated along the lines of tradition, while settlement formats the condition of possibility for continuity. A continuity that derives from 'origins' which are traceable to a delimited geographical location: the area of Clerkenwell in London. Although it concerns a particular section of London, this area is construed as paradigmatic for Italian settlements in Britain. As Lucio Sponza writes,

[t]he history of Italian immigration to Britain is to
a great extent the history of the Italians in London
– indeed, in a relatively limited area of the
metropolis for most of the nineteenth century.

This is true both in terms of sheer numbers and, more importantly, in the sense that the occupational structure and living conditions were reproduced in a scattered manner in almost all the Italian settlements around Britain (1988: 19)

The London 'colony', as Colpi calls it, is a second place of origin for Italians in Britain (this is examined in more detail in chapter 4). Settlement, then, with its origins, colonisation metaphor, and gendered forms of stabilisation, constitutes an important symbolic marker, delineating the Italian immigrant collectivity and rooting it, as it were, in English territory. On the other hand, the 'community' is also attempting to define itself in response²⁰ to the increasingly noted presence of 'new' migrants from Italy. In the last 20 years, young Italian migrants have entered and left Britain in large numbers. These 'new migrants' are problematic for the 'community' leadership. Their presence is further complicated by the active involvement of Padre Carmelo, St Peter's parish priest, with young Italian offenders, drug users and living with HIV/AIDS. The most common complaint heard from Italians is that Father Carmelo spends too much time in prisons and not enough with the 'community'.

Although a large number of youths come here for a variety of reasons, the popular press (both English and Italian) has focused, in recent years, on young delinquent and drug users — the numbers of which are estimated to be between 1 400 and 2 800. In December 1992, *Time Out* published an article on young Italians coming to London for work, but who 'sink' into a world of drugs, crime and AIDS.²¹ *Backhill* published a series of extracts of a speech given by Sir John Smith, Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, about "Young Criminals".²² *La Voce*, for its part, published a small article about the work of the Holy Cross Church near King's Cross which, on Thursday afternoons, offers shelter and food to homeless Italians²³, as well as a series on drugs and toxico-dependent Italian youths coming to London (issues of July 1995 to February 1996).

The proximity of King's Cross to St Peter's church, *the* Italian church, adds to the drama and to the menace these youths present to the coherence of the 'community'. Moreover, twice a week, the parish offices of St Peter's are open to young men, who find food served by volunteer workers, and advice dispensed by

²⁰ Michel de Certeau writes that memory "responds more than it records" (de Certeau 1984: 88).

²¹ *Time Out*, 2-9 December 1992: 10-11.

²² *Backhill*, issues of December 1994/January 1995 to May 1995 inclusively. Sir John's argument is that "the origins of delinquent behaviour and criminality can be traced to... childhood years" (*Backhill*, March 1995: 8). He locates the source of delinquency in inadequate parenting, which is "handed down from generation to generation" (*Backhill*, April 1995: 14). Sir John's argument is not racialised nor ethnicised, but founded upon ideas of descent. The family becomes the sole source of scrutiny and of explanation for delinquency.

²³ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #929, April 1995: 9.

Padre Carmelo. In this respect, St Peter's is a 'theatre of extremes' (Orsi 1985: 48). A place where the 'old' community confronts the 'new', incoming migrants. In the social club, the 'old' community finds a cosy, familiar place to meet: men gather in the bar to play cards, or to watch football. Women gather regularly, accomplishing a variety of craft work, some of which will be sold at the annual bazaar.

Meanwhile, in the parish office below, young Italian men gather for a chat, watch television, speak with Padre Carmelo, and have a nice Italian meal, while the Italian housekeeper meanders her way through, going about her daily tasks. Excluded from 'la comunità', these youths nevertheless find a welcoming meeting place at St Peter's. Bounded by the walls delimiting their respective territories within the same building, these two worlds — the young, 'new migrants', on the one hand, and the Social Club members on the other — might meet occasionally at the Sunday mass.

With this new Italian presence so close to home, as it were, the 'community' is seeking to define itself, to enclose itself. Unlike their predecessors, these youths are not here to settle, nor, it seems, do they identify as 'immigrants' (Sodano 1995). Likewise, they are not viewed as immigrants by local leaders.

I don't think that we will have any longer, in the future, the old form of immigration. The old form of immigration is past, it is history. [The community leaders] don't want to call [the newcomers] immigrants... [These migrants] come here for a period of three to six months, or for two years. To learn English, to study. They want to combine study and job. This is a new phenomenon. We have to face this new situation.
*Mobility is a new phenomenon everywhere.*²⁴

In the present climate of mixed fascination and aversion for travellers, and of fear of 'loosening' controls at British borders, the marginalisation of these youths from the 'community' is no accident. Immigrants and travellers have been criminalised in recent years. Migrancy has become unacceptable and subjected to strict legal control. We only need to think of the Criminal Justice Act, and the less publicised Permanent Residency Test. Immigrants, for their part, are now represented as criminals, as exemplified in recent debates over EU immigration policies. Right-wing Conservatives such as Nigel Evans and Winston Churchill contend that adopting EU guidelines would lead to a 'tidal wave' of illegal immigrants, 'bogus asylum-seekers', 'terrorists' and 'drug smugglers'²⁵, not mentioning 'Euro-scroungers' who 'abuse' of the British welfare system.

²⁴ Interview with Giuseppe Blanda, of St Patrick's International Centre, an organisation that offers social and educational services to youth from different parts of the world (October 1993).

²⁵ *Daily Express*, February 15, 1995.

In this context, the settlement image acquires even greater potency. The settler figure emerges as the symbol marking the boundary between e/immigrants and migrants. Migrancy is yet again marginalised, defined against a timespace based on permanence and some form of rooting. While the foundations of the community are signified by a break in time through the moment of emigration, the settlement constitutes a point of attachment from which ideas of locality and continuity can emerge. How, then, is this local particularity defined? This localisation is very much configured around the experience of immigration, on the one hand, and family-life and organisation, on the other. The remainder of this chapter is organised around these two points.

Living memory and the 'immigrant condition'

Lying at the foundation of the Italian community, migration has been uncovered, up to now, as a signifier of tradition and vagrancy and thus stands on the margins of the Italian 'community'. It is simultaneously a thing of the past, belonging to a timeless tradition which accounts for the mass displacement of Italians at the turn of the century, and a thing of the present, a mode of existence deemed incompatible with the ideal of settlement. In this section, I turn to the positioning of migration within what Bruno Bottignolo has named the 'immigrant condition' (1985: 86). For this writer, the Italian community does not emerge spontaneously from the common ground of ethnicity. It results, rather, from spontaneous interactions between people sharing similar conditions of existence: "Their common experience and shared destiny join[s] them and [makes] them feel very close to one another." (idem: 87)

Throughout the narratives of Cavallaro, Bottignolo, Marin and, to a lesser extent, Colpi, the complexity of immigration as a predicament comes to the fore. As Umberto Marin puts it, emigration is not only about landing or settlement, nor does it end when integration is successfully achieved. For Marin, there is a price paid for this integration, usually proclaimed in economic terms (Marin 1975: 104). The grave problems of emigration are underestimated, in Marin's view, and he intends to uncover them.

In this section, I wish to unveil the multiple meanings projected onto the 'immigrant condition'. Wrapped in languages of deterritorialisation, suffering and sacrifice, this 'condition' is paradoxically a double source of empowerment and alienation. Firstly, the immigrant condition of existence is conceived as a source of alienation because of its marginalisation from the politics of nationality. Secondly, stories of the 1939-45 war years in Britain are about alienation and suffering as sources of collective empowerment. Thirdly, sacrifice emerges as a recurring theme deployed within kinship narratives that guarantee the identity and difference

of the 'Italian factor'. In the texts examined here, these three features are inscribed into the 'immigration condition' which emerges as a new surface of belonging based on a teleology of suffering.

In a first instance, recovering the Italian presence comes out of a particular relationship to the nation and the norms of the nation-state. Running through the accounts cited here — in Marin, Bottignolo, and Cavallaro in particular — lies an image of the 'always-already' foreigner.

The immigrant is in society, but for society, be it Italian or English, he is lost. Migration is not only a passage from one society to another, it is also a journey in which one goes out of a society and the practice of associated life, to find himself living in a situation of liminality. (Bottignolo 1985: 51)

Once outside his own country, the individual, who is no longer recognised as a citizen but is accepted and perceived as a foreigner, finds he is in a state of isolation and "weakness" (idem: 71).

This alienation operates in the ways Italians feel they are "in someone else's home" (quoted in Bottignolo 1985: 53; interestingly, this analogy was also used by Joanna, a British-born Italian woman, in her thirties). In addition, the indifference of Britons towards the plight of Italian immigrants struggling to negotiate a different culture and way of life sustains the sense of invisibility.

An Italian migrant who enters and lives in Great Britain can go unobserved. He is often described as an "invisible immigrant". (idem: 71)

A recurring sense of loss and alienation from both Italy and Britain punctuates the narrations of Italians in Britain. These authors seem uncomfortable with the idea of a serene experience of the diasporic mode of existence. Migration acquires an eschatological meaning that ties the destiny of Italian immigrants to a predetermined fate. For Marin, once the migration process is initiated, it is never ending, and the physical return to the *patria* will not bring it to a halt:

[i]n fact, the problems of emigration become summed up and not subtracted: those who re-enter the fatherland do not cancel the drama of those who will find themselves constrained to leave; and those who re-enter do not conclude their emigrant event, but reproduce in another form their interminable odyssey. (1975: 97)

Migration, in this sense, is equated with endless wandering. It is a state of perpetual homelessness.

Through the migratory act, the Italian immigrant has lost a great deal of his political relevance and has become practically a stateless person. (Bottignolo 1985: 49)

The pathologisation of the immigrant condition and of migration emerges out of the power attributed to the norms of the nation-state. Modern ideas of the nation are typically conceived as bringing diaspora to an end, and they endure, in particular forms, in the project of redemption designed by Marin and Bottignolo.

Bruno Bottignolo finds that the 'national myth' may be a source of empowerment for Italian immigrants.

The national consistency was particularly important when immigrants acted as a group. In these circumstances, as we have seen, Italians were mobilised and gathered above all in the myth of nationality. For the Italian immigrants, only an Italian entity as an ideal point of reference could mobilise their commitment and offer them that "ubi consistam" by which they could escape their impotence

The national myth explains, at least partly, why immigrants tend to load their institutions, which alone would have very specific and limited functions, with meanings. On the other hand, the lack of financial means of these institutions further underlines the important role that the nationality myth has for the immigrants. (Bottignolo 1985: 139)

From an Italian point of view, this national myth breaks down traditional regional boundaries, epitomised by the bell-tower mentality (*campanilismo*). For Bottignolo as well as for Colpi, this is a move forward in the creation of a united and diverse Italian 'Community'.²⁶

Bottignolo resorts to the national myth as a necessary source of stabilisation for Italian immigrants nostalgic "for citizenship of their original mother country" (1985: 30). For the 'forever-foreigners', alienated culturally and structurally from the host society, identified first and foremost as manual labourers — "It is not men who immigrate but machine-minders, sweepers, diggers, cement mixers, cleaners, drillers..." (idem: 76) — the retrieval of their humanity is only possible by returning 'home'; a home born out of the combination of family and nation. "To re-become a man (*husband, father, citizen, patriot*) a migrant has to return home." (ibid.; my emphasis) The politics of identity of Italians abroad and its concomitant family trope and gendered forms of citizenship are examined in the chapter that follows. What is essential for the purpose of the present argument is that the annalists of the 'community' are literally caught up with the norms of the nation-state. A sense of impasse comes out of these authors' attempts to redeem Italian immigrants from their 'condition' when they do so in nationalist terms. If the

²⁶ It is worth noting, however, that Terri Colpi speaks of the North-South division – in contrast to *campanilismo* – as a constitutive force of the 'community', rather than a liability (Colpi 1991a: 178).

national myth is a source of power, it is not enough to bring about the full redemption of Italians in Britain. Are the languages of Italian nationality and symbolic return 'home' viable when 'home' is, for a large part of the British Italian population, in Britain? Both Bottignolo and Marin agree that the redemption of Italians from the state of perpetual nomadism resides in the construction of a political agenda that will allow Italians to 'return home', as it were, in the form of a renewed citizenship. As we will see in the following chapter, this may provide a partial solution to the menace of estrangement from Italy. But problems arise when nation is used as the norm for definitions of identity. When nation and culture come together, identity becomes organically rooted in a given timespace and makes the possibility of multi-local ties unthinkable. Similarly, the construction of local particularity is hindered, or incomplete, if it rests solely on sustaining relations with Italy, a place Italian immigrants come from, but no longer live in. How, then, do Italian writers define the specificity of the British Italian population, over and beyond its relationship to Italy?

Terri Colpi excepted, all the authors discussed here resist the objectification of ethnicity as the primary ground for continuity, solidarity and identity within the Italian immigrant collectivity. As mentioned above, the 'community' stems from common experiences of migration and settlement which have now become the sites of memory of a large part of the Italian population. What do these memories speak of?

Tales supporting a 'diasporic founding text' are usually expressed through a Christian teleology of sacrifice/salvation, founded on stories of exile, loss, suffering, resistance and the anticipation of redemption (Clifford 1994; Cohen 1992; Gilroy 1994a). The recovery of tales of suffering within languages of solidarity adds a new signifying component to the repertoire of symbols constituting imagined communities. In the literature on Italians, such tales are most vividly evoked in memories of the 1939-1945 war years.

On the night of Mussolini's declaration of war on the allies (10 June 1940), anti-Italian riots broke out in different parts of Britain. "Across the country, a night of smashing, burning and looting ensued" (Colpi 1991a: 105).²⁷ In the week following the 10th of June, over 4000 Italian men were arrested and interned as 'enemy aliens'. Among them, 300 were British-born (Colpi 1991a: 113; also Marin 1975: 86).²⁸

²⁷ The extent of the 'riots' were perhaps not as large as this comment suggests. A British journalist went out on the early morning of the 11 June and counted only two or three broken shop windows in Soho (Sponza 1995). However, the damage is said to have been greater in Scotland (Colpi 1991a: 105).

²⁸ A great number of these men were members of the *fascio*, which is not to say they were all necessarily fascist sympathisers. The influence of the *fascio* in London Italian life during Mussolini's rule will be clarified in chapter 3.

The arrest and interment of Italian men has been the object of a mixture of different accounts. Condemned as an injustice resulting from a hasty and unorganised response on the part of the British authorities, this event is also represented as a moment of reconciliation. While deplored and marking a breaking point in the life of the 'old community' — many families lost their business and property and had to re-start after the war — the internment camps are also remembered as unique terrains of encounter between diverse sections of the Italian population.

It was here, for the first time, that all geographical and socio-economic sections of the British Italian Community met: the young, the old, the fascists, the innocuous or non-fascists, the anti-fascists, the upper crust from London, the shopkeepers, the artists, the musicians, those from the north of Italy and those from the south of Italy. It was a most extraordinary gathering. (Colpi 1991a: 113)²⁹

The camps were also, it seems, sites where antagonistic and hostile relationships between English and Italian were absent. Stories of life in the camps are stories of alliances and friendships rather than of division and animosity. Such alliances are further emphasised in accounts of the integration of Italian POWs in English society after the armistice between Italy and the allies (Sponza 1995). Hence, the interment of hundreds of Italian men is remembered as a significant moment of solidarity within the Italian collectivity, as well as between Italians and Britons. One man I interviewed spoke of his time spent in the camps in such terms. He was Alberto Cavalli, an organiser of St Peter's social club. Cavalli was arrested at the age of seventeen, along with his father, and they eventually wound up in a camp on the Isle of Man. He recalled the arrest with no animosity against British authorities: he considered he was the victim of circumstances and that the British had little choice. As for life in the camp, he reminisced how, all in all, it was rather comfortable:

we had everything we wanted: sports grounds, canteen post, swimming, walks, 'pictures' once a week at the local cinema.

Cavalli added that to this day, a small group of former internees meet regularly at St Peter's church to commemorate their time in the camps.

In contrast to these rather fond memories, another event darkens the recollections of the war years. This is the sinking of the *Arandora Star*, a 1500 ton ship that set sail to Canada on 1 July 1940, transporting 1500 men: German POWs,

²⁹ See also Mgr. Gaetano Rossi's memories of his interment (Rossi 1991).

German Jewish refugees, and Italian internees. On 2 July, it was torpedoed and sunk, killing over 700 men, 446 of whom were Italians.

A striking commemoration of the Arandora Star tragedy was displayed in an exhibition by the Scottish Italian photographer, Owen Logan, at London's Photographers Gallery in March 1994. Entitled *Bloodlines - Vite allo Specchio* (or 'mirrored lives'), the exhibition was constructed around a central axis stretching between two significant events, one habitual, one traumatic: the weekly draw of the Neapolitan lottery, and the sinking of the Arandora Star. A large photo of the ship, hanging from the ceiling, is what we first encountered when passing through the exhibition room entrance. It was mounted in a two sided glass frame: on one side, a large photo of the Arandora Star; on the other, the photographs of three survivors. The photo of the lottery draw faced this one, at the opposite end of the room. On either side of this central axis were two parallel life spans, one devoted to the Italian population in Britain, the other, to Italians in Italy. Each facing photograph on each side bore the same number, conveying a mirroring effect; a distorted effect, rather, because the photographs did not relate to similar events. *La lotteria* carried the number zero, while the Arandora was numberless. These pictures and their titles follow the format of *La Smorfia*, a guide to the Italian lottery where all aspects of life are translated into numerical relationships.

The significance of the Arandora Star goes beyond its tragic fate. The image of the ship has a particular significance in migration. As Gilroy points out, it focuses attention on the "middle passage", transition, and initiates the various "projects of redemptive return" to the homeland (1993a: 4). Interestingly, the catalogue prepared for Logan's exhibition begins with photographs of Algerian emigrants at the port of Algiers and on the ferry that goes to Algeciras, in Spain, thus adding an additional layer to the significance of the Arandora Star. The ships are associated with particular events. Unique, traumatic events, the trauma being not only exacerbated in the story of the Arandora Star, but also highlighted by its opposite in the exhibition set up: the lottery.³⁰

³⁰ Yet both events have something in common: chance. Owen Logan explores the links between personal dreams and public events in the lives of emigrants whom he likens to gamblers. Immigrants enter into a relationship with chance, placing a bet on the future; a bet which nevertheless rests on an act of faith. The outcomes are unpredictable and unplanned.

Last century many of the poor emigrants from Italy arrived in Britain on foot, having walked across Europe. The presence of their descendants in this country is the result not of a plan, but of an accord made by the first generation with fate, or its secular double, chance. A better life was envisaged in another place, but the location of these other lives and places could never be certain. Children were born during the search. Britain was one place which for many became the destination. (Logan 1994 in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue).

This pictorial narrative exemplifies the construction of the *Arandora Star* as a highly resonant event for British Italians, marking the life of the British Italian community.

The sinking of the *Arandora Star* was, and still is, the most tragic event in the history of the Italian Community. It also makes the British Italian Community unique in global terms: no other Italian Community in the world has suffered such a blow. (Colpi 1991a: 115)

The tragedy of this ship is the inaugural location for the making of a unique British Italian identity. Through this event, suffering is remembered in all its potency. The death of these men testifies to the experience of alienation, exclusion, discrimination, humiliation of Italians living in Britain during the war years. As such, this event is repeatedly and variously remembered. Plaques, lists of the victims' names, commemorative ceremonies, keep the memory alive.³¹ In this respect, the sinking of the *Arandora Star* may be understood as one version of living memory. The British Italian community is defined by the grief over the lives lost in the *Arandora Star*; its memory is inscribed — on plaques, in books or periodicals — as an embodied memory. In this respect, the metaphor of the body conveys a compelling image of collective suffering.

The tragedy of the *Arandora Star* will remain for many years like a scar, everlastingly painful and bloody, within the living body of the Italian collectivity (Marin 1975: 86-87).

The Italian presence in Britain is wrapped in memories of suffering that displaces migrancy from the margins to the centre and gives substance to the meaning of the 'immigrant condition'. Similarly, sacrifice becomes a recurring image of the plight of Italian immigrants and, by virtue of its iteration, a constitutive force for collective identification.

"Ho fatto tanti sacrifici all'estero" – I have made so many sacrifices abroad – is a key phrase used by the migrants in England. It is employed often and sums up their attitude, both to emigration and to their experiences (i.e. being abroad is conceptually inseparable from hardship, both material and psychological). (Colpi 1991a: 268)

Though construed as a unifying force in the construction of an Italian 'community', sacrifice and suffering work differently for men and women. Stories

³¹ A plaque bearing the names of all the victims has been erected in the portico of St Peter's church in 1960, and an annual commemorative ceremony has been held since that year. Terri Colpi reproduces the list of victims in an appendix to her book (1991a). A series of articles appeared in *Backhill* in 1993, tracing the stories of some victims. Italians in Glasgow also remember the event in a mosaic representing the explosion produced by the torpedo striking the ship. The plaque reads: "We will never forget you" (Colpi 1991b: 145).

of Italian women immigrants stress their emotional suffering, while those of men emphasise their physical or moral plight, as the following excerpts from Terri Colpi illustrate:

[t]he girls, who had come from all over Italy, experienced considerable homesickness and isolation at leaving their family-centred way of life behind. The majority were *contadine* and they found adaptation to the factory environment very hard. Disconcertingly alone, except for each other, in an alien environment, they received little social or welfare help from the Italian or British authorities. Because of the shortage of Italian men at that time, their search for spouses led to much inter-marriage, not with locals, by whom they were positively shunned, but with other ethnic groups [Polish, Yugoslavian, Ukrainian and Latvian]. (idem: 146)

All first-generation migrants in Bedford today claim, when summarising their years abroad, with particular reference to the earlier phase, that they have made nothing but '*sacrifici*'. Early first-generation male migrants, single and perhaps especially married, made the most sacrifices... To be in this completely alien environment carrying out heavy industrial labour in adverse climatic conditions, without even the food that they were accustomed to, was for many an intolerable level of *sacrifici*... A further element of *sacrifici* related to the obligation of the migrant to provide financial support for his wife, children, and often parents at home in Italy... The women at home too made *sacrifici* since, apart from the struggle to survive, they were bereft, often for many years, of their men folk. (idem: 154)

Once again, women are presented as passive subjects, victimised and lonely for being separated from their family and for having no husband. Men, for their part, appear as active agents, who suffer no less, but whose suffering is converted into action and obligations towards their families. Women remember "their men", while men work for their families. In Colpi's account, the community is once again gendered, this time through narratives of sacrifice. Furthermore, the 'immigrant condition' of existence of the community is epitomised in the experience of women.

First-generation women of the southern Italian communities are the least contented perhaps of all the Italians in Britain today. *They are the living embodiment of the difficulty and sadness of emigration.* (idem: 218; my emphasis)

The contribution of women to community via their sacrifice and suffering is a common feature of nationalist forms of memory (Gillis 1994: 12). Furthermore,

Colpi's female representation of community mimics the portrayal of nations as women. This will be considered again in the chapter that follows. The point I wish to raise at this stage is the relationship between gender and family. Indeed, in what we have seen so far, relationships between men and women are systematically located within the family. That is to say that the subjectivity of men and women (especially women) is constructed from their relations with their husbands (or wives), children and family. What I want to investigate are the different layers of meaning invested in the family and its relation to migration, locality and authenticity. What kind of family is being constructed? What does the centrality of the family mean in the Italian diaspora?

Family in migration: a post-national essentialism?

Examining the circulation of 'sacrifice' in discourses of Italian immigrant identity reveals that it is deployed in a patriarchal, family-based system of relations. Renato Cavallaro's account of immigrant life stories is illuminating in this respect.

Cavallaro associates sacrifice with labour on the factory shop floor. The daily drama of hard labour imposed by the immigrant 'condition' makes sense inasmuch as it is the means of accumulating goods and income. This drama is not only retold in the Calabrese immigrants' life stories, it is ultimately re-enacted in the grand wedding feasts parents organise for their children.

The economic 'sacrifice' the wedding reception requires, periodically legitimates the working-time as a time of acquisition of the money to 're-accumulate' in the future. The sacrifice furthermore unites the members of the group by symbolically reproducing the concrete drama of a daily-life conquered by labour. (Cavallaro 1981: 84)

Sacrifice is bequeathed to future generations as the outstanding symbol of the immigrant condition of existence. In one wedding reception, in the summer of 1992, a guest paid tribute to the newlyweds in the following words:

Cavaliere Gino Biasi expressed his congratulations and best wishes to the young couple as well as to all young persons present, so that they appreciate and follow the example and the sacrifices of their parents, who do all that is in their power to support their children throughout their lives and to accompany them to the altar on their wedding day.³²

The world of the Italian *emigrato* is a world normalised by a system where sacrifice guarantees redemption, embodied in the future generations. This teleology

³² *La Voce degli Italiani*, #869, July 1992: 10.

charges parents with the responsibility of transmitting this founding value of the *emigrate* condition to their offspring. A teleology that imputes the children, in turn, with a responsibility towards their parents, as well as towards the community and Italy. Sacrifice, in short, constitutes a binding element between the generations within family groups, who develop an essential "centripetal reciprocity", the pivotal point of which is the father figure. As Renato Cavallaro puts it,

Within the Calabrese collectivity, the family develops a centripetal reciprocity that stems from the family head and that results from the daily imperatives founded upon 'sacrifices'. If emigration is the projection of an existence destined to sacrifice, then sacrifice must be assumed, by future generations, as a necessary condition for group cohesion... And sacrifice is not without an author. The father, in fact, reproduces the order-obedience relationship that lies at the basis – along with the father's own availability 'to sacrifice' – of the stability of the hierarchy of authority. (1981: 112)

Stories of immigration, wrapped in tales of sacrifice and relocated in the distinctly patriarchal family setting, move away from the present and look towards the future where sacrifice will deliver its cohesive and redemptive effects. The family signifies duration, expressed in generational terms. In Cavallaro's account, it is the ultimate symbol of solidarity: "[t]he family is, in fact, the totalising experience of the solidarity system." (idem: 112) It stands for the collectivity, represents a microcosm of the broader systems of social relations. As Terri Colpi puts it, "[a]lthough individualism is the mark of Italianism, the family is at the very core of the Community" (Colpi 1991a: 191). Moreover, this microcosm stipulates the dominating position of the father, portrayed as the core activator of the centripetal system of authority and solidarity. The embedment of family and gender should alert us to the way community is gendered when it is spoken of in family terms. The contrasting ways in which women and men are portrayed in the histories of Italian immigration to Britain buttress a masculinised definition of mobility and emigration, and a feminised version of settlement. Though the 'immigrant condition' (rather than ethnicity) configures the grounds of collective identification, its reproductive moment is located within gendered differences and a system of generational responsibility which summon family-based representations of the 'community'.

A distinction must be made, however, between defining the community as *based* on the family, and symbolically representing the Italian community *as* a family. The picture produced in stories of Italian immigration to Britain, is one of a community of families, whose continuity relies heavily on the preservation of family norms and values. Italian immigrants are commonly represented as "more

family conscious than the population at large" (Colpi 1991a: 191). Italian families and kinship systems are characterised by a high degree of formalism about the obligations and social control between kin (Garigue and Firth 1954; Colpi 1991a: 194; Sponza 1988: 236-237). For Bruno Bottignolo, the Italian family ethic is highly individualistic and even asocial, yet worthy of admiration (1985: 65). For Cavallaro, there is no mediating space between the collectivity and the family: in other words, there is no 'institutional life' outside of family-based systems of relation because the construction of daily existence is solicited by values that are deeply rooted in this "in-group" (1981: 119). In short, he argues that the family microcosm hinders the development of institutional structures (idem: 115). In this respect, Renato Cavallaro reconstructs the 'primary' family group and the home as the ultimate familiar place for the Calabrese immigrants of Bedford. The family, according to Cavallaro, acts as a "body buffer zone" that rigidly separates one's primary group from the outside, alien world associated to the factory (1981: 102). The family is signified as the space of 'being' for the immigrants as well as for the 'second generation', whereas the 'outside' world is one of not being, of alienness. In other words, the home and the family provide spaces where one positively defines her or his identity ('I am...'), while the factory, which embodies the outside world, is a space where one defines his or herself by the negative ('I am not...' or 'I am less than...'). Bruno Bottignolo goes along with this understanding of the Italian family.

But one can talk of a family ethic in the sense too that the family is basically the only ambit and the maximum social extension of the Italian immigrant's ethical system. The Italian immigrant cares, almost exclusively, only for his own family; others' family he does not care much about, if at all. Society around him is, for the married person as it is for the single person, by itself a no-man's land, not worthy of much respect. In it one controls oneself mainly because a libertine behaviour could have disastrous effects in the family ambit. (1985: 64)

Throughout these narratives, the family is reified as the principal binding element, the central pole of aggregation and identification for individuals. All other forms of personal relationships are measured against the family gauge. Family spells out norms of social relations and determines their acceptability and strength. Friendships, for example, unless formalised and consolidated under the *comparaggio* system of honorary family member, are not considered as 'strong' as family ties (Cavallaro 1981: 112).

The repeated emphasis on the Italian family ethic crystallises the family as the cradle of a fundamentally Italian way of life and of fundamentally Italian values.

Such conceptions manifest themselves in representations of Italian families as a protective space against adversities, such as assimilation (Garigue & Firth: 92-93) or the labour market (Sponza: 65-66) — Cavallaro's "body buffer zone". The location of culture within the family is further encoded in the equation between formalised, extended family structures and non-industrial, individualistic way of life. Cavallaro suggests that the family and the home are spaces that allow the re-enactment of rural, cyclical time in contrast to the urban, industrial time of the factory. By doing so, he follows the legacy of anthropological reconstructions of 'ethnic' groups, the modern version of 'tribal' societies, which Guarigue and Firth (1956) have produced in their own study of 'Italianate' (sic) kinship systems. In Firth's view, the formalised and extended kinship systems he and his colleague observed among Italian immigrants in London are typical of peasant cultures, while the 'looser', nuclear system found within an English community are characteristic of Western societies (Firth 1956: 13-15). Hence, the link between formalised, extended kinship system and 'peasant culture' are brought together in the invention of 'traditional' lifestyles which are cast in opposition to 'modern' ways of life. This, indeed, is how culturalist discourses of ethnicity work. An ideal, pastoral family is set to carry the burden of reproducing ethnicity, which is viewed as a less 'developed' version of the modern nation.

But I believe that there is more to the Italian family trope than merely a symbolic location for reproducing ethnicity. An alternative analysis of the extended family system is needed if we are to equally consider routes and roots. We could make more, for instance, of an observation of Guarigue and Firth, according to which

[o]ne of the main characteristics of the kinship universe of the Italianates is its geographical dispersal. Each kinship group not only links persons residing in a number of countries, but also persons living in a number of localities in each country. (1956: 88)

Transnational kinship ties characterise all diasporas, often tracing paths of belonging and displacement that span a number of different countries. In the texts on Italian immigrants in Britain, having a family in Italy sustains the sense of belonging to Italy, but a belonging lived through distance, nostalgia and memories.

Apart from their families at home in Italy, the migrants had no real sense of belonging to the country of their origins – a country which they loved very much...It must be remembered that, in any case, the hope of many Italians was still to return to Italy one day and for these people the notion of assimilation seemed absurd. There was ever present a *nostalgia*. Perhaps mythological by this time, but no less relevant and applicable,

people cherished memories of Italy. (Colpi 1991a: 86)

Colpi's inference, here, is that as time passes on, links with the land of origins take on the form of living memory that only family relations can render palpable, 'real'. Families, in emigration, are vectors of movement and displacement: people write, phone, travel or migrate between Italy and England to contact, visit or join their families. So there is this inherent paradox within the family figure: it signifies settlement, stability, continuity, on the one hand, and multi-local ties and displacement on the other. The emphasis Colpi and others place on formal kinship systems serves to stabilise this constant movement and to quell nationalist concerns about the multi-local ties of these immigrants and their descendants. Indeed, many of the recent debates over immigration in many over-developed countries, focus on the suspect loyalties of immigrants to their 'host country'. In contemporary Britain, the allegiance of immigrants from the Asian sub-continent, the Caribbean or Africa is deemed questionable, for if these 'aliens' have a different 'national character', their loyalty is not conceivably oriented towards Britain, and they become a threat. Moreover, many of these people "bring with them anti-British attitudes"³³ which they reproduce and transmit to their children. If the debate centres on black immigrants, thus racialising the issues and further systematising populist racist views, ethnic absolutism is also deployed within discursive formations about national culture and coherence (see chapter 3). These, in turn, spell out norms of collective and individual selfhood that interpellate the population at large, while underpinning the association between 'blacks' and 'immigrants'. With this in mind, Colpi and Bottignolo's insistence on the formalised kinship system of Italians may be seen as a response to such national concerns. The 'problem' of the multi-local ties of Italians is solved by confining their expression within a system of kinship and family obligations. The emphasis is placed on loyalty to the family rather than loyalty to Italy. The Italian presence is thus presented as distinct from, but not incompatible with, British definitions of national identity that deploy familyist definitions of social cohesion and responsibility.

Commitment to the family is essential to social cohesion, it is regularly said, for the family is seen as the transmitter and regenerator of traditions, it is the source of order and the sense of responsibility, it is the focus of loyalties below the nation; and all these are 'natural' and the embodiment of Toryism's primary values. (Barker 1981: 44)

³³ A. Sherman 'Britain is not Asia's fiancée', *Daily Telegraph*, November 1979. Quoted in Lawrence 1982a: 85. Also Casey 1982; Anderson 1995.

Yet families in migration also acquire a distinctly post-national potency. The family becomes the beacon of emigrant struggles against nationalist, anti-immigration policies. The annual National Day of Migration organised by Catholic Church in Italy, was devoted to the family in 1994.³⁴ On this occasion, the issue of family re-unification was raised in a critique of European countries for their failure to truly address and facilitate the greater mobility of human beings. As a Scalabriniano father argued, 'Fortress Europe' means not only the hardening of continental borders, but also of national ones.

Families in migration face the increasingly rigid closure of governments and nations that raise insurmountable walls against what they label as invaders.³⁵

Families in diaspora push against national borders. However, the family discourse of Italian emigrant intellectuals does not suggest as radical a challenge as the one projected by Paul Gilroy — that is, the potential of diaspora to instantiate an anti-essentialist, chaotic model of kinship that valorises plurality and regionality rather than the "protracted condition of social mourning over ruptures of... forced separation" (1994a: 210-211). Kinship, here, remains emphatically based on the nuclear family and deeply tied to images of traumatic uprooting. Moreover, the family is universalised, naturalised and reified as an emblem of belonging for people who feel lost in a new country. As such, the painful family separations caused by migration is deemed unjust, unfair, unnatural. This is well illustrated in an issue of *La Voce degli Italiani*, which paid tribute to the family in the following words:

The family is not a cold institution, nor is it a mode of being that the postmodern man has now surpassed. It is, rather, the will to humanity and fraternity. If our times are characterised by the experience of the void, around as well as within ourselves, after the void comes nostalgia. And nostalgia is always the nostalgia for someone, nostalgia for a love, nostalgia for God... And if today the family finds many enemies and many desecrations in the name of modernity, we must remember that man remains a being with roots and that in order to survive, he needs soil or humus where he may plant his roots. It is necessary to overcome the stage of fear of meeting others, the fear of establishing alliances, the fear of

³⁴ The title of the meeting was: "Migrations: family, first 'educative' community" (*Migrazioni: famiglia, prima comunità educante*). Past meetings also had the family as their theme: 1969, "Man has the right to the guardianship of the family, wherever he goes"; 1980, "Family and Community"; 1987, "Family, the soul of migrations". See *La Voce degli Italiani*, #921, November 1994: 12. The right to family re-unification is also a recurring concern for *Migrantes*, the Italian Catholic organisation devoted to migration issues world wide.

³⁵ *ibid.*

consolidating real and deep relationships with others. Otherwise we will remain alone and our horizon, rather than opening itself to hope, will be enclosed within an insurmountable wall.³⁶

The family is the 'sanctuary of life', in the words of the Pope, the vital cell of our social system, adds Padre Giandomenico Ziliotto.³⁷ The family is represented as simultaneously the basic unit of society and a universal need for the fulfilment of individual lives. It is the bedrock of universal values such as the need for others. This presupposes that human beings are not only beings with roots, but social beings: they need each other to avoid nostalgia. Nostalgia, for its part, is conceived as a founding moment born from the void, from the lack of relations, from the absent Other. Here, nostalgia is not a yearning for a period of the past, but, rather, a yearning for the Other.

And the family inserts itself within this founding nostalgia: it is the overbearing result of humanity's need, of the need for company... the need to recover the proximity of the Others... the only possibility to defend our freedom, our persons (*le nostre persone*)...³⁸

In this article, nostalgia appears not as a lack, but, rather, a resource. Padre Giandomenico speaks of the void in a very Foucauldian manner: he speaks of it as empowering, insofar as it constitutes the conditions of possibility for nostalgia and the ensuing recovery of fundamental human needs. The void constitutes a particular terrain of possibility. The question is, then, what are the terms of this new possibility?

The father's tribute to the family is precisely aimed at offering a salutary answer to the 'postmodern condition'. While he turns the void into a space for creativity, he offers the family as the answer to what he identifies as humanity's fundamental quest to root itself. Padre Giandomenico clearly appeals to the family as a universal response to universal needs. In the texts above, the family is not ethnically, racially, sexually, historically, class or religiously specific. It appears as the natural, timeless response to human yearnings. It is expelled from historical time, conceived as a natural unit rather than as a historical construct. It circumscribes a realm in which we are interpellated by appeals to the natural; our 'natural' needs for the other, our 'natural' needs to 'root' ourselves. Furthermore,

³⁶ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #912, June 1994: 2. Entitled "La famiglia al centro", this article reported the annual pilgrimage to the monastery of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Aylesford, which was, that year, dedicated to the family.

³⁷ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #921, November 1994: 12. In this article, the family is described in words very similar to the article quoted previously. This article is signed by Padre Giandomenico Ziliotto, based in Brixton and current director of *La Voce*, while the preceding piece was not signed. Padre Giandomenico is presumably the author of both.

³⁸ *ibid.*

the very image of roots, soil and humus carries biological undertones and sketches images of the heterosexual couple as a fertile ground for human emancipation. In short, by virtue of its naturalisation, the family, rather than the nation, symbolically offers the comforts of 'home' in the incessant flux of the postmodern, post-national world.

Interestingly, the Scalabriniani discourse of the family turns the value of emigration inside out. From being a valuable political and social asset — as we shall see in the next chapter — emigration appears, when located within the family, as a liability. The very poignant emotions tied to being away from one's family notwithstanding, my point here is that the difficulties of migration are signified in familial terms: family signifies emigration in a very specific way. Emigration, for families, means unnatural separations and suffering, and unfair isolation from the surrounding social life. By reifying the emigrant family as emblematic of the migration experience, the different conditions of emigration are obscured and collapsed into a homogenising fold. Discourses of emigration as a 'crisis' give a particular impetus for the recovery of the family image as a harmonious unit. Apart from obscuring the variety of experiences of migration, this rhetoric obliterates the variety of familial experiences by presenting it as a necessarily harmonious unit of self-support and emancipation. That some families are perhaps better off separated, for example, is unheard of. The patriarchal family is a hegemonic metaphor for intimacy, for an ethics of love, for solidarity and social responsibility.

In short, family in emigration acquires a particular status that combines ideas of settlement and displacement, stability and disruption. Family and emigration are in tension, each challenging the virtues of the other. The virtues of emigration, presented in London Italian politics of recognition, are revealed in the following chapter. Here, we have seen that emigration menaces and enforces the idealised unity of the family. Simultaneously, transnational family ties spin new webs of belonging that are multilocal, plural and as such, supra-national.

Concluding remarks

The literature on Italians in Britain sketches an indeterminate portrait of a collectivity whose common ground is defined not in terms of a primary ethnicity, but, rather, in terms of the shared experiences of migration. It is presented as the historical outcome of a tradition of migration, and of the living memories of settlement, suffering and sacrifice. The 'community' is not objectified by the authors discussed above (except for Terri Colpi). It appears, rather, as a communal project yet to be named. Community, here, is nothing but imagined, political and contingent.

But it is imagined in terms that objectify particular values as foundational and guarantors of continuity. In this respect, we may understand the appeal to the family as a response to the destabilising flux of migration and 'diasporisation'. As such, it is portrayed as a safe haven in the prolonged social moaning of the forever-foreigner condition of immigration. The symbolic construction of the Italian 'community' is projected onto an image of the ideal, patriarchal, pastoral family. To paraphrase Paul Gilroy, the patriarchal family is the preferred institution capable of reproducing the traditional roles, cultures and sensibilities that can solve the indeterminacy of the Italian collectivity (1993a: 194). Italian culture, confined within households where it is cajoled and preserved, is positioned at the centre of the narratives and of the immigrants' outlook on life in Britain. Consequently, the reification of the Italian family inverts the relation between self and other by construing as 'other', all that does not conform to its norms of interaction. The primacy of the family trope thus has the dual effect of turning the Italian collectivity inwards, onto itself, and to inscribe its foreignness. As such, the family trope rests on the very boundary between self and other.

The centrality of family-based narratives of the collective self is perhaps symptomatic of a neo-nationalist historicity, where the nation is no longer the site and frame of memory for the Italian immigrant population (see Gillis 1994: 17). Tied to the excavation of family values, however, is a masculinist conception of community that subordinates women and children, while it establishes an inter-generational system of responsibility and continuity. Throughout the 'periods' of these histories from the foundations, through settlement to the 'immigrant condition', the process of identity formation is stabilised and its duration guaranteed through principles of gendered and generational differentiation. In short, the family provides a vocabulary to speak of cultural identity and local particularism in terms of nurturance, fixed gender roles and generational responsibility. The primacy of the ideal heterosexual couple in representing the authentic Italian way of life is also taken to be expressive of essential difference.

Moving away from these histories, however, we need to examine how such discourses manifest themselves in the institutions whose mandate it is to (re)produce an Italian community. How pervasive are such views? Is the 'immigration condition' still at the centre of a protracted sense of alienation and foreignness? Is the family the only inoculation against assimilation? Is gender the modality in which cultural specificity is lived? How, in other words, is the new Italian identity defined within London Italian institutions? In the next chapter, I will reveal how some London Italian leaders see the family as a necessary but insufficient condition to protect the 'community' from assimilation. Moving away from the 'immigrant condition' to the less static symbol of 'emigration', they

propose new grounds of identification that proceed from a return to the Italian nation, with a difference.

Chapter 3

The politics of 'Italians abroad': nation, diaspora and new geographies of identity

In diaspora, questions of identity have led intellectuals back to the nation.

María de los Angeles Torres

Italians never die, they just *pasta* way

Printed on a t-shirt

Since the American civil rights movements, languages of civil society have been the most prominent way in which claims of peoplehood and self-determination have been grounded in appeals for social integration by ethnic and cultural minorities (Calhoun 1994b: 308). In more recent years, such political demands have been based on concerns for cultural integrity and preservation. As pointed out earlier, the political projects of minorities have moved from seeking recognition in national institutions to resisting assimilation by emphasising difference, rather than identity. In the case of immigrant populations, resistance to assimilation is partly resolved by a return to the national 'homeland' (Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1991; de los Angeles Torres 1995; Jacobson 1995).

In this chapter, I examine how the creation of an Italian emigrant identity relies on some form of 'return to the nation'. 'Nation', here, is conceived as a discourse that informs Italian emigrants in their struggle to escape assimilation. This discourse is characterised by narratives of origin and destiny that represent national culture as primordial, timeless and grounded in a mythic origin (Hall 1992: 292-295). The national myth encloses and fixes identities by establishing a congruence between culture and geography which grounds origins within a bounded timespace. Discourses of nation naturalise individuals' allegiance and identification, making it something that is 'second nature' (Casey 1982).¹ Consequently, migration complicates the national ideal of culture and identity. By dwelling in a place where

¹ The idea of national allegiance as 'second nature' was argued in a controversial article published in the July 1995 issue of the *Wisden Cricket Monthly*. The free lancing reporter, Robert Anderson, tried to explain the weak performance of the British cricket team by the fact that some of its players are 'foreign born' – i.e. either immigrants from the Caribbean or the Indian sub-continent, or children of such immigrants. These players, he argues, could not have that 'extra pull' for England that 'unequivocal Englishmen' instinctively have. See R. Anderson 1995. This discourse is central in the rhetoric of contemporary new racism in Britain, where the emphasis on cultural identification as natural "allows nation and 'race' to fuse" (Gilroy 1993b: 27).

they do not 'come from', migrants potentially disrupt the 'natural' order of things in both their nation of origin and of settlement (Gray 1996; Clifford 1994).

This chapter looks at how the politics of identity of Italian emigrant leaders in London "are caught up with and defined against...the norms of nation-state" (Clifford 1994: 307). This is about the power of the national myth in securing a consistent and coherent referent of identification (Bottignolo 1985: 139), on the one hand, and of migration as a new timespace of identification, on the other. The latter is what Appadurai calls *ethnoscape*: "the world constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (1990: 296-297). In short, this chapter enquires into the Italian emigrant leaders' attempt to resolve the 'dialectics of diasporic identification' (Gilroy 1991) in their political demands for identity preservation and self-determination.

These politics of identity emerge from a position of 'in-betweenness', where the relations between 'here' and 'there' need to be negotiated and redefined. In this respect, the 'invisibility' of the Italian presence is something that is both praised and a source of concern. It is praised insofar as it signals the discreteness of the Italian presence, who ploughed through the rough times of early settlement "without making a din".² Indeed, the relationship with different regions of Britain is being consolidated as the years go by and the generations follow each other. In turn, this integration is a source of concern insofar as one of the consequences of invisibility may be cultural assimilation. The central political issue, then, is the preservation of an Italian identity, which emigrant leaders propose to rescue by consolidating political and cultural links with Italy. It follows that Italian politicians (not the British) are challenged for their lack of political will to protect Italian emigrants from assimilating in British (or any other) culture. What emigrant leaders of London want is to enter the public debate, in Italy, about the nature of their relationship with the Italian state.³ But the issue of securing institutional ties with Italy goes hand in hand with the affirmation of local particularism. The politics of Italian emigrant identity are about achieving greater control over the decisions shaping Italian emigrants' lives

² *La Voce degli Italiani*, #898, November 1993: 1.

³ The state, here, refers to the institutional system comprising the legislature, executive, central and regional administration, judiciary, police and armed forces. I regard it as a partly independent force which may be influenced by different interests, represented in a variety of social movements. I distinguish it from the government, that is, the body of persons governing the state at any given time. In Italy, the government is elected by a combination of proportional representation and majority vote (since 1994). Voters elect members of the chamber of deputies (lower house) and the senate (upper house). The voting age is 18 for the chamber, and 25 for the senate.

and destinies. This was summarised by Lorenzo Losi, a leading figure in the London Italian political life, in a speech he gave in 1993:

[o]ne demand is obvious and has become explosive in the last years: that of [Italians abroad] being craftsmen of their own future, that of determinedly contributing to decisions regarding the community itself, that of being constantly interpellated through the representatives legally elected, on the decisions which directly concerns each and everyone's daily life: consular services, the school, information, etc... The separation between those who decide and those subjected to the decisions seems to obvious.⁴

How do London leaders propose to achieve this? How do they represent their claims? What are the fields that are deemed in need of some form of political intervention?

London Italian political demands are expressed in a language of citizenship that includes political, linguistic and generational concerns. In the next pages, I probe the set of principles supporting these claims. I will analyse how the experience of emigration (or a diasporic mode of existence resulting from emigration) and the promise of Italian national allegiance, are stitched together by a complex definition of culture. In other words, the focus here is on the creation of cultural meanings in the political expression of identity. I look at how these demands *create* a particular 'community' and scrutinise its organising principles. It is often assumed that politics of identity based on ideas of cultural integrity and preservation emerge out of a fully formed culture.⁵ It is precisely this presumption, as it lies at the basis of the 'Italians abroad' political identity, that I propose to unpack. In short, I examine the politics of identity as a constitutive feature of cultural identity, rather than speaking of a pre-existing collective culture. Similarly, I will look at the subjects created in the politics of identity, for, as Craig Calhoun rightly points out, conceptualisations of the public sphere often assume that it is provided with "fully formed subjects with settled identities and capacities" (Calhoun 1994a: 23; see also Butler 1992: 13 and Taylor 1994: 59).

My principle source of information is *La Voce degli Italiani*. This newspaper is the main public platform where a discussion on the relationship between Italy and

⁴ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #898, November 1993: 1.

⁵ The sophisticated debates among some political theorists over 'the rights of minority cultures' tend to start from this premise and to overlook the kind of culture that is spoken of and created by the cultural claims of minorities. My concern is for identity formation itself, rather than the moral and political implications of minority rights. See Taylor 1994; Kymlicka 1989, 1992 and 1995a and 1995b, Kukathas 1992.

Italian emigrants in Britain takes place.⁶ The voices we will hear are those of Scalabriniani Fathers and ‘community leaders’ (elected and non elected) who join forces to struggle for official recognition within Italian state apparatuses. By choosing to focus on the emigrant newspaper’s politics, my account does not provide an exhaustive picture of the arguments, policies, institutions, programmes, budgets and agendas involved in the project of identity formation and preservation — in short, the logistics and mechanics of identity politics. Taking my cue from Benedict Anderson’s argument about the role of newspapers in representing ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson [1983] 1991), I focus on the kind of ‘community’ spoken of in the politics of this newspaper, which is the most widely read Italian immigrant newspaper in Britain.

The chapter is divided in five parts. First, I sketch a brief overview of Italian politics of emigration to set the historical backdrop against which contemporary debates take place. This section provides a short journey into the different positions on emigration adopted by Italian governments and political parties over the last century. When I began my study, it occurred to me that contemporary Italian politics of emigrant identity, both in Italy and abroad, echoed ideas first expressed by Benito Mussolini. Hence this overview will allow me to assess the specificity of, as well as the present ambiguities and influences contained in, contemporary Italian political discourses on emigration. In sum, I suggest that the nationalist project running through past and present discourses varies only in terms of degree rather than of any fundamental principle. Finally, this first section also outlines the contextual changes surrounding Italian emigration, and the influence of the New European discourse of citizenship on the Italian state’s relationship with emigrants.

The next three sections are organised around three types of concerns included in the Italian emigrant politics of identity: political (voting rights), linguistic (language tuition) and generational (‘young Italians’).

First, the central political issue for London Italian leaders is about securing new voting rights for Italians abroad. This section focuses on the debate that occurred in *La Voce* during the year of 1993, with a few references taken from subsequent issues. During that year, new legislation was proposed to provide for new voting rights for Italian emigrants. The bill was rejected by the Italian Senate in 1993 (see appendix 4). It is the debate that took place in 1993 that I scrutinise in section two.

⁶ It was mentioned earlier that St Peter’s has an overtly a-political approach to community identity. Although it fosters a minimal interest in Italian politics if only by the monthly update on the latest news, the leaders of St Peter’s, and the editors of *Backhill*, keep a low profile on issues regarding the immigrant rights and their civic ties to Italy.

Here, a political identity congeals in the creation of a constituency of 'Italians abroad' which would benefit from new voting rights that include political representation. Hence Italian emigrants present themselves as Italian citizens living abroad who should have equal access to this fundamental civil right. I will argue that the politics of an Italian emigrant identity reverse Italian government discourses on emigration, while it simultaneously conforms to, and resists, the ongoing project of Italian unification.

The second cluster of concerns revolves around the preservation of a particular cultural heritage, the emblem of which is the Italian language. The topic examined in the third section is the Consulate-run Italian language classes. Italian emigrant leaders are highly supportive of these classes, perceived as a necessary space for the transmission of Italian culture. However, their relationship with nationality is complicated in their struggle for more autonomy over the running of these classes. In this section, I examine how local particularities are substantiated in these debates. I argue that Italian politics of identity support claims for both national and particularist projects of community formation, with the latter being regulated through the family trope. Finally, I suggest that the importance of these classes for Italian leaders is not only linked to the transmission of linguistic proficiency and cultural heritage, but to the standardisation of an Italian national language spoken and written beyond Italian borders.

Thirdly, issues of continuity and social change are drawn from concerns expressed in terms of generations. These issues overlap with the cultural ones, insofar as both concern the future of 'younger generations'. The latter, however, are spoken of in terms that make them the subjects of collective responsibility: a 'community affair'. In turn, the 'generation question' relocates issues of political representation and cultural continuity within a system of generational responsibility. In this fourth section, I will pay particular attention to the definition of new cultural politics configured around 'young Italians'. I examine how the idea of 'generations' is simultaneously a source of, and a solution to, the 'problem' of continuity raised by present leaders of Italians living in London.

Claims for political recognition of Italian emigrants thus converge in creating a political, linguistic, multi-generational 'community' of Italian emigrants. The question arising at this point is who is this community made of? What kind of community members are created in the claims for, and instantiation of, closer links with Italy?

In the fifth part of this chapter, I look at ceremonies and remembrances honouring citizens for their contribution to ‘their’ country, Italy. These ceremonies are particular instances where continued ties with the Italian state are affirmed. Moreover, they constitute instances of direct intervention in British Italian life by the Italian state, as well as one of the only spaces where Italian emigrants and Italian officialdom meet. In these spaces, a particular Italian subject is created. Moving away from the amorphous *émigré* emerging from the ‘Italians abroad’ discourse, we enter a realm of practices that produce — and commend— particular kinds of Italian citizens. I show that citizenship is articulated around concepts of hard-work, duty and honour that are bound to class and gender systems of differentiation.

In short, this chapter is about the politicisation of emigration by London Italians who struggle for the formalisation and institutionalisation of political ties with Italy, while simultaneously claiming greater authority and autonomy over the definition of the status and lives of emigrants. To be sure, the question about the relations between Italy and its diaspora is not specific to the present day emigrant political class, nor is it absent from Italian government concerns. The politicisation of emigration has been a recurring theme of discussion, in Italy, since the turn of the century. This is the topic of the next section.

Italian politics of emigration: a brief overview

Italian people's relationship to national identity is complicated by a history of emigration. There are approximately 4.5 million Italian emigrants living outside Italy⁷, and an estimated 25 million emigrated between 1876 and 1965 (Vasta 1993). When descendants of emigrants are included in the surveys, estimates reach up to 65 million people of ‘Italian origins’ living around the world.⁸ Emigration is a household word in Italy, where almost everybody has a friend, acquaintance or relative who has settled abroad.

As stated previously, emigration from Italy reached important proportions in the years following the Unification and leading up to the first decade of this century. Yet little consideration for the fate of emigrants was given by Italian governments of the time. At best, emigration was perceived as ‘safety-valve against class hatred’ and opposition (Clark 1984: 166), and was welcomed for its significant contribution to the national economy, with remittances amounting to over 300 million lire a year in the late 1890s (idem: 122).

⁷ *La Voce degli Italiani*, # 940, October 1995: 1-2.

⁸ *La Voce degli Italiani*, # 938, September 1995: 1.

The Socialist Party of the time expressed some concern over emigration, under the impetus of Edmondo de Amicis who published a novel, *Sull'oceano*, in 1889 about the voyage of Italian emigrants on a steamer from Genoa to Buenos Aires (de Amicis [1889] 1898). This characterised what has been labelled the second generation of the post-unification left, when socialism met nationalism on the terrain of emigration; that is, when the class struggle moved beyond Italian borders and became an international struggle between 'rich' and 'poor' nations (Romano 1977: 102).

In 1901, a General Commission for Emigration was set up to supervise the speculators and transportation agencies "who were running a virtual slave trade in human flesh" (Mack Smith 1959: 242; also Clark 1984: 166). Other than this, however, the government's policy was normally one of *laissez-faire*.

It was under Benito Mussolini's leadership that the politicisation of emigration was systematised and institutionalised. Mussolini replaced the term *emigrante* with *Italiano all'estero* (Italian abroad; Mack Smith 1959: 242), and Italian emigrants' passports were stamped *lavoratore italiano all'estero* (Italian worker abroad; Colpi 1991a: 87). Christening emigrants 'Ambassadors of Italy', Mussolini's doctrine was that

these *émigrés* did not reflect the poverty of his country, but rather the superabundant energy of a young people with a mission to civilize the world. (Mack Smith 1959: 242; italics original)

Mussolini appealed to Italians living abroad by charging them with this precious mission, and thus included them into the Italian national fold. This was part and parcel of his expansionist ideals of international fascism.

He spoke openly of his mission to extend fascism 'everywhere' and his propagandists began to talk about sweeping away 'Protestant civilization' of Northern Europe. By April 1925, it was estimated that fascist parties existed in forty different countries, and a consignment of black shirts was sent as far away as Hyderabad. (Mack Smith 1983: 108)

Under the Duce's rule, the role of Italian Embassies and Consulates increased, and social clubs, the *fasci*, were founded. The first *fascio* outside Italy was established in London in 1921 (Cliff 1995; Marin 1975: 80), followed in 1922 by the Glasgow *fascio*, also known as *Casa d'Italia* (Colpi 1991a: 92).

Today, the past attention given to Italians abroad by the Italian government is remembered as a form of social redemption for 'communities' of emigrants. For a great number, fascism was about patriotism and anti-communism (Cavalli 1973: 58 &

66). For another section of the population, joining the fascist trade union was compulsory (Cliff 1995), while others joined the local *fascio* to take advantage of the social and cultural activities it organised for its members and their families. The London *fascio*, for example, sponsored a range of activities, from language classes to summer holidays in Italy for Italian children. Its premises were also used as a meeting place for existing associations, the *dopolavoro* (the after-work club) and a school for young musicians. (Colpi 1991a: 92) In short, for a number of London Italians today, the *fasci* are remembered as testimonies of the Italian state's presence in emigrant communities, and for reviving in them a 'sense of dignity', a sense of national pride (Marin 1975: 80).

Terri Colpi argues that Italians immigrants were not aware of the extent of Mussolini's politics, nor were they fully aware of the events unfolding in Europe (1991a: 88). Such a view was also expressed by men I interviewed in the course of my research, who were living in London at the time. This is not to say, however, that all Italian emigrants were oblivious to Mussolini's politics. Moreover, the representation of Italian emigrant community as 'innocent' can be problematic insofar as it creates a unified image that obscures internal political diversity, while denying the legacy of the political past in the constitution of contemporary political and national life.⁹

After the downfall of Mussolini, Italy went through social transformations common to most western countries of the post-1945 era: mass consumption, the development of mass media, changes in social attitudes, etc. At the political level, the democratisation of Italian politics which rehabilitated party opposition, was established on the grounds of a common pursuit: the consolidation of a national culture and of an integrative state. Throughout those years, relations between the Italian state and Italian emigrants loosened. Local *fasci* were closed down, and the institutional structure was re-organised, usually under the initiative of newly arrived Italian emigrants. Locally based organisations flourished — as mentioned in the

⁹ In a play about life in Little Italy of Clerkenwell, in the nineteen thirties (Olive Besagni, *Down The 'ill*, performed at St Lukes Conference Centre, London, 22-25 March 1995), one character expresses strong dissidence and deep concern for his daughter's and neighbours' support – in varying degrees – for Mussolini's campaign in Abyssinia. During that play, the audience joined in a scene where the cast sang the *Giovanezza*, the fascist youth song. I found it disturbing to witness members of the audience (mostly men) happily joining in what was performed as anodyne folk culture. What was troubling was the process of forgetting that was played out. A process that simultaneously confined fascism in the past, while it drained the present use of the song of any fascist connotations. On another occasion, a young Italian man I met at St Peter's church – he was born long after the war – jokingly sang the *Giovanezza* whilst saluting. My point here is that the preservation of some legacies of a political past emptied out of their political contents, and their integration into popular culture, are indicative of the constitutive threads of national cultures.

opening chapter, there are currently more than 100 clubs, *circoli*, welfare organisations, professional associations, sports clubs, etc., in the Greater London area only — while state organisations were reducing their interventions to the promotion of Italian culture and to the consolidation of good diplomatic relations with the United States (especially after the 1943 armistice) and European countries.¹⁰

In Italy, however, a number of boards and commissions now deal with emigrant issues both at the federal and regional levels. At the regional level, Italian emigrants may contact ERMI, *Ente regionale per i problemi dei migrante*, for any query that might fall under regional authority jurisdiction. At the federal level, the CGIE, *Consiglio Generale Italiani all'estero*, chaired by a high ranking officer of the Foreign Affairs Department, is a consultative body with strictly advisory powers. It is constituted by representatives of elected councils in countries of emigration. These local councils are called COMITES, *Comitato degli Italiani all'estero*. In 1993, the president of the COMITES for Britain was Lorenzo Losi, who was director of ACLI which is linked to the Christian Democratic Party.¹¹ Losi was also vice-chairman of the CGIE.

Today, Italian politicians hold a discourse on emigration that bears similarities and differences with that of their forerunners. Some differences can be accounted for by the new European context in which contemporary discourses circulate. Italy has been a member of the EC since its inception in 1952 (under the banner of the European Steel and Coal Community) and it is upon this terrain that emigration crosses with the promotion of Italian national culture.

In 1993, President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro addressed the European Parliament in support of the political integration of the European Community. Scalfaro's idea of a politically unified Europe rests on "commitment, will-power, political clarity and the deepening of common cultural roots." He invited European citizens to

¹⁰ Italian organisations based in London include: the Embassy, the Consulate, the Military Attaché, the British-Italian Society (which is under the patronage of the Italian ambassador) and the Italian Cultural Institute (ICI). The latter is a good exemplar of Italian state intervention to promote Italian culture. Created in 1951 under the Anglo Italian Cultural Agreement, the ICI has the mandate to promote and encourage cultural exchanges between Great-Britain and Italy. Among other roles, the ICI acts as the "official advisory agency to the Italian Authorities on the equivalence of certificates and courses of studies." (ICI brochure) Apart from providing Italian language classes at relatively high cost, the ICI holds a variety of cultural and intellectual events that gather Italian and British aficionados of Italian 'high' culture.

The Italian Consulate, for its part, has educational departments which organise, fund and supply teachers for Italian language and culture classes for children and grandchildren of Italian immigrants (see third section).

¹¹ ACLI (*Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani*) is a *patronato*, that is a welfare organisation offering a variety of services to Italian immigrants. *Patronati* usually have clear political tendencies, and may be linked to an official Italian party. They present a list of candidates for the election of members for the local COMITES. Other *patronati* include: INAS and INCA (see appendix 2).

promote and favour the growth of the "European citizen" by valuing cultural changes and the diffusion of languages but, above all, to firmly believe in the finality of the European construction. A commitment which the president of the [Italian] republic himself engaged in as citizen of a country which has had and still has an important role in the European community... [Stressing the importance of presence of Italian culture abroad, Scalfaro told the 81 European deputies] "Italy has a enormous cultural heritage (*patrimonio culturale*) and has the right and duty to bring it abroad", while he simultaneously reasserted the depth of common European cultural roots, "which must, however, protect the specificity and the variety of its dense culture."¹²

The project of political integration in Europe allows for the emergence of the idea of a European citizenship that rests on the congruence of culture, geography and origins (European cultural roots). This carries ethnocentric and racist undertones that silence and undermine the rights of black minorities in Europe (see Miles 1992; Back and Solomos 1994; Back and Nayak 1993), while it imagines a homogenised, white European identity. On the other hand, national cultures are enforced and their dissemination is construed as a universal right and duty.

Within this context, Italian politicians speak of emigration in terms that consistently seek to assert Italian national integrity over claims of both local (e.g. London Italian) and inter-national relationships, without compromising the European community spirit. Italian government representatives make sure not to offend English national claims, for instance, by emphasising that tighter links with Italy should not hinder the loyalty of emigrants toward the country of adoption.¹³ During the campaign promoting new voting rights for Italians abroad, this guarantee is rhetorically presented by making the voting issue a cultural matter rather than a political one (see next section).

The revival of *cultural* identity is indeed at the centre of Italian governmental discourses about Italian emigrants. In his message to Italians abroad, in 1990, President Cossiga made an important distinction: in his view, he was not addressing 'Italians abroad', but, rather, "Italians in their own home" (*Italiani in casa loro*). This 'new logic' is about establishing new ties with world-wide *Italofoonia*, that is, with Italian-language speaking *Italians* around the world. This, he continued, calls

¹² *La Voce degli Italiani*, #900, December 1993: 2.

¹³ President Cossiga in *La Voce degli Italiani*, #831 October 1990: 9, and Senator Giacobazzi, under-secretary to the Italian Foreign Affairs department, #898, November 1993: 1

for the invention of new forms of material and social support, and of a new cultural politics that will reflect the experience of 'younger generations'.¹⁴

To conclude, if the conditions of emigration have substantially changed since Italian Unification, the articulation of emigration with the Italian national project has consistently been included in Italian politics. Present discourses of Italian culture within the European Community are wrapped in novelty that obscures the legacies of a not so new nationalism, the stride of which today's discourses follow. The project is the representation and dissemination of Italy outside its borders, where Italian governments still appeal to Italian emigrants as custodians of Italian culture (this will be illustrated throughout the remainder of the chapter). In this respect, differences between past or present Italian government discourses, and between Italian political parties, are a question of degree rather than of any fundamental divergence.¹⁵

I have sketched out contemporary discourses on immigration emerging from Italian governments in order to set the backdrop against which the London Italian politics of identity develop. These two discourses — from Italy and from London — are deployed on the terrain of European integration, the vocabulary of which relocates nationalist discourses within a frame of transnational transactions. To be sure, a study of the relationship between Italian politics of emigration and London Italian politics of identity would require more systematic comparison of the historical development of each. However, a fuller grasp of the specificity of London Italian politics will hopefully come out of casting it against the background of Italian discourses.

The vote for Italians abroad: universal rights for citizens with a difference

We have seen in the previous chapter that the communal project of recovery was initiated by Umberto Marin when Britain joined the European Community. For Marin, this was the answer to the everlasting alienation and betrayal endured by Italian emigrants.

[I] wish to repeat once again the reason I applaud the integration of Great Britain within the EC. We Italians from Great Britain expect many things, above all the following: that this favours the elimination from our continent of the plague of forced emigration, which remains the sole alternative

¹⁴ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #831, October 1990: 9.

¹⁵ This is not to say that the Italian nation aspired to today is no different to past fascist nationalist aspirations. The way the Italian state has attended to women, for example, reveals clear distinctions between contemporary Italy and Mussolini's rule (Caldwell 1989). Yet in matters of emigration, Italian discourses of the present day echo those of the fascist years in terms of nesting the ties between Italy and the Italian diaspora into nationalist principles.

to misery in some Italian regions, and that it will lead to redeem our emigrants from the ranks of *Negroes (negri)*¹⁶ of Europe, that is of second class citizens, uprooted from their own land and culture, deprived of all political power, anxious about the uncertain future of their children, valued only as instruments of production. (Marin 1975: 152)

The brand of foreigner will disappear only when the *political redemption* of émigrés will operate, when... fundamental political rights will be conceded to them (idem: 154).

The prospect of European citizenship provides a new vocabulary for Italian intellectuals concerned with recovering an Italian presence in Britain¹⁷; the representations of Italians *qua* Europeans offers a new language of differentiation for Italians in Britain.

The British Italian Community is well-placed to think positively about Europe and about retaining its own identity within that structure, to look to 1992 and beyond and to help Europeanise Britain. (Colpi 1991a: 258)

In other words, the representation of Italians as Europeans is a new signifier from which they can reformulate their contribution to Britain, namely by fostering a 'European conscience' within English society, "whose temptation is always to shut itself off, to close itself upon itself", according to Padre Graziano Tassello.¹⁸ The European Union offers a new language of identity and difference, with the language of citizenship providing the vocabulary in which ideas of national allegiance will be embattled.

It is thus informed by this rhetoric of European Community and citizenship that London Italians attempt to rescue themselves from oblivion. While Italy is committed to promoting Italian culture and language, London Italian representatives are more immediately concerned with securing links with Italy while erasing their forever-foreigner condition in Britain. New voting rights for Italians abroad are one

¹⁶ The use of the 'Negro' as metaphor for underclass was used in various political discourses. It appeared during the seventies 'ethnic revivalism', and seems to be making a small come-back in the nineties. In Québec, for instance, a renowned nationalist pamphlet of the 1970s was titled *Nègres Blancs d'Amérique* (Vallières 1979). A revised edition was published in 1994, the same year that a book on Irish nationalism appeared bearing the title *Ulster's white negroes* (O'Dochartaigh 1994).

¹⁷ As well, it seems, as in the United States, where a new European-American ethnicity is emerging, bringing Italians together with other Americans of European descent. See Alba 1994: 21.

¹⁸ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #831, October 1990: 15.

way of achieving this, and the European Community offers the conditions of its possibility.¹⁹

The Italian immigrants had been waiting for these [European] elections because they saw in them something more than a simple administrative reality. It appeared to them that as a European fact, they were pointing to a possible area of social interaction where they could have been “citizens” with full rights, equal to all the others (that is British and Italian people in their own country). In particular it appeared to them that the simple fact of being registered on the Italian polls for the [European] elections organised for them from Italy would defeat the reality of their everyday experience and show that in the home country they were being considered, and that they themselves were still able to have decisive ties with their own fatherland. (Bottignolo 1985: 50-51)

It is in this context that, in the early 1990s, leaders of a number of organisations in London have rallied in support of a new election bill that would allow all Italian citizens living abroad — regardless of the time spent away from Italy — as well as their children and grand-children — provided that they hold an Italian passport — to vote in Italian elections.²⁰ To obtain the electoral certificate, it is not required to be born in Italy nor to be on the list of contributors.²¹ A striking assumption underlying this provision is that Italian emigrants and their offspring, after years of living abroad, will even wish to have a say in the political life of Italy. In one of the rare expressions of dissent found in *La Voce*, a reader questioned the legitimacy of Italian emigrants' electoral participation precisely on those grounds:

Is it fair that native Italians who have spent all or most of their lives in the country of adoption, not mentioning the millions who can claim as Italian only their name, handed down by their grandfather of great-grandfather, have the right to decide which government will run Italy?²²

The most contentious aspect of the bill, however, relates to the election of representatives of Italians abroad to both houses of the Italian Parliament. Rather than voting for a college within their *comune* of origin in Italy (or that of their

¹⁹ Voting rights for Italian *émigrés* was first raised in 1908 at a Conference of Italians abroad held in Rome and has been at the centre of an ongoing debate over the last 40 years. It has been recently revived in the context of constitutional changes occurring in Italy in 1992 and 1993.

²⁰ Italian citizenship follows the principles of the right of blood.

²¹ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #896, October 1993: 1.

²² *La Voce degli Italiani*, #899, November 1993: 4.

parents/grandparents), Italians abroad would elect representatives for their own constituency abroad, which would be one of four: Europe, North-America, South-America, and Asia-Africa-Australia put together. The proposed legislation provides for the election of 30 *émigré* representatives: 20 MPs (out of 630) and 10 senators (out of 322). 15 MPs and 8 senators would be elected according to majority vote, and the remaining 5 MPs and 2 senators would be elected by proportional representation. The details of the debates in Italy are not part of my immediate concerns. Suffice to say that this particular clause was instrumental in the rejection of the bill by the Italian senate in November 1993. According to *La Voce*, the main argument against the bill was that those who pay no (or less) taxes and who have tied their destiny to another nation should not affect the Italian political life. Thus from the Italian government's perspective, two criteria distinguish Italians abroad from the rest of the Italian electorate: class and residency. These constitute the basis for the hierarchical order of citizenship, according to which citizens who pay more taxes and who not only reside but who tie their destiny within the geographical boundaries of Italy have more of a voice than others. Supporters of the proposed amendment to the electoral legislation were quick to take issue with this and to denounce it as an infringement of the universal principle of equality.²³

Equality is the principle that allows for a claim such as the one put forward in the revised voting legislation to emerge.²⁴ But what is at stake for Italians emigrants? The argument is supported by two points: survival and national unity. Yet the relationship between both is conceived differently depending on whether the arguments are coming from Italian politicians or from representatives of Italians living abroad.

In Italy, Senator Giacobazzo of the Foreign Affairs Department argues that Italian emigrants' allegiance to Italy would be exemplary of an inter-regional unity still the object of contention within Italy itself. This was eloquently expressed in his reaction to the rejection of the voting bill in November 1993:

[i]n these days of crisis for some important parts of Italian life, I have come to consider that our communities [abroad] still maintain alive, in a welcomed delay, a sense of *patria* and of nation that we have not cultivated [here, in Italy]. They

²³ See *La Voce degli Italiani*, #938, September 1995: 1 and 4.

²⁴ Certainly, an interesting discussion around liberalism can take place with regards to claims expressed by particular groups on the basis of equality, by I will leave it to political theorists to shed some light on the moral and political implications of minority rights. See Taylor 1994, Kymlicka 1992, 1995a & b. See also Bhabha 1993 on a how multiculturalism pushes the liberal principles of equality and tolerance to their limits.

cultivate, instead, ideological belongings (*appartenenze*) and they dissipate this great patrimony rarely alive in our country. We maintain that the presence in Parliament of elected members from this population beyond our walls would have been useful to the sense of unity of our country, which is so vilified and lacerated. But this will not be. I am hurt because, in the words of a well-known saying, you can take a man out of a country, but you can't take the country out of the man.²⁵

For Senator Giacobuzzo, if emigrants are exemplary in their patriotism, their survival is not even at stake, since they are eternal carriers of the sense of identification to Italy. Their will to electoral participation is a sign of their eternal link with the fatherland. The fears Giacobuzzo expresses are for Italian nationhood, rather than for Italian emigrant identity itself. The vote is conceived, here, in instrumental terms, but in relation to an idea of 'identity' that is dissociated from 'belonging'. "[T]he vote is something that *revives* in [Italian emigrants] an identity, more than [the expression of] a proper and true belonging".²⁶ In such a view, identity is eternal and will be activated given the right political structures. This mimics neo racist discourses in Britain, according to which national allegiance is something intrinsic, deeply entrenched in individuals so that it becomes 'second nature'. Nationhood, in this discourse, "is the true state of man" (Casey 1982: 28); it is essentialised, naturalised and masculinised. I will say more on this in the following sections. My point at this stage is that the attribution of equal voting rights to Italian emigrants is conceived, in Italy, as an issue of national integrity and solidarity that will transcend regional differences.

From the London Italian leadership's point of view, however, the issue is more complex. First, the vote for representatives of Italians abroad is a political life-line for this population.

The vote represents today the ultimate area for the renewal of profitable contacts with emigrated communities, who will otherwise disappear for good.²⁷

London Italian leaders are struggling for the recognition of emigration as the basis from which a distinctive identity may emerge. In a meeting on the voting bill,

²⁵ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #899, November 1993: 4. In the same issue, Italian president Scalfaro is reported to have said that the disappointment of Italian emigrants over the rejection of voting bill is "a sign of their attachment to the fatherland" (idem: 1).

²⁶ Sen. Giacobuzzo in *La Voce degli Italiani*, #898, November 1993: 1, my emphasis.

²⁷ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #897, October 1993: 1.

where Senator Giacobuzzo met with London emigrant spokesmen, Lorenzo Losi spoke of emigration in the following terms:

I reaffirm that this emigration distinguishes itself by the way it integrated itself even if maintaining... its proper *italianità* and in fact imposing it to the host country. Silent labour, surpassing difficulties without making a fuss, acceptance of the typical and specific contradictions for those living away of their country of birth, are regular occurrences in many cases. On the other hand, the friend operating in the social, particularly the missionaries and heads of *patronati*... could tell us about so many other life stories, could tell us about the solitude and the difficulties encountered daily in cities as well as in the periphery... And it is for this reason that we disagree with those who claim that this community has no problems. Instead, we say that this community lives and often solves its problem without making a din.²⁸

It is on these grounds that Losi continues to suggest that emigrants need proper representation within the Italian state. It is on these grounds that he argues that Italians abroad must be "craftsmen of their own future".²⁹

Grafted to this central concern is the recognition of the unique vantage point from which *émigrés* might serve Italy: the "Italian patrimony beyond the confines [of Italy]" represents an "incalculable resource" for Italy.

[With the vote for Italians abroad] [w]e will see the introduction, within the Italian fabric, of a precious concern for universality and a desire to surpass borders, which are typical emigration values.³⁰

This version of the myth of return sees the emigrant returning to the political life of the 'country of origin' enriched with the very experience of migration. Therefore, the rejection of the bill was read, by the London leadership, as denying the recognition of *emigration* as a legitimate point of convergence and a basis for the formation of a political constituency.

In short, London Italian languages of political community turn the Italian government politics of emigration on its head. While Italian political leaders speak of the representation of Italy abroad, the emigrant leadership emphasises the representation of 'abroad' within Italy. As a result, these local politicians are not only proposing to expand the jurisdiction of the Italian state beyond the borders of the

²⁸ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #898, November 1993: 1.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Graziano Tassello in *La Voce degli Italiani*, #897, October 1993: 1.

Italian peninsula. They are also speaking of 'new geographies of identity' (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 170).

This was symbolically represented in the course of the vote debate, when *La Voce* introduced the *Simbolo degli Italiani all'Estero* (figure 1):

[a] movement open to all men [sic] with serious ideas... in view of creating a wide ranging debating platform.³¹

Designed by Giorgio Brignola, the Genoa-based emigration correspondent for *La Voce*, the *Simbolo* is a non-aligned debating platform open to all Italians interested in the voting issue, and eventually in other political questions. According to Padre Gaetano, Brignola thought there could exist a united movement of Italians living in Europe.³²

The *Simbolo degli Italiani all'Estero* is the symbolic representation of what is also coined *l'Altra Italia*, "who lives far away".³³ Both these labels suggest the preservation of the original fatherland (*patria*), Italy, as a fixed geopolitical entity: its borders are preserved by locating the Italian diaspora *all'estero* or within *another* Italy.

The 'Italians abroad' image stems from a vexed position between the impossibility of return to Italy, and the quest for new solidarities based upon new forms of existence. The *Italiani all'Estero* identity is produced from this complex combination of nationalist cultural politics (locating an original fatherland and culture within the confines of the Italian state territory) and of diasporic awareness (rehabilitating the emigrant, multi-local mode of existence). It maps out a "diasporic space" (Brah in Clifford 1994: 314) as a kind of third space, beyond the confines of territorial boundaries 'here' and 'there', strikingly conjured up in a section of *La Voce* titled "planet emigration" (*Pianeta Emigrazione*). This is perhaps a collective version of what Trinh T. Minh-ha labels "(un)location" that describes the necessary "shifting and contextual interval between arrested boundaries" (Trinh 1991: 4).³⁴ Yet precisely because the boundaries remain intact, *l'Altra Italia* is a 'reassuring elsewhere' (Glissant 1981: 177) by virtue of enforcing the very familiar boundaries it attempts to breach. These boundaries are drawn around Italy, the first place of origin, but punctured by the creation of four political constituencies in four different parts of

³¹ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #896 October 1993:1, and #897 October 1993: 3.

³² Personal interview. Giorgio Brignola is also correspondent for other Italian emigrant newspapers in Europe, and he has a regular slot in the weekly BBC radio programme in Italian: *BBC Mondo Italiano*.

³³ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #896, October 1993: 3.

³⁴ I am grateful to Magdalene Ang-Lygate for drawing this point to my attention.

Figure 1
Simbolo degli Italiani all'Estero



The logo for the *simbolo* represents a globe crossed, lengthways, by a pole, planted in the American continent, bearing three flags. Each flag is one of the 3 colours of the Italian flag (red, white and green). But the panels are separated, suggesting the partition of the Italian flag. Between each flag, a part of the globe is seen.

the world. In this respect, the *Simbolo* simultaneously transcends and reproduces Italian *regionalismo*. It challenges the existing organisational structure in London, devised along regional lines of identification — Piacentini, Parmigiani, Veneti, Siciliani — while its definition as a distinct political and cultural constituency produces yet another region within the Italian state apparatus.

In short, the relationship of Italians abroad with Italy resorts to languages of civil rights and duties to mediate and formalise links between emigrants and Italy. Issues of representation are embattled in these debates that seek to rehabilitate an emigrant identity within the Italian national project. Tensions arise, however, between a diasporic awareness and a nationalist discourse, both of which ground the creation of an *Italians abroad* identity. Invested in this new geography of identity is not only the issue of representation, but also one of self-management on the basis of local particularism. Italian spokesmen for emigrants aspire to more power over rulings affecting Italian emigrants. As emigrants themselves, they (or any future elected emigrant representatives) consider themselves in the best position to represent Italians abroad by virtue of the shared experience of emigration. Emigration is construed as a distinctive feature of Italians abroad and as such, is constitutive of a community that is not all that Italian. In London, *comunità* is not reducible to *italianità*. In this respect, discussions around Italian language and culture classes for children of Italian immigrants are a case in point.

Language tuition and the affirmation of local particularity

In this section I look at discussions around Italian language classes where the relationship with the Italian national culture is interrupted by claims for local particularism. More specifically, I look at the particular point of contention about the selection of teachers for these classes. The central claim, here, is for increased autonomy in the definition of the 'community's' destiny.

The first Italian state schools for Italian children of London were set up in 1933, under the Mussolini government.³⁵ Up to seven schools were run by the *Direzione Didattica*, based at the Greek Street *fascio*. After the 1939-45 war and the

³⁵ Other privately run schools did exist prior to these. The first Italian school was founded in 1817, subsidised by the *Regno di Piemonte*. This *scuola popolare* was first based in Lincoln's Inn, under the *Cappella Sarda*. It became the *scuola di San Pietro* in 1837 and it eventually moved to Clerkenwell and was run by the Pallottini Fathers of St Peter's church. In 1841, Giuseppe Mazzini founded a school for poor Italians, offering Italian language classes to children and illiterate adults. The clearly patriotic aims to transmit to children of Italian immigrants a sense of *Italianità* (Palmer 1991) and 'anti-religious' views did not appeal to the St Peter's school and hostility grew rapidly between the two. Mazzini's school closed in 1848, shortly after its founder returned to Italy. St Peter's then became the only school for most of the second half of the 19th century. It ran until the 1939-1945 war broke out.

closing of the London *fascio*, it was not until 1966 that new classes were set up thanks to the initiative of Italian emigrants and parents who financed, organised and taught the classes themselves. Since 1971, the classes have been taken over by the Italian Consulate, under the supervision of two *Direzione Didattiche*.³⁶ The Consulate supplies funds and teachers, and the administration of the classes is the responsibility of COASIT (*Comitato di Assistenza Scuole Italiane*), registered as a charity organisation in England and directed by Remo Finaldi. Also involved in the Italian language tuition are approximately 45 parent committees (*Comitati Genitori*) headed by FASFA (*Federazione delle Associazioni e Comitati Scuola Famiglia*), chaired jointly by Remo Finaldi and Giuseppe Giacon. Giacon is a prominent and respected leader of the London Italian 'community'. He was responsible for reviving the languages classes in 1966, and plays a leading role in the promotion of 'community interests'. Apart from the positions mentioned above, he is chairman of the *Circolo Veneto* (Venetian Club), member of COASIT, and *correspondente consolare*, a Consulate middle-man who attends to queries by Italians who cannot go to the Consulate offices because of its very limited opening hours (it opens to the public only on weekday mornings). Giacon is Member of the Order of the (Italian) Republic, and has been honoured by the Mount Carmel School for Girls, in Islington, who created the *Coppa Bepi Giacon*. The plaque on the cup reads "for triumph over adversities". The cup is awarded to pupils who have shown their capacity to overcome life's adversities, and is sponsored by Giacon himself.³⁷

A recurring theme in my interviews with men concerned about Italian language teaching to Italian children is the choice of teachers. What is at stake in this issue is the construction of local particularity in contrast to a national identity. Teachers in London classes are sent from Italy for a period of two to four years³⁸, having been trained in Italy, following the Italian Ministry of Education curriculum (Baldwin et al. 1980: 25, 27). The issue of contention is that these teachers do not have an 'emigrant mentality' as Giuseppe Giacon contends.³⁹ A similar argument was also asserted by the former Association of Teachers of Italian (ATI): teachers sent from Italy "project around the phenomenon of emigration an atmosphere of

³⁶ The Italian Law 153/1971 is aimed at providing courses for Italian workers' relatives, in order to facilitate their insertion in the host country's schools and in view of keeping alive *'l'origine linguistico-culturale'*.

³⁷ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #894: September 1993: 6. The fact that an emigrant is selected as sponsor for a cup honouring determination and guts is probably no accident. Emigration and its teleology of suffering is emblematic of adversity, and successful emigrants such as Giacon are often deified as symbols of defiance and success.

³⁸ Although some do decide to stay and manage to continue with their teaching.

³⁹ Personal interview, March 1993.

regret and nostalgia" which hinders the intellectual development of the emigrants (Baldwin et al 1980: 27).

According to local leaders, parents send their children to these classes so they can be in an 'Italian atmosphere', so they can 'feel' Italian. It follows that the Italian teachers should be replaced by Italian *emigrant* teachers, that is, individuals who are aware of the community life and familiar with the emigrant/settler experience, construed as *the* point of convergence for Italians in England. For the same reasons, the employment of English teachers (i.e. with no Italian ancestors) is also dismissed. Moreover, these individuals would also lack the "Italian spirit" necessary to convey a more adequate image of Italian culture.⁴⁰ Hence the basis of the arguments about who is most competent to teach young Italians is twofold: first, Italian emigrants have a particular experience that shapes their identity in a way that distinguishes it from Italian adults coming from Italy; their relationship with Italy and with Italian culture is distorted and transformed from years of living abroad and of settlement. Secondly, the relationship with the local English culture is also complicated by the experience of migration, as well as by the legacy of an inherent spirit, or mentality, that only Italians and their descendants can possess.

From the outset, this view suggests an essentialist definition of culture as something that pre-dates individuals, and that one does or does not have. Giacon's comment expresses a form of objectification and essentialisation of Italian culture (or part thereof) as a thing to be transmitted from generation to generation: the Italian 'heritage'. In this view, language classes are conceived as instruments for the transmission and *preservation* of a cultural heritage, rather than of its *production*. But Giacon's argument cannot be reduced to this single comment; his politics are more sophisticated than that. If he suggests the need to perform and recreate a particular 'spirit', he also perceives the classes as instances for making the community.

We, as parents, we see the Italian classes not only as a means to teach Italian but as a social [occasion], as a place for creating the Italian community. We create the Italian community.⁴¹

Thus, contrary to common speculation about community leaders, this man is well aware that he is creating a community, that the community does not precede its institutions. It is not born out of spontaneous generation. It needs places and spaces where the Italian 'spirit' and 'feeling' are performed... and inscribed.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

Indeed, there is more to language and culture classes than creating a sense of solidarity and improving proficiency in oral expression. What classes provide that families do not are reading and writing skills. If children or grand-children of Italian immigrants are seen as possessing an 'Italian spirit', they must nevertheless learn about the culture that is said to be its expression. In this respect, supplementary schooling constitutes 'inscribing practices' which Paul Connerton views as necessary to the maintenance of collective identity — along with 'incorporating' practices, that is the sedimentation of collective memory in bodily postures. In this particular case, the language classes fix cultural memory through the passage from its oral transmission to a literate one.

The transmission from an oral culture to a literate culture is a transition from incorporating practices to inscribing practices. The impact of writing depends upon the fact that any account which is transmitted by means of inscription is unalterably fixed, the process of its composition being definitely closed... When memories of a culture begin to be transmitted mainly by the reproduction of their inscription rather than by 'live' tellings, improvisation becomes increasingly difficult and innovation institutionalised. (1992: 75)

The language taught in the classrooms is the standardised Italian (in contrast to regional dialects), connected with a standardised, nationalised culture. "Bringing the country into the classroom" is a dominant feature of foreign language pedagogy (Jackson 1990: 6). The point here is that the relationship to Italy is not only created, it is formalised and inscribed. In other words, supplementary classes inscribe not only a link, even if symbolic, with Italy, but also a unified version of Italian culture that, according to some critiques, obscures regional differences (ATI 1982).

However, Connerton perhaps overemphasises the static consequence of the shift to print-language. What is inscribed is not only a unified cultural emblem. But as Benedict Anderson argues, print languages also allow for the creation of 'imagined communities' that break open the seams of national boundaries.

the concrete formation of contemporary nation-states is by no means isomorphic with the determinate reach of particular print-languages. (1991: 46)

The identity of 'Italians abroad' relies precisely on its membership of this imagined community of 'Italophones', to recall President Cossiga's appeal to the world-wide *Italofofia* in 1990. However, for London Italian representatives, the reproduction of a cultural heritage, on the one hand, and the production of a local community of emigrants on the other, are competing in demands for increased

autonomy in language tuition. Put differently, invested in the tuition of Italian culture and language is the negotiation between national homogeneity and integrity, and local particularity.⁴²

I've argued so far that this local particularity rests on the experience of migration and Italian descent. The Italian language is, here, a vehicle of transmission of an original culture. Indeed, language, in popular and official conceptions of multicultural education, is commonly perceived as the best conveyor of a unique and singular culture (Tosi 1991: 207). But the language debate is also invested with ideas about the relationship between 'ethnic consciousness', identity and social integration.

Italian language and culture are fundamental elements in the formation of second and third generations and an indispensable factor for a successful integration within the host society.⁴³

[The preservation of the cultural heritage is] an important factor in the building up of the children's personal identity, hence as a prerequisite for their participation in the life of the society of which they have become part of through their parents' immigration. (Mengon in Baldwin et al. 1980: 26)

In other words, these descendants of Italians will acquire a stronger positive sense of selfhood by learning about their cultural background via the language. Language, in this view, solves the ontological 'problem' of belonging to the Italian culture without thinking about it, and consequently to be open to other cultures (Marienstras 1975: 187). This thesis bears an ethos similar to that of sixties 'ethnic revival', where ethnic consciousness and individual well-being converged. Likewise, politics of multiculturalism often rest on modern ideas about the relationship between self and society — that is, that personal autonomy is located as a cornerstone for collective empowerment (Gilroy 1987: 247).⁴⁴ Yet in the case examined here, the relationship between Italian children and the *émigré* collectivity is mediated by the family.

⁴² Moreover, at a time when Italian authorities are reducing their funding, some leaders are considering asking more intervention from the British government. Their concern, however, remains one of self-management and the preservation of their heritage.

⁴³ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #831, October 1990: 19.

⁴⁴ Such a conception also underlies the EEC directive no 486/1977 which provides compulsory bilingual and bicultural education to the children of emigrants who must integrate in the language and culture of the host country, "but without ceasing to identify to the language and culture of their country of origin." (Lazzari 1990: 416; also Stubbs 1985: 384, for a copy of the Directive) Such views have been criticised on a variety of grounds, all of which question the metonymic relationship between language, culture and identity (Rodriguez 1983; Edwards 1985; Hewitt 1991; Khan 1980; Giles et al. 1977; Fortier 1992; Oriol 1985).

For one thing, the classes are also presented as having an important symbolic function for the parents themselves. As Bruno Bottignolo suggests, the classes play a symbolic role by offering a substitute to the fading dream of returning.

[Parents] think they are in some way reproducing themselves and passing their culture and world to their children. On the other [hand], all Italians have the impression that their distant homeland cares for them in some way and is near. (1985: 125)⁴⁵

In October 1990, *La Voce degli Italiani* expressed its appreciation of the classes in similar terms.

Thanks to the language and culture classes, the worker abroad becomes, through their children, the most useful conveyor of Italian language and culture beyond the confines of the Republic.⁴⁶

In a way, the ongoing struggle to maintain the classes is woven through inter-generational relationships. The children's knowledge of Italian language and culture is re-imported not into the community, but into the family, thus re-asserting its centrality. In other words, the family — not the individual — is the cornerstone of the 'community'. Ethnicity is rehearsed in the family setting, although it may not be entirely reproduced there. This means that the family is not solely responsible for the preservation of the 'cultural heritage'. On the contrary, the acquisition of Italian cultural values and language is removed from the exclusive province of the immigrant family: "[s]econd generation Italians will not appropriate Italian cultural values without proper structural support".⁴⁷ The family is *a* space for producing difference, but not the only space. The formation of difference and the inception of a particularised form of collective identification spills over the family circle, into the 'community' (or civic) institutions.

In addition, as long as they are run by Italy, Italian language and culture classes for Italian children remain outside of the British education authorities' jurisdiction. Also labelled *dopo scuola* classes (after school classes), these lessons

⁴⁵ The link with the past was one of the reasons given by 'second generation' Italians in Montreal to explain why they speak Italian to their children while they would speak English among themselves (Fortier 1991: 53-55). This link with the past, I have argued elsewhere, does not necessarily rest on the assumption of a unequivocal link between language and identity (Fortier 1992).

⁴⁶ *La Voce degli italiani*, #831, October 1990: 19.

⁴⁷ *La Voce degli Italiani*, # 912, June 1994: 5. This was stated at the first dinner dance of the Parents Association of Kensington, by its president, Pierino Casella.

are extra-curricular activities that take place evenings or Saturday mornings. Thus, they exist on the margins of both the British and the Italian educational systems.⁴⁸

To summarise, language as a cultural tool shuttles between the family and the 'community'. Families are perhaps conceived as the 'first ethnic networks' (Juteau 1983), but are not held to be solely responsible for cultural re-production which also rely on public institutions. Consulate-run Italian language and culture classes are necessary supplements for inscribing cultural values and linguistic competence, but images of continuity are re-located within the family — not the community — mobilised by a system of generational differentiation. As for the language question, its centrality as the singular necessary basis for cultural continuity is disturbed by a more complex view of cultural change configured around the 'problem of generations'. In this respect, this section hinges upon the following one.

Through the "culture line"⁴⁹: the multi-generational community

Whether in debates over the vote from abroad, or about the control of language tuition, the Italians abroad politics of identity wrap Italian emigrants into the homogenising fold of the shared experiences of migration and a common language. Still, when debates turn to questions of continuity and change, the wrapping splits up along the seams of generational differences.

The recurring image of generations in the pages of *La Voce* alerts us to its significance beyond the family realm. Generations are typically used in immigration and ethnic studies to periodise the settlement and adaptation of a population within the 'country of adoption'. Yet as Werner Sollors suggests, generations are used as a metaphor that works "as a community-building device" (Sollors 1986: 223; also Boyarin 1992). While the generational atomisation of the Italian emigrant population gives these units a semblance of coherence, generations also provide a particular way of speaking of changes within the collectivity as a whole, and to reify them as issues

⁴⁸ This is another point of contention. The question of the status of Italian – whether it should be a foreign language or a community language – has been raised by some critics of both Italian and British approaches to minority language teaching. See Tosi (1991) and Cervi (1991), who both argue that full integration of Italians in Britain would be achieved by including Italian as a 'community language' within the British education curriculum. Giuseppe Giacon, for his part, is ambivalent about the issue. For a totally opposite viewpoint, see Rodriguez (1983) who contends that bilingual education merely keeps minorities on the margins of the 'crowd', as it were. Full individuality is achieved, he argues, "by those who are able to consider themselves member of the crowd" (idem: 27). And this is possible only when given the same opportunities, i.e. the same education, as the rest of the population. Although his argument is compelling, its limitation is that it rests on the premise of a clear cut division between the 'private' and the 'public'. Difference, in his view, is and should be produced within the family.

⁴⁹ This phrase is borrowed from Paul Gilroy's forthcoming book on multiculturalism.

of common concern. The question I now turn to is the kind of narratives and strategies that are used to construct the 'generation question' as an issue of collective concern. What do 'generations' speak of?

In 1992, Italian president Oscar Luigi Scalfaro sent a message to Italians abroad in which he spoke of cultural continuity. Pointing out that he was the president of "all Italians, in Italy as well as abroad", Scalfaro stressed his desire for deeper relations between Italy and Italian emigrants and concluded with an appeal about the revival of Italian identification.

Yet another task of human, political and cultural significance imposes itself: that of re-establishing the ties with many generations of Italians and Italian descendants who have lost contact with Italy. I hope that this phase, which I shall call the detachment from the roots, is passed, for I know that, in various modes, in various continents, a comforting rediscovery of Italy is already in progress among descendants of our emigrants.

We will do our best to ensure that this rediscovery is confirmed and extended, for it is the best way toward the spread of our language and of our very rich culture.

Hence the image of our Italy will become ever more alive in the world, through all of you Italians living outside the borders of the fatherland.⁵⁰

Setting aside the expansionist pursuits supporting this discourse, I want to focus on the language of generations used by Scalfaro. In a rhetoric typical of discourses on emigration/immigration, changes in the cultural life of Italian communities abroad were expressed in terms of generations. Indeed, the process of estrangement from Italy was portrayed by the succession of generations of emigrants and their descendants. Generations, in this discourse, punctuated the gradual *degeneration* of an imagined 'original' culture. Likewise, it is in the name of the preservation of this culture that emigrant leaders seek to formalise cultural links between 'younger generations' and Italy by calling for new cultural policies

which [sustain] the process of human, professional and social growth and which [ensure] continuity in the knowledge (*conoscenza*) of Italian reality in all its developments, thus contributing to the conservation and transmission of the original identity.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Backhill, July 1992: 30.

⁵¹ *Il Messaggero*, date unknown.

It was along these lines that an issue of *La Voce* reported a meeting held in Udine, in the northern Italian region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, where 'new generations' were invited to discuss emigration-related issues: *L'incontro internazionale delle nuove generazioni in emigrazione* (International meeting of new generations in migration).⁵² The 120 delegates, representing Europe, North America, South America and Australia, "all graduates and holders of diplomas, with a good knowledge of Italian" met to discuss what the region of Friuli-Venezia had done for the younger Italian generations abroad, to examine and indicate reasons for change, as well as to make propositions for future action.

The comparison is now without any alternative: or we are in a position to solder the new generations to a new discourse between land of origin and land of adoption or we will, within the brief consuming of a biological sunset, have to close definitely the great book of the diaspora [sic] in a hundred countries around the world, with a last page which registers the eventual and irreversible assimilation of our people in an anonymity with no roots.⁵³

This lyrical statement emerging from the conference proceedings, brings together roots *and* routes within a quest to keep some memory and Italian identification alive against the menace of assimilation. Here, the foundations of identity rest partly on an essentialist conception of culture. The image of the 'biological sunset' metaphorically speaks of the link between time and decay, or loss. If we let the sun set, the land of origin will fall into darkness and disappear into oblivion. What this discourse solders is an organic link between land and culture, expressed in the distinction between 'land of adoption' and 'land of origin'. This distinction suggests two types of identification: one which is volitional, and one which is intrinsic; an "identity-as-conjuncture" and an "identity-as-essence" (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 165). Such a split is concealed in expressions such as "my blood and my heart are Italian, my brains are English".⁵⁴ An aura of eternity surrounds the 'land of origin' and its organic Italian identity — "Italians never die, they just *pasta* way"⁵⁵ — which stands in contrast to the contextual and historical undertones of the idea of 'adoption'. Cultural identity is brought into contact with

⁵² *La Voce degli Italiani*, #894 September 1993: 5.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Interviews with Joanna, a self-proclaimed Italian *and* English (no hyphen) woman born in London of Italian immigrants, and with her brother Francesco. Both are involved in community organisations.

⁵⁵ This was printed on a t-shirt sold at the annual pilgrimage to the monastery of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Aylesford, in June 1993.

geographically and genealogically coded 'origins', thus transforming it into a pseudo-biological property of human life.

By contrast, the land of adoption is conceived as the place of residence where new cultural forms menace the survival of age-old and faraway roots. Indeed, if adoption is volitional, it also connotes a commitment whereby immigrants tie their destiny to a chosen place. In this context, descendants of emigrants are asked to uphold their original identity

with the will not to submit to the devastating process of homogenisation which aspires to a total and global assimilation for all, with no roots nor memory for anyone.⁵⁶

But this menace is not construed as inevitable. It may be reversed if the process of migration is itself reversed. This reversal is not so much a definite return, but a symbolic return in the process of renewal and inevitable change. A bridge is erected to link past and present in the construction of the future. In other words, the land of origin constitutes a "detour through the past" enabling the future generations to "produce themselves anew and differently" (Hall 1993: 362).

This was more explicitly formulated at the "Third Regional Conference on Venetian Emigration" of November 1992. This meeting took place in Treviso-Monastier, Veneto (north-eastern Italy), and reported in a January 1993 issue of *La Voce*.⁵⁷ Emerging from the conference was a statement on the creative potential of regional mobilisation around issues of emigration. Here is the core of the reprinted text:

The formation of a hinge between the two Veneti is explicit in the creation of a regional body for emigration with the ensuing management of the phenomenon, in a more creative and less political manner. In such a management, culture becomes the nodal point of the Venetian diaspora's [sic] strategies, the ideal bond between successive generations and between associations, who more than ever should engage in the path of a real connection... without denying the folklore and local aspects pursued by the provinces.

The presence, however reduced, of second generations at the Conference... has contributed to table a noteworthy proposition. The will to establish contacts between groups of different nations, to continue research in the field, to attempt deeper connections with Venetians living *in patria*,

⁵⁶ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #894 September 1993: 5.

⁵⁷ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #879, January 1993: 5.

indicating that the new generations see themselves as bearers of a more open culture, which shows solidarity and universality, and which decants in the region of origin. *It is the end of the culture of roots and the beginning of the culture of relations*, a true recovery of an essential Venetian trait. (my emphasis in last sentence)⁵⁸

This text clearly engages with an open-ended conception of culture and the creation of a diasporic space of cultural relations: a trans-national network for the deployment of a culture of relations between multiple locations. What is suggested, here, is a shift *from* a culture of roots *to* a culture of routes, but in a way that still engages with ideas of original identities.⁵⁹ This is what Edouard Glissant would name "Relation", which is the founding principle of identity formations that rest on relations, mobility and multiplicity, yet which rely on some form of rootings that are on the ground's surface — the rhizomatic bud as opposed to deep seated tree roots — and creative of new spaces of identification (Glissant 1981). In other words, belonging, even 'on the surface' (Probyn 1994), entails the process of enclosure and fixation, however temporary and contingent. Hence the new culture of routes proclaimed in the Veneto Conference comes full circle back into the roots of the 'region of origin'. Indeed, the culture of relations is deemed an "essential Venetian trait". The aim of the passage to a culture of relations remains the recovery of origins, but these origins are then relocated within a relational system where they transit and cross with other cultural formations. In other words, the 'origins' are put into circulation in a trans-national network of relations. Moving beyond the problematic of generations caught between two cultures, these proclamations emphasise the creative potential of this 'in-betweenness', of 'culture's in between' (Bhabha 1993), that contact zone where two cultures meet, each of which, however, is conceived as an enclosed and inalterable entity.

The main agents of this culture of relations are the 'young generations'. Called upon as soldiers of redemption, 'young Italians' are painted as carriers of an original culture and responsible for its revival around the world. Their task is to bridge Italy with the rest of the world in a reciprocal co-operation from each side. As such, it is their duty to proudly carry their heritage and to bring it into their 'land of adoption' (sic). The youths are presented as constituted by an 'original' identity and

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ It is worth noting that the possibility of this shift might be related to the regional, rather than the national focus of the meeting. The hoped-for connections bring together regional and transnational affiliations, overstepping nationally bound identities. Perhaps this is symptomatic of the limitations of nationalist conceptions of identity, that do not accommodate cultural continuity in multi-local settings. National boundaries are broken down to allow for transcultural relations to take place.

an 'adopted' one, which both decant into each other. In this regard, this is about the creation of a new ethnicity: one which features hybridisation and 'diasporisation' (Hall 1988), yet which proceeds from a return to the fatherland. Hence the detour through the past is not merely a stepping stone: it is, rather, a touchstone in the construction of the new identity. That is to say that although the origins are relocated within a language of migration and change, it seems that they are construed as necessary conditions for the invention of a new Italian ethnicity that may bear some claim to authenticity.

The generation metaphor examined here serves to consolidate solidarity around issues of cultural de-generation, loss and change. While Italian emigrant leaders clearly recognise the specificity of their descendants' experiences, their return to the nation brings them back into a constraining rhetoric of land, culture and origins that produces pseudo-biological underpinnings to their project for a new cultural politics. In this complex generational rhetoric, generations are both the problem and the solution. Generations are bound to an inalterable cultural origin that endows them with an inherent identity (the 'Italian spirit') and imputes them with a responsibility towards the community. Consequently, generations are agents of change, yet a change that is policed by the ultimate project of recovery and preservation. Biological undertones are concealed in a complex discourse where time is the active principle of cultural degeneracy, while multi-locality and dispersal are the vectors of hybridisation.

To sum up what has been argued so far, the politics of identity of Italians abroad are expressed in languages of citizenship that involve political, cultural and generational concerns. These three fields of concerns are stitched together by a foundational idea of culture based on common origins rooted in the fatherland and put into transnational networks of cultural exchange. Resistance to assimilation has led Italian emigrant leaders back to the nation, yet with the recognition of the unique vantage point of the *émigrés*. A return with a difference that engages simultaneously with pluralist and essentialist conceptions of identity formations.

The question I now turn to is: who *are*, then, these 'Italians abroad'? What kind of subjects are produced within the 'Italians abroad' identity? In the next section, I examine ceremonies of conferment of state medals and honorary titles and I scrutinise the images of Italian 'citizens abroad' that they produce. For identity politics not only shape identity formations, they also create subjects and spell out who it is possible, acceptable and valuable to be.

Images of nationals: soldiers, hard workers and beauty queens

Running through the discourse of 'Italians abroad' are allusions to amorphous men and women whose only defining character is to *be* 'Italians abroad', sharing the typical emigration experience of silent suffering and coping. Italian emigration is represented as an active thing animated by its own, inherent characteristics: suffering, loneliness, estrangement, alienation, discreteness, but also displacement, settlement, negotiation, syncretism. Emigration is something that is "undergone, not undertaken" (Jacobson 1995: 24): it appears as something that *happens* to people and puts them through the inescapable obstacles of its journey. But what kind of people are the emigrants, or, more accurately, the *émigrés*? In this section, I examine images of nationals deployed in Italian state ceremonies in honour of London Italians. These ceremonies constitute a particular place where Italian state officials and Italian emigrants meet. In contrast to other meeting places (the Consulate or promotional fairs for Italian products), these occasions publicly congratulate men and women for promoting Italian national values engraved in the national motto *Onore, Patria, Famiglia* (Honour, Fatherland, Family). In events such as these, honour is intrinsically linked to inequality, that is, that the award would be worthless if it were bestowed to all Italians (Taylor 1994: 27). Thus the corollary question is: which systems of inequalities does it speak of? I attempt to answer this question by looking at how citizenship works through particular figures, such as the soldier, the beauty queen and the hard-worker.

I want to begin with a vignette. It is the story of Nicola Nastri. This story was reported in *Backhill*, St Peter's monthly magazine. Nicola's story was told by Olive Besagni, who writes a regular chronicle on the life in London's former 'Little Italy' at the turn of the century.

The story of Nicola Nastri is that of "a war hero", as Besagni herself puts it⁶⁰, and of a dedicated son. Indeed, Nicola, already serving in the British army when Mussolini declared war on the allies, volunteered to serve with the Special Service Unit in order to save his father from internment.⁶¹ Nicola's story is told extensively — it takes up two of Besagni's features⁶² — and carries all the ingredients for the making of a hero: a top secret and dangerous mission in Italy, his sacrifice for his father, his alliance with British soldiers, his imprisonment in Italy, hiding his Italian

⁶⁰ *Backhill*, March 1993: 30.

⁶¹ The fate of Arturo Cavalli – whose story is referred to in chapter 2 – and his father was different, however. During his trial after his arrest as an 'enemy alien', Cavalli was asked if he was ready to serve with the British army. He replied that he would on the condition that his father was released. This did not satisfy the tribunal, and both he and his father were sent to an internment camp.

⁶² *Backhill*, April 1993: 12-13, and May 1993: 12-13.

identity to his Italian captors, his Italian aunt denying she knows him when interrogated by his captors, and his post-war decorations. Nicola's story is a striking rerun of the war years, where the Italian state is unquestionably the enemy, but where some Italian citizens (here and in Italy) are allies.

The relationship between family and nation is brought together in Nicola's story. Nicola's allegiance to Italy passed through his father, whom he protected from internment by the 'enemy'. This is one version of what Lynn Hunt would term nationalism's 'family romance' (1992).⁶³ Praised for being both loyal to Britain (a good soldier) and to his father (a good son), Nicola's drama is about dedication to the patriarch, respect of family values and national allegiance. Hence the central subject of the Italian national family romance enacted in these war remembrances is not only a male soldier, he is also a son.

The ultimate image of national allegiance is the men's willingness to fight and die for their country. Each year, the Italian consulate and embassy, jointly with the National Association of War Veterans (*Associazione nazionale combattenti e reduci*), organise a memorial service in honour of Italian servicemen who died in Britain in the 1939-45 war. Held at the military cemetery in Brookwood (Surrey), the service is officiated by the priest of St Peter's Italian church, accompanied by the Scalabrini choir.

According to John Gillis, this kind of memorial dedicated to the fallen soldier was typical of the days before 1939 and have now been replaced by

a new emphasis on veterans, who were immensely better treated than any of their predecessors... Parades replaced cemetery pilgrimages as the typical memorial day activity. Now it became possible for women, even those who had not been mobilized, to feel that they too had been part of history, not just as widows and war mothers, making sacrifices through husbands and sons, but in their own right. (1994: 13)

In the Brookwood ceremonial, women remain excluded from the collective memories of war. During the service I attended in November 1993, I watched a woman gently laying flowers by some apparently selected gravestones. A son? A husband? A brother? The war mother, widow, sister, moved discreetly behind the scene while soldiers and veterans were praised for their patriotic sacrifice (two

⁶³ Lynn Hunt suggests an interesting psychoanalytic reading of the French Revolution as "a drama about the conflict between father and son and about the threat of violence to the community." (1992: 12) The father-son drama in the Italian national family romance is not the same as that in France – where fraternity rather than family constitutes a central trope – but it would certainly be of interest to follow Hunt's theoretical insights in exploring the foundations of Italian nationalism.

veterans were presented with medals by the ambassador during that ceremony). Similarly, the narratives of the war years in histories about Italian immigrants in Britain speak of "wives and mothers...left at home to carry on as best they could" (Colpi 1991a: 126). Women's contribution to the 'war effort' exists by proxy, through brave and patriotic husbands and sons. In short, these remembrances perform a particular kind of citizenship deployed within kinship narratives that work through principles of gender differentiation, where the male soldier-citizen holds the starring role. Yet, embedded in the main story line about the soldier-hero, other stories bring relief to the central character and relocate him within a patriarchal family setting, thus making him a son, father, husband. The story of the nation at war is also the story of a nation of families.

Other ceremonies, however, tell slightly different narratives. Each year, on the occasion of the *Festa della Repubblica*, the Italian embassy holds a ceremony of conferment of honorary medals to Italians or non-Italians in Britain. The awards, bestowed by the Italian ambassador, are numerous. One of these is the *Stella al Merito del Lavoro*, the recipients of which bear the title of *Maestro*. This medal is granted to an Italian individual whose hard-work contributes to producing a respectable image of Italian labour abroad (*lavoro italiano all'estero*). One Maestro, Nicesio Fantini, was honoured for his activities in miners' unions as a spokesman for Italian miners, thus "acquiring esteem and respect for Italian labour abroad".⁶⁴ Another maestro was honoured for marketing Italian ethnicity — Giuseppe Belloni, Master Chef, received the Stella in June 1995. He is esteemed, the text reads, for his dedication and hard-work in the hotel industry, "ulteriorly promoting, in this way, the image of the Italian worker abroad".⁶⁵

Another honorific title, more prestigious, is that of *Cavaliere* (somewhat similar to the English knighthood), which goes to recipients of the Order of the Republic (*Ordine al Merito della Repubblica*). Many British Italians — and some non Italians — have acquired this title in recognition of their significant contribution to Italian national development, through their contribution to the British Italian community. Terri Colpi was honoured in June 1995, for her work in support of the Italian community.⁶⁶ The same year, Ada Pizzuto and Sebastiano Petrillo were made Cavaliere: the former for her volunteer work in prisons, the latter for his key contributions to a variety of Italian associations (including the Association of War

⁶⁴ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #912, June 1994: 6.

⁶⁵ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #934, June 1995: 6.

⁶⁶ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #934, June 1995: 6.

Veterans that organises the annual remembrance ceremony in Brookwood).⁶⁷ In 1994, Lazzaro Servini, a former war internee, was honoured for his engagement in promoting Italian language and culture in Wales, and Dr. Elisa Provini-Walker for her similar commitment within British academia.⁶⁸

These state ceremonies, common to many countries, are moments of instantiation of national values and integrity. For Italian immigrants in Britain, they are also instances of official recognition, by Italy, of the Italian presence abroad. Men and women are honoured for their action as ambassadors of Italian culture. We talk of hard-working labourers; of generous donors of art work⁶⁹; of significant contributions to the Italian 'community'. However, the relationship between these ideas of duty and philanthropy, and class-based social differentiation alert us to the fact that defining Italianness in these ways endorses a certain economic and political order.

This pertains particularly to the *Stella all Merito del Lavoro*. The honoured are Italian 'co-nationals' who have suffered out of their duty to the country or to their trade. Labour is tightly bound to suffering and sacrifice, in Italian immigrant historicity. But in these state functions, labour is valued as productive of a good image of itself. Out of hard-work, Italian emigrants will promote a respectable image of Italian labour in general, and, by extension, of Italy. In the case of the *Stella all Merito del Lavoro*, labour is confined to the market economy rationale and its concepts of profit and prosperity. What is underlined in the state ceremonies, is the profit and prosperity of Italian nationhood by virtue of individual efforts. The award of these Medals by the Italian State honour the 'active citizen' who "engages in 'doing good' but purely in private capacity" (Hall and Held 1993: 174).

Moreover, the fact that eighteen men, no women, have received the *Stella* in the last three years indicates that the values promoted work in a gendered way. To put it simply, the title of honourable hard worker is available predominantly to men because it is granted for their actions within the labour market, where men hold the economic power and occupy most of the decision-making positions.

Without arguing for the reification of 'female' values and the need for the recognition of women *qua* women, there is something to be said about the location of the values and the inherent class and gender orders that are produced through them (Walby 1994). My argument is that differences of class and gender are obscured and

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #912, June 1994: 6.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

produced through contentions that the values of 'honour, fatherland, family' are universal. My concern here is about the embedment of languages of citizenship, national projects, and class/gendered systems of differentiation. Put differently, citizenship is invested with class and gendered systems of differentiation and has developed in relation to them (ibid.)⁷⁰

This is not to say that women are not recognised as citizens. In the Italian nationalist discourse, the centrality of the family suggests the political inclusion of women as mothers and wives, whose duties, however, are relegated to the 'private' sphere of social life. In the London Italian state ceremonies, individuals are praised for honouring the fatherland through fulfilling their public duties. Because of the entwinement of nationalism and gendered systems of differentiation, this public duty is masculinised: the soldier, the hard-worker, the cultural 'ambassador'.

By contrast to this masculinised portrayal of national allegiance stands the feminisation of the nation itself, exemplified in the annual *Miss Italia nel Mondo* beauty contest.

A few months after the conferment ceremony held in the London consulate, a contest for "Miss Italia in the world" brings young Italian women living abroad to compete, in Italy, for this gender specific version of Italian ambassadorship.⁷¹ The contest involves the selection of a Miss Italia for Great Britain (sic), who will then go to Italy to compete against peers for the "Miss Italia in the world" competition. This contest is the off-shoot of what used to be *Miss Emigrante*, and involves 'second generation' Italian women. The change of title occurred in the mid 1980s and signifies, for Terri Colpi,

the change in attitude towards emigration and the general strengthening of links between Italy and the expatriate Communities. (Colpi 1991b: 171)

Truly, the shift from *Miss Emigrante* to *Miss Italia in the world* also speaks of how communal identities are inscribed on women's bodies. The beauty queen is a particular version of the widespread portrayal of nations as women (Mosse 1985; Parker et al. 1992). By contrast to the fallen soldier, honoured as an active, brave, patriotic citizen, or to the Cavaliere/Maestre, congratulated for their individual efforts for the national good, beauty queens are chosen to embody the nation (or a collective referent of identification such as 'emigration'). Wrapped around their bodies is a

⁷⁰ The development of democratic rights in Italy, as elsewhere, interweaves with class and gender-based social differentiations. For example, in Italy, universal male suffrage was introduced in 1918, and women first voted in 1946.

⁷¹ See *La Voce degli Italiani*, #895, September 1993: 4.

banner identifying the Beauty Queens *as* the nation: Miss Italia in the world, or Miss Italia for Great Britain (sic), etc. Also, young women publicly compete against each other, thus staging a number of rivalries at once: between nations, between 'Italian communities', and between women. In the latter case, 'feminine' rivalry rather than solidarity is publicly displayed into a contest that casts women against each other. Finally, if this is another striking version of linking Italy with Italian emigrants, as Terri Colpi suggests, it also entrenches notions of femininity and womanhood. In short, Miss Italia in the world is a specific instance where gender, ethnicity and nation come together in the construction of a gendered nationhood. As national allegiance is masculinised ("You can take a man out of a country, but you can't take the country out of the man"), the nation is feminised.

Concluding remarks

To speak of origins has become highly unfashionable in these days of anti-essentialist critiques of identity formations. Yet the pervasive and obsessive quest for origins in a variety of minority movements should alert us to the necessity of scrutinising it. One of the questions at the heart of this study is precisely to examine how the production of coherent narratives of selfhood *combine* essentialist and pluralist ideas. As Breda Gray points out,

[a]lthough some theorists suggest that we are in a transnational era which undermines any concern with roots, migrants are constantly negotiating between nations, between 'where they're from and where they're at'. (Gray 1996: 2)

In this respect, '[t]ransnational mode[s] of existence' (Marienstras 1975: 179) and ambivalent connections with a prior or mythical homeland are constitutive elements of diasporas.

The ambivalence about physical return and attachment to the 'fatherland' is one vector of the London Italian 'drama of emigration' that London emigrant leaders seek to resolve by a return to the nation expressed in languages of citizenship and origins. These politics of identity combine notions of a fixed and inalterable original culture with notions of migration, change and transformation. By positing emigration as a central collective signifier, while calling for cultural preservation, Italian leaders of London simultaneously challenge and conform to nationalist conceptions of identity that rely on narratives of an original core culture, yet that do not easily accommodate mobility.

Origins appear as the nodal point linking political, cultural and generational concerns and stitching the 'here' and 'there' together. The language of origins emphasises descent and roots and substantiates ideas of an authentic, pure, a-historical, core culture confined within the borders of the 'fatherland'. The necessary return to the land of origin acts as a touchstone in the construction of a new identity, that also proceeds from a diasporic mode of existence.

In this respect, Italian politics of identity emerge from what Rosi Braidotti has labelled the 'migrant consciousness', "caught in an in-between state whereby the narrative of the origin has the effect of destabilizing the present." (1994: 24). The politics of identity of London Italians seem to be juggling with the Italian national myth that relies on narratives of origin, on the one hand, and present living conditions that are increasingly estranged from this 'origin', on the other. In other words, the London Italian diaspora moves between the two structures of local and national authorities. They look back to the country of origin for national identification but work hard to integrate the local experience into the identity formation. In short, the tension between 'here' and 'there' creates a border zone between identity-as-essence and identity-as-conjuncture from which a new diasporic identification emerges, combining pluralist and essentialist ideas of cultural identity (Gilroy 1991; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996).

Further, the political struggle over the definition of the Italian emigrants' destiny is deeply woven into kinship narratives that spell out ideas of generational responsibility embedded within gendered systems of differentiation. This is neatly captured in the story of Nicola, the soldier-son. His dedication to both his father and Italy encapsulates the way that nationalism weaves together nation and family and produces gendered images of citizenship and responsibility that are inscribed within the patriarchal family setting. By fusing nation and family together, discourses of national allegiance naturalise the different positions men and women occupy within national and ethnic communities.

Having described how Italian emigrant leaders represent the 'community' to Italy, I now turn to the ways that the 'community' represents itself to itself. I move away from the political life of Italian emigrants, into the daily life of St Peter's and the Centro Scalabrini, where I look at the ways in which local particularism is expressed and displayed in 'community' events.

Chapter 4

Religion, culture and local particularity

Mamma dami cento lire che in
America voglio andar

Italian folk song¹

Pattern is the soil of significance;
and it is surely one of the hazards
of emigration, and exile, and
extreme mobility, that one is
uprooted from that soil.

Eva Hoffman

So far, I have examined how ideas of kinship and origins are worked into the creation of an imagined community of Italians abroad. I have focused on the production of a cultural integrity that could guarantee the identity that Italians seek to recover in order to occupy a position of equality in relation to Britons. This is widely supported by a set of rhetorical strategies that simultaneously mimic and challenge nationalist definitions of identity and culture. The picture surfacing from my analysis, at this stage, is that identity formation for Italians abroad is very much "caught up with and defined against... the norms of the nation-state" (Clifford 1994: 307), to repeat a phrase cited earlier.

But is the Italian emigrant identity nothing more than a political and social category? How does it manifest itself in the local, everyday life? The remainder of the thesis is devoted to the regular activities of St Peter's and the Centro Scalabrini. I will be looking at public ceremonies, rituals and textual recollections as part of the local culture generated in the two institutions.

If we are to understand identity as neither a fixed essence nor an utterly contingent construction, we need to examine the social dynamics and mechanisms of continuity. Gatherings, rituals, processions that occur in the quotidian life of St Peter's and the Centro are of interest to me because they establish an intimate relationship of identification and recognition between the participants and create the effect of an internal, spontaneously reproduced ethnic core that binds them together. This is supported by a rhetoric of re-enactment that encloses them into a patterned sequence. Stories are told and re-told at roughly the same time each year, in roughly the same manner. As Hobsbawm and Ranger argue, ritualisation and formalisation lie at the basis of the invention of tradition, thus elevating into eternity what are,

¹ Mamma give me one hundred lira: I want to go to America.

rather, modern forms of remembrances (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Or, to be more precise, they exalt into timelessness a culture that is said to be *re*presented and *re*created by the different versions of 'community functions'.

Paul Connerton's work is useful here because of its insistence on 'habitual memory', where "the past is sedimented... in the body" (1989: 72), pointing the way to a definition of the changing same as both embodied *and* inscribed. Translated in Connerton's terms, Italian community life is constituted from a cluster of *inscribing* practices (practices of storing and retrieving information in print, photographs, sound tapes, video films, etc.), and *incorporating* practices (bodily postures and activities) which substantiate individual and collective selves. For Connerton, embodiment is an important aspect of cultural continuity. Following on from this lead, I suggest that 'community' events and commemorations are not only about cultural (re)production; they are also about producing identity and patterns of significance from which ideas of continuity can emerge. In this sense, identity is lived as coherent, eternal and pre-determined, though it is the outcome of practical activities: language, songs, prayers, and other bodily postures and gestures (Gilroy 1993a: 102).

In this chapter I enquire into the meanings emerging from the localised "soils of significance" (Hoffman 1989: 278). For if diaspora does involve some form of uprooting from patterns of significance, it also includes the construction of new grounds of identification that are not wholly deterritorialised. What I am concerned with is how the 'here' is inhabited and invested by an Italian presence; how the Italian presence manifests itself in London, and what is expressed in these displays. My question, in short, regards localised practices of identification. What specific dramas occur in St Peter's and in the Centro Scalabrini? What grounds of communality do they create? These rely, to a large extent, on different versions of memory work conceived, by 'ethnic brokers', as ways of *re*producing cultural specificity. What I examine here, is how memory may be highly localised and the various forms this localisation may take (Boyarin 1992: 2).

London Italian associative life is tightly bound up with religious institutions (Parolin 1979). The social events of a large number of London Italian clubs and associations take place in St Peter's social club or at the Centro Scalabrini, and are usually preceded by a religious service. Larger 'community' outings include a pilgrimage to the Aylesford monastery of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and the Scalabrini picnic which is solemnised by a Holy Mass. The churches play a significant role in 'community' life, and it is the nature of this role that I explore in

the following pages. For, to paraphrase Richard Rodriguez, clearly something is going on in these churches that is not only liturgical (1995: 78).

In the pages that follow, I pay attention to the place of religion in the cultural production of local particularity. I insert 'popular religion' under the rubric of 'popular culture', because the religious practice of Italians in London is rich with cultural meaning. My purpose is not to examine the Italians' faith nor their relationship to the Bible, but rather to take into account the circulation of religious practices and expressions in the production of localised particularisms. In this respect, the power of religious languages is not to be neglected. Religious language can provide a legitimacy which significantly appears to be above politics and beyond the present. It has the power to sanctify and to universalise cultural behaviours and social injunctions, rendering them somewhat timeless and spaceless. How this relates to gendering the community is examined in chapter 5.

This chapter contains three parts. I begin with an analytical survey of what Paul Connerton would call a 'calendrical rhetoric of re-enactment' (1989: 65): the structuring of the events, their calendrical organisation into an incessant flow patterned into a predictable yearly timetable.

Second, I unpack practices of remembering and forgetting that invest specific meanings into St Peter's and its surroundings. By analysing, first, a regular feature of the church's magazine, which reconstructs early-century 'Little Italy' through the lives of former residents, and second, the yearly procession in honour of the Madonna, I untangle the relationship between genealogy, geography, identity and difference in the construction of a second place of origin for Italians living in Britain.

Life at the Centro/Chiesa takes up the third section of the chapter. I reveal how the emphasis on emigration is less linked to a concern for origins and descent than to the invention of a new community. This relates to the task the London Centro Scalabrini sets itself as an 'ethnic church', the meaning of which is developed in an MA dissertation produced by one of its resident fathers at the time of my research, Father Gaetano Parolin (1979). The Catholic ethos is central to this discussion. Indeed, its unease with private worship fuels concerns for what Parolin has coined 'familistic religion'. Finally, a look at the Centro's 25th anniversary celebrations reveals how the organisation emphasises religious ideals of universalism to celebrate pseudo-pluralist forms of 'new ethnicities'.

It bears repetition that the popular culture of these institutions is set against the backdrop of great indeterminacy about the character of the Italian 'community'. The memory work invested in each setting, solves this indeterminacy in different ways.

But in both cases, one important mechanism of stabilisation consists of the structuration of London Italian life around a yearly timetable.

Organising London-Italian time

June 20 1993, lunch time, Centro Scalabrini in Brixton. Dressed in a white blouse and black skirt, I am reporting for duty. In order to access the Father's Day lunch organised by the *Club Donne Italiane*, I volunteered to wait on tables. This was my first observation of a 'community function'. Fortunately, it was also my last one as a waitress.

That Father's Day was the first of the social whirl of social occasions that I was to experience in that year. June, pilgrimage and picnic. July, the Procession. August, summer holidays, clubs are 'dark'. September, Grand-parents' day lunch. October, Charity bingo. November, Armistice ceremony. December, Christmas party. January, briscola competition.² February, Valentine's lunch. March, Easter lunch. April, CDI Quiz Night. May, *La Voce* Solidarity Banquet. To this day, I watch the months go by and recall which event is bringing together Monica, Luisa, Silvia, Domenico, Roberto, Angelo, Padre Russo and Padre Giandomenico (with his camera). The calendar of events frames the 'community' life. It punctuates it into a predictable, rhythmic continuity. Each year is much the same as the other. October, the Bingo...June, the pilgrimage and the picnic...July, the procession... Each month, *Backhill* and *La Voce* record the events, with details of the themes, speeches, distinguished guests and, occasionally, the menu, all with the obligatory photographs.³

Lodged between these 'community' events, are the annual lunches of regional or other associations — February is the Circolo Veneto's annual lunch. March is the Trinacria Gran Gala (Sicilians in England). December, the Trentini Association. Hence, the calendar also encloses a geographical reconstruction of Italian diversity, which all congeals in October, at the annual FAIE dinner-dance.

The FAIE (*Federazione delle Associazioni Italiani England*) includes close to 40 associations, clubs and *circoli*, most of them based in London. The annual dinner-

² Briscola is a card game. Card games are interesting sites where ethnic particularities are played out. Briscola is said to be the game of northern Italians, while *scopa* is that of southern Italians. Each group boasts the higher skills required for their game, and mocks the other as simplistic and 'childish'. In all the events I have attended, men would inevitably wind up playing cards, after lunch or dinner. The yearly briscola competition is organised by the women's club, in an attempt to breach this male bastion of ethnic popular culture. Card games, in sum, are spaces where a gendered ethnicity is played out and embattled.

³ Such details are usually found in *La Voce* rather than in *Backhill*. The latter usually provides a photograph with a short paragraph informing the readers of the nature of the event.

dance gathers representatives and members of most of these organisations. At the dinner I attended in 1993, along with Silvia and Monica's families, our table bore a small sign reading *Campani*, standing for the *Campani nell Mondo* association. When I ask if 'we' were from Campania, Monica laughed and replied, matter-of-factly, that no, 'we' were not from that area of Southern Italy. It turned out that none of the 15 guests in our party came from there. The 'link' was Monica's husband who came from a neighbouring region and had been vice-president of the association in the past. I wondered how many other tables were like ours... The fact is it didn't seem to matter where we were from. We all took part in this performative act of identity construction, signifying regional identities that had little bearing on the immediacy of our lives. Friendship and family ties are what brought together the guests at this table, not a *Campani* origin. The point is that the performance produced a regional identity for us all; a provisional identity card. One that was part of the constitutive diversity of the Italian national culture which was performed, that evening, under the auspices of FAIE.

Juxtaposed to these two layers of Italian 'community' life, are the activities occurring in different areas of Britain. *La Voce* and *Backhill* keep us informed of events in Scotland, Wales or Nottinghamshire. Meanwhile, readers may find out about visits to and meetings in Italy by Italian emigrants, or about visitors from Italy to Britain. Hence different routes of travel are superimposed on the calendar of events: Italian 'national' or 'regional' gatherings in different parts of England, Italian emigrants visiting Italy, Italians from Italy coming to Britain, or the yearly trips of the CDI to different parts of the world. The regular recording of these occasions conveys a sense of connected dispersal of the Italian population, a connection which spans out to Italy or other countries, where Italians from the world occasionally meet (in international meetings on migration, or of the Italian press abroad, etc.) All this interconnects within a series of movements and moments, seemingly spontaneous and sporadic, framed by a calendrical logic which, year after year, provides a sense of continuity and stability.⁴

⁴ We must bear in mind that these events are not equally accessible to everybody. While a number of lunches and events are held in the social club of St Peter's or the Centro, many dinner dances and galas take place in stylish hotels, with prices ranging from 30 to 50 pounds a head. The Royal Lancaster, The Grosvenor, The London Hilton or Cafe Royal are regular venues where men in tuxedos and women in long gowns eat, dance and pose for photographers. Similarly, the annual trips abroad organised by the CDI are not affordable for many women, who might join other groups in weekend trips to Ireland, Scotland and the like. An extensive ethnography of the world of Italian *prominenti* and 'community brokers' would be necessary to unwrap the intricate relationship between class, ethnicity and the politics of identity in multicultural Britain. Such issues are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Returning home from the Father's Day lunch, with aching feet and back, exhausted and hungry, I could not but praise all those involved in 'community work'. The energy and time spent in maintaining the community life is tremendous. For solidarity is not a natural outcome of an assumed shared identity. Women of the CDI and men from the churches and the numerous associations spend days organising lunches, games, sporting events, daily excursions, travels abroad, and other gatherings that bring together members of the 'community'. These women, most of whom are volunteers, and men, some of whom are 'professional community organisers' (such as the Scalabriniani fathers), actively *produce* the community.

But what is this community about? What is re-created in these settings? What do these collective self-representations speak of? The rest of this chapter looks into these questions. In the next section, I examine some of the activities of St Peter's church, and explore how they invest a distinct area of London with historical and genealogical meanings that support definitions of identity and difference. I will pay particular attention to two cultural productions of St Peter's: a textual narrative of 'Little Italy', and the annual procession.

Geography, genealogy and Little Italy as a second place of origin

It was on a hot and sunny Sunday of August 1992 that I first ventured into a section of Clerkenwell, where 'The Italian Church' still stands. Having read Lucio Sponza's history of Italians in 19th century London, my first visit to Clerkenwell was daunting. Instead of finding a Dickensian street life bustling with markets, cries, songs and aromas, I discovered a quiet, desolate quarter of London. This is more pronounced on weekends, where shops are closed, the market stalls of Saffron Hill are shut down, leaving two local pubs and a hole-in-the-wall off-licence open to the odd customer. The stillness and deserted character of the area contrasts starkly with what once was the most densely populated area of London and a main settlement of Italian immigration. Only the silent trace of Giuseppe Mazzini testifies to Little Italy's past. Above the door of a barber shop tucked away in a side street is a plaque, erected in 1922, in honour of the renowned leader of the Risorgimento. It is made of a large, rectangular stone, bearing a bas-relief of Mazzini's head. Under it, a string of laurel leaves and a text that reads:

Dio Popolo Pensiero 1805-1872 In this country,
Giuseppe Mazzini the apostle of modern democracy,
inspired young Italy with the ideal of the
independence, unity and regeneration of his country.

This testimony is what Jonathan Boyarin would see as a sign marking something that 'was and no longer is' (Boyarin 1992: 4), and in this regard, this section of Holborn is a 'place of forgetting'. Boyarin argues that memory and forgetting are not simple opposites but, rather, are in a relation of direct proportion. Like remembering, forgetting is historical, social and processual. It is not merely absence: it is simultaneously a process and a state. In this area of central London, the relationship between forgetting and space is not simply about the *absence* of a 'neighbourhood' life. This is a place where a face-to-face community of daily interactions *was and no longer is*. An area where people like Giuseppe Mazzini are forgotten in the local Italian popular culture, while the lives of poor Italian immigrants are remembered, monthly, in St Peter's magazine (see below).

The relation between forgetting and space is interrupted by the living presence of the area's central landmark: St Peter's Italian church, where the drama of Little Italy is enacted and re-enacted in various forms. As I walked towards the Church on that day of August 1992, the sounds of Italian *ciaccie* (chatter) and the presence of men and women in their Sunday best, broke the silence of the surroundings. It was this small cluster of activity that directed me to the church.

St Peter's church stands discreetly between two adjoining buildings, with the porch and entrance enclosed under two wide arches, above which are three niches. In the centre stands a statue of Christ with, on each side, large mosaics depicting scenes from the Gospel: Jesus handing the keys of Heaven to St Peter and the Miraculous catch of fish. But the discreteness of the church entrance belies the grandeur of its interior. Walking in, through the large, double panelled doors, I found myself in the ornate (and familiar) surroundings of a Roman Catholic church.

St Peter's church is, for most Italians I have met, *the* place of worship, especially for special occasions. It became the core of the 'original settlement' and is still seen as the heart of the present day 'community'. It is the *Casa nostra*, where Italians return for their weekly visit, to attend the annual procession della Madonna, or to celebrate the rites of passage that punctuate their life. The church premises are emblematic of 'home', a place where Italian culture is inscribed. A reliable enclave in the hostile, 'vast city'.

The Church of course, IS THE COMMUNITY. It ably fulfils the needs of Italians in London on so many levels – religious, social, moral – dealing with the problems of drugs, bringing solace to the dying, and comfort to prisoners, visiting the sick and elderly, and also performing the joyous rites of the Church, such as weddings, Baptisms and

Confirmations etc., again the list is endless. No one needs to be told the many different roles our Priests have to fulfil, meeting daily, problems of the community with patience and good spirits. We NEED OUR CHURCH AND OUR PRIESTS very much, but especially for us, in this vast city where we are exposed to many bad influences. The Church is like a rock, keeping us steadfast in our faith. Without the physical presence of a Centre (the bricks and mortar), the Community would begin to flounder, and eventually cease altogether...⁵

The church, the *casa nostra*, echoes images of family and household pervading the textual narratives examined in chapter 2. It is asserted as the institution where ethnicity is tried and preserved. Without it, the community would flounder. As such, St Peter's is defined as the cradle of London Italian authenticity.

Yet St Peter's occupies a mixed position within the local Catholic hierarchy. On the one hand, it has a national parish status, that is to say that it is the official church for all Italians of England. On the other, it answers to the diocese of Westminster. In the mass celebrating the 130th anniversary of St Peter's (9 May 1993), Padre Carmelo insisted on the latter, publicly asserting to Cardinal Hume, invited for the occasion, that St Peter's considers itself part of the British Roman Catholic Church, dismissing its national parish status as "not important". Concomitantly, Padre Carmelo de-ethnicised St Peter's by stressing that it is part of the "British Catholic family".

The position of St Peter's in British Italian historicity results from a conjuncture of historical conditions.⁶ Originally, the church was destined to be an international Roman Catholic cathedral. It was intended to minister to the religious needs of the large number of Catholics resident in and constantly hurrying through London. Its initial name was to be St Peter's Roman Catholic Church of all Nations⁷, but when it opened in 1863, it was simply called St Peter's Church. Only later did it become known as St Peter's Italian Church. The Catholic community of Holborn, in the mid and late nineteenth century, consisted mainly of Italians and Irish. But soon after the completion of St Peter's, the nearby thirteenth-century chapel of the Bishop of Ely was restored to the Roman Catholics and, in 1879, was re-opened as St

⁵ From a non-dated booklet published at St Peter's, *St Peter's Renovation Fund*. Capitals original.

⁶ It is often assumed that 'ethnic organisations' appear somewhat spontaneously, resulting from the 'natural' needs of immigrant populations. As if they are mere extensions of an inherent way of life. Contrary to such beliefs, St Peter's was not built in answer to the pressure from Italians living in Holborn in the late 1800s. As we have seen in the opening chapter, Pallottini fathers were sent to London for fear that Italians might be converted to Protestantism.

⁷ *The Builder*, May 14, 1853: p. 312.

Etheldreda's Catholic Chapel, in Ely Place. Italians and Irish tended to attend St Peter's and St Etheldreda respectively. But this division had not always been: in October 1871, for instance, the Italian Church and its annexed rooms were used by Irish republicans and 'home rulers' for their political meetings (Sponza 1988: 139, 202).⁸ Poles also used the church's crypt as a place of worship for the National Polish Church. In addition, the Italian Church would cater to Catholic immigrants from other parts of the Continent, for religious ceremonies such as the Solemn Octave of the Epiphany. On such occasions, apart from the usual masses in Italian or in English, St Peter's would have French, Polish or German speaking preachers.

Such moments of intercultural contact and mixture are forgotten in the memories haunting St Peter's church. Memories that not only inhabit the church premises themselves, but also its immediate surroundings. St Peter's and its location acquire their signifying potency out of the relationship between them. The church is located in what used to be a section of Little Italy, or *Il Quartiere Italiano*, in Clerkenwell. An area, as indicated above, haunted with memories and forgettings, some of which are deposited at St Peter's. Up the stairway, in the portico, are two war monuments. One is dedicated to the memory of the Italians residing in London who died in the Great War of 1914-1918. This monument lists 175 names and was erected under the auspices of the National Association of War Veterans in November 1927. Above this memorial, a bronze bas-relief represents a lifeboat, overloaded with men, arms stretched out, expressions of horror on their faces: it honours the 446 Italians who lost their lives in the sinking of the *Arandora Star*. A committee composed of some survivors and members of the Mazzini-Garibaldi Club were responsible for this initiative, in November 1960. The inscription reads: "To the memory which lives on in the hearts of the relatives, the survivors and the Italian Community". Each year, a remembrance ceremony for these victims is held at St Peter's. The location of these national memorials on the church's premises brings together nation and religion and testifies to the national status of St Peter's. But these memorials are also, and foremost, landmarks of London (and British) Italian historicity, inscribing past alliance (in the 1914-18 war) and enmity (in the 1939-45 war) with Britain.

⁸ The relationship between Irish and Italian Catholics has been punctuated by tensions and reconciliations which would merit further investigation. Some authors claim that as in the United States, the Italian churches of Britain have led a long battle to gain recognition and to remain separate from the Irish led British Catholic hierarchy. To this day, it is said that the conflict still exists between the two bodies (Colpi 1991; Marin 1975; Bottignolo 1985). What form this tension takes remains obscure. During my fieldwork, I could only pick up on hints of tension expressed by clerics, most of which were reluctant to say more, preferring to dismiss it as "water under the bridge". Often, however, I was informed of the crucial difference between Italian and Irish popular religion: " 'we' bring our food and wine to parish or community gathering, 'they' only drink beer."

At another level, St Peter's also relies on the continuous use of its premises, by Italians, for its survival. Each week, a small section of what used to be Little Italy comes to life as the air fills with voices of Italian men and women gathered on the pavement, and aromas from the Italian deli located in the building owned by St Peter's and open Sundays mornings. On occasions such as in the weekly masses, the weekly weddings, the funerals, the Sunday lunches at St Peter's social club, the yearly Procession of the Madonna, the silence of the neighbourhood is broken. On these occasions, participants journey back to St Peter's, re-enacting a migration back to and out of (Little) Italy. These weekly services, with Italian communicants praying in Italian (bar one mass in English), are what makes St Peter's Italian: to put it simply, without Italians, the status of St Peter's as *the* Italian church, would flounder.

As for the immediate surroundings of St Peter's, known as 'The Hill' (short for 'Backhill', a street off Clerkenwell Road that runs alongside the church), they also constitute an inherent part of London Italian historicity. Whether through popular religion (such as the annual Procession della Madonna) or in written histories, this section of Little Italy is repeatedly retraced and its confines redefined. Here, the neighbourhood is construed as the 'original settlement', a second 'place of origin' which is similar to, yet distinct from, Italy the fatherland (*patria*). As such, the Italian Quarter bears some specific characteristics which re-occur in the social texts of its (re)production. Within the memories, commemorations and stories of Little Italy, the intricate strands of the community's fabric weave together, to create both its social and geographical foundations. An example of stories from *Il Quartiere* is found in a regular feature of St Peter's monthly publication, *Backhill*.

Started in November 1992, "The Hill" is written by a British-Italian woman, Olive Besagni. Its typical pieces are on families or portraits of individuals, all of which emerge from stories told to Besagni by former residents of *Il Quartiere Italiano*, or their descendants. These short biographies are set against the backdrop of the everyday life of Little Italy in the late 19th or early 20th centuries.

To a large extent, this chronicle bears the hallmarks of the textual narratives examined in chapter 2. The community, here, is symbolically reconstructed through the lens of the patriarchal family, with its systems of gendered and generational differentiation. In Besagni's series, the story of *Il Quartiere* is the story of families who share the experience of (e)migration, hardship, hard work and hope, all of which

will be redeemed through the successful integration of the 'second' generation.⁹ Yet Besagni's chronicle also carries distinctive characteristics, which I want to discuss here. These are the ways genealogy and geography are worked into the creation of new grounds of identification.

In contrast to the narratives discussed in chapter 2, genealogical reconstructions in *The Hill* serve to create communal ties that extend beyond the patriarchal family. In Besagni's stories, readers are introduced to the characters of each story through their links — kinship, professional, or other — with other former residents, some of whose stories could have been told in previous issues. In other cases, the genealogy is more conventional and retraces the family tree of the characters. For example, in one of her features, Besagni writes of her friend, Romano Viazzani, who

would often relate to me stories told to him by his paternal *nonna* [grandmother], Antonietta Viazzani. Antonietta was born in 'Il Quartiere Italiano' in the year 1903 and she celebrated her 90th birthday this year. Antonietta is living in Soho now with her daughter-in-law Rita and her granddaughter Alma. This months' story...takes us back to 'Il Quartiere' in the year 1881, when Antonietta's mother, Assunta Cattini, was born.¹⁰

Such genealogical tracings usually provide a trans-generational backdrop to the main story, linking past to present, linking memories to 'real' people, linking former Little Italy residents to the present day, geographically dispersed, 'community'.

The Nastri sons... all married to English girls, all had good marriages and as you can imagine there are plenty of young Nastri's growing up in England today. All as a result of that journey made by Trofimenia and Alfonso way back in the year 1908.¹¹

⁹ As the following excerpt illustrates:

Over the years [Taddeo] developed a rheumatic condition which plagued him for the rest of his life. He vowed that his children would receive a good education and never have to work in the kind of conditions, detrimental to health and family life, that he had experienced. He clearly steered them in the right direction. Antonio... went into banking... he was a greatly respected member of the community. Annie was a brilliant seamstress. She was employed in the finest haute couture fashion houses... Luisa...although plagued by poor health, she eventually...became a linguistic secretary. Damaso was an accountant, he enjoyed life, and he could be found in the "Coach and Horses" where he was known for his formidable skill as a card player. (*Backhill*, December 1992/January 1993: 9)

For a fuller description of these aspects of Besagni's chronicle, see Fortier, forthcoming.

¹⁰ *Backhill*, October 1993: 8.

¹¹ *Backhill*, March 1993: 30.

Cultural critiques such as Walter Benn Michaels (1993) might be tempted to conclude that such re-constructions conceal racist views of culture, since languages of descent are actually languages of biology and blood ties. Though Besagni's emphasis on the ideal heterosexual couple reproduces the kind of post-national *essentialism* discussed in chapter 2, it does not suggest that the culture of the present day 'community' is *biologically* determined by its lineage. This case is a good example of the distinction that must be made between biological determinism and other forms of essentialism. Here, trans-generational links collapse the past into the present and give substance to London Italian historicity and solidarity. Besagni's social genealogy conveys a sense of movement: movement in time and space. Regular correspondence between Besagni and some readers further adds to this sense of a *living* community that descends from the first settlers in *Il Quartiere*. She writes of people who contact her, having recognised a cousin, neighbour, friend in a photograph, asking for information or offering to tell her their own story. As her stories extend into one another, the complex fabric of community life and membership slowly surfaces. Besagni's stories constitute a version of memory work that is particularly rich with images of duration, thanks to her strategic use of genealogy as a ground for communal identifications that extend beyond family based images of 'the community'.

Combined with this element of continuity is a contemplation of geography and boundaries. In Besagni's feature, details of street names and addresses, of shop and pub names, photographs and accounts of the street-life, bring Little Italy back to life, drawing it as a 'place of origin' descendants can return to and re-member. In one instance, Besagni reprints a letter she received, where a reader from Birmingham, tracing his 'family-tree' in order to find his 'roots' (sic), asks for information regarding the Alberici family that once lived in Clerkenwell. He then tells of his journey to Clerkenwell.

...so I decided to visit Clerkenwell and discovered St Peter's Italian Church, as it seems to be the heart of the Community, and I felt so close to my ancestors and tried to picture their marriages taking place there. On entering the Church Arcade I noticed to the left a commemorative plaque in honour of Italians who died in the 1st World War, and to my surprise was listed an ancestor "Giampietro Alberici". I have twice returned to St Peter's to celebrate the Procession in Honour of Our Lady of Mount Carmel which is held in July. Both occasions have been enjoyable and I have really felt that I am re-tracing

the surroundings and traditions that would have been familiar to my ancestors.¹²

St Peter's and the section of Clerkenwell where it stands, constitute a place of pilgrimage for the Italian emigrant population of Britain. People journey back to these surroundings, perhaps seeking to capture a bit of 'what it was like' for their predecessors, or simply to 'see' where they lived and worshipped. Through these journeys, physical and symbolic, the place becomes what de Certeau calls a 'practised space'. It is "composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense articulated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it." ([1980] 1990: 117)

Movement and migration are important features of Besagni's stories. Though emigration is the inaugural moment of all the life stories Besagni collects, migration is a recurring event throughout the lives of these people. As such, migration and displacement are constitutive of the 'community'. However, Besagni does not represent the migrant character of the community as a pathology that can only be solved by a return to Italy. The relationship with Italy is pervasive yet ambiguous, in Besagni's accounts. People go back during the war years, or to recover from severe illness, or to bury their children. But they do not go back to an Italy conceived as the only possible home. 'Home' is both in London and in Italy.

Life in 'The Hill' is depicted in diasporic terms. This involves the possibility of multiple places of belonging, as well as incessant movement and migration. Migration, however, is usually a process initiated by men. Men are more likely to migrate on their own, to seek work, while women are 'sent' away by their family for a number of reasons — job opportunities, to be separated from a man they fancied, etc. — or they migrate to join someone else. Even narratives about courting are marked by a masculinist representation of mobility. Men emigrate to London and to their loves, or they return to Italy to marry and bring their wife back to London.¹³ The passivity of the women is striking in these accounts of courtship, where occasionally they reluctantly accept the proposal of their admirer, eventually *won* by his love.¹⁴

Though policed by a gendered system of differentiation, migration appears as a defining feature of the life of these Italians. Paradoxically, the repetitive evocations of migration act upon the delimitation of *Il Quartiere* as an enclosed space, surrounded by an imagined boundary. We rarely go beyond its limits, and when we do, it seems like a temporary migration. Even the daily journey to work in the West

¹² *Backhill*, June 1993: 10.

¹³ See the stories of Martino Mora (*Backhill*, February 1993: 10), Alfonso Natri (*Backhill*, March 1993: 12) and Taddeo Molinari (*Backhill*, December 1992/January 1993: 8).

¹⁴ *Backhill*, March 1993: 12.

End conveys this sense of moving between two different worlds. *Il Quartiere Italiano* emerges from Olive Besagni's narrative as a space enclosed and distant from the rest of the world.

I asked them if they ever felt threatened outside the confines of 'Il Quartiere Italiano' on account of their obvious Italianness. Pasqua said that he "did to a degree, but it was worse during the War Years." Victor volunteers that "whenever we represented the school in competitive athletics or football, we always felt that we were competing for Italy, rather than the school."¹⁵

This suggests that in the minds of some of the residents, Little Italy was Italy. However, overlaying the boundary between Little Italy and Elsewhere¹⁶ is another boundary that separates this Italian quarter from another Italian 'colony'. At the turn of the century, a small Italian settlement developed in Soho, predominantly populated by traders in the catering industry. According to Sponza, the corporate mentality of the Soho business people contributed to maintaining a spatial separation between the two neighbouring 'colonies'.

The spatial separation between the bulk of the new Italian settlement around Soho and the old Italian quarter in Holborn (now extended to Finsbury) also contributed to a narrow corporate sentiment which resulted in 'its tendency to isolate itself from the other categories of [Italian] workers, and to avoid absolutely any contact with itinerant Italians'. The setting up of a trade organization by the Italians engaged in catering confirms that such a corporate attitude did materialize. (Sponza 1988: 106)

Moreover, the Italian residents of Holborn were from Campani, Emilian and Tuscany, while those of Soho mainly came from Lombardi and Piedmont (Colpi 1991a: 55). Without wanting to overstate ethnic differences, it is likely that, at the turn of the century, regional identities joined in with class differences in the constitution of two very localised Italian immigrant identifications. Interestingly, Besagni's narratives retell a similar story: not so much a story of rivalry, but one of absence. Remembering Holborn's Italian Quarter is concomitant with forgetting Soho's Little Italy.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Backhill*, March 1993: 30.

¹⁶ This analogy is used by Henry Louis Gates to map out the boundary between the area where he was brought up in Piedmont, West Virginia, and other parts of the town, state or country. Gates 1994.

¹⁷ I am grateful to the Italian immigrant woman — she did not name herself — who alerted me to this point, at a talk I gave on Besagni's narratives, at the Club Donne Italiane, in November 1994. Fortier 1994.

But this enclosure did not result from processes of internal antagonism and self-identification alone. From the turn of the century to the post-war years, Italian immigrants were subjected to discrimination. This inhibited their chances to secure employment, to get housing, etc. As I mentioned in chapter 3, the rehabilitation of Italian immigrants only began in the sixties. Many Italians I have met in the course of my research have told me about the days when they hid their Italian identity, changed their names, concealed their accent and avoided speaking Italian in the street. Being spat at, ridiculed, discriminated against at school or at work was the lot of many Italians living in London up until the late fifties.

In the recollections collected by Besagni, the sense of community and belonging comes out of the simultaneous influence of an inherently 'felt' sense of ethnicity, and the shared experiences of emigration and settlement.

Trofimenia was happy enough in her new home [in Gt. Bath Street, in the heart of Little Italy], at least she was amongst her own kind, and the majority of their neighbours and friends were all in the same boat, which helped to overcome homesickness which from time to time must have prevailed.¹⁸

These were hard times for the family but their situation wasn't any worse than many of their neighbours and friends...¹⁹

In short, the boundaries surrounding Holborn's Little Italy were more than symbolic constructions. They resulted, in particular times, from multiple processes of exclusion/inclusion through which the residents of this London area developed a localised sense of identity. Today, this population is dispersed, integrated in the London social and economic fabric, yet the boundaries Besagni retraces around the Italian Quarter produce another form of localism. This is a localism that is not the outcome of memories of rivalries and discrimination, but rather of their forgetting. Moreover, a process of enclosure pulls the genealogical links back to this distinct geographical location. Recollections of 'The Hill', in this respect, serve to create a historical environment for Italians in Britain, thus substantiating and legitimating their existence as a distinct community.

The pilgrimage of Mr Alberici, cited above, illustrates this. In his letter, Mr Alberici also states that he returned twice to St Peter's, to attend the annual procession in honour of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. This event is the most important affair of St Peter's, if not of the 'community'. Its significance is the result not only of the large

¹⁸ *Backhill*, March 1993: 13.

¹⁹ *Backhill*, February 1993: 10.

crowds it attracts, but of its very nature and the cultural meanings that are projected onto it.

The annual procession *della Madonna del Carmine* takes place on July 16, or the first Sunday thereafter. Members of St Peter's pride themselves on the fact that the first procession was, in 1883, the first public demonstration of Catholicism to have occurred since the pre-Reformation days (Sponza 1993: 133). In this regard, this procession may be read as a statement aimed at the British Protestant world. In short, the procession is about being Italian Catholic in an English, predominantly Protestant world.

This particular form of veneration of the Madonna is not, however, a typically Italian practice. In the words of an organiser, the procession is the re-enactment of village feasts dedicated to their respective patron Saints. "Since we cannot have feasts for each village of origin of London Italians, we hold this big event for all of them and we chose to honour Our Lady". This type of reverence for the Madonna is a practice traditionally found in Southern Italian areas. However, when the first procession in Britain took place, the Italian population was predominantly from northern areas.

The Madonna of Mount Carmel does not seem to have been a symbol of particular devotion in any of the main provinces in Italy from which the immigrants predominantly came. It was a tradition which developed (thus was 'invented') in London, possibly originated by the Catholic revival among Irish people in Holborn and Islington in the early 1850s. It appears to have started when one Father William Young concluded his 'mission in the church after Sunday vespers with a custom unknown to Old Catholicism, a distribution of thousands of scapulars of the Passion and Our Lady of Carmel.' (Sponza 1988: 315 n. 78)

Along with this example of 'invented tradition', the concurrence of the first procession with Catholic emancipation points to the wider issue of syncretism in terms of religious practices in general. I will return to this later; but first, a description of the event is called for.

Preparations for the big day begin several weeks in advance: sketches are drawn out for the floats, costumes are mended, flowers are ordered, food is prepared, stalls are repaired, volunteers are recruited. On the eve of the event, seven floats are built by a number of volunteers: families and friends arrive early afternoon and set out in teams to work on each float. Inside the church, food and drinks are laid out. Padre Russo walks around, beaming, with his contagious smile, looking around him with

pride, obviously enjoying the presence of his parishioners, gathered for this special event. Dressed in his black suit and white dog-collar, he stands at the door or in the dining room, greeting and chatting with people, teasing the younger ones, joking with others. Padre Carmelo, for his part, is casually dressed, sometimes showing up outside, but generally more discreet than Padre Russo. He approaches people in a more intimate way, often holding one by the arm and chatting quietly. Meanwhile, men, women, children build the floats and by seven o'clock, all is practically finished: just in time for the Saturday evening mass, where some will stop before heading home.

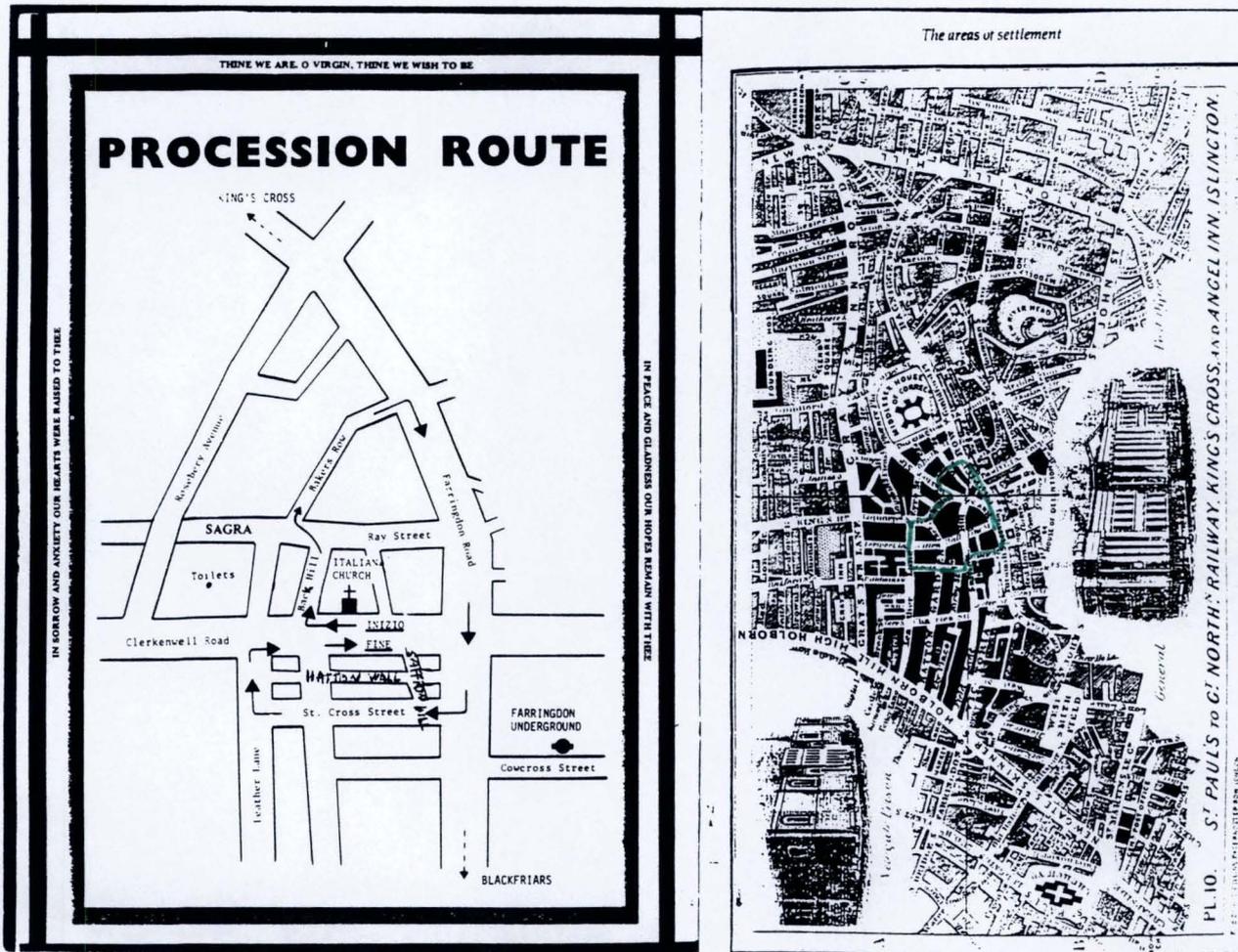
The next day, everyone is back, ready to take on different roles. From two o'clock, people arrive and the streets fill with wanderers who stroll amongst the stalls to try their luck at the tombola or eat a *salsiccia* (sausage) and apple fritter. They buy the programme — roughly the same as the previous and following years' — and an Italian flag or a balloon for the children.

Around three o'clock, the Madonna emerges from the church, supported by four porters, framed by a flowered arch. She is the centre-piece of the day's event, and will be closing the procession behind a trail of seven floats, each representing a biblical scene. On each float, yesterday's builders and artists are turned into angels, saints, Jesus or the Virgin Mary. The procession also includes statues of Saints, small groups led by their association's banner, the year's first communicants, altar servers and, finally, the parishioners, praying and singing, led by Padre Carmelo and the Bishop of Westminster.

The procession travels through the winding streets around St Peter's church in a long and slow re-mapping of Little Italy's 'core', the heart of which is the church, where the procession begins and ends (figure 2). During the two hours it takes to complete, the map of 'Il Quartiere Italiano' is re-drawn, the streets of the former 'Little Italy' are re-appropriated and invested with sounds, colours, odours and images of Italy. The *sagra* (fair) marks the distinction of London Italian Catholicism, where the sacred has a taste and a smell. Stalls sell Italian wine, *salsiccia*, cakes, or strawberries & cream with sparkling wine. As in all 'community' events, food and wine are part of this religious celebration.

In the early evening, the crowd slowly disperses. The noise dies out, the stalls are dismantled, the cleaning agency comes in to clear up. Once again, Italians of London have expressed their faith with a difference. This annual event is, for some (such as my friend Silvia), an unmissable moment of worship and religious devotion. For others, it is a feast, a time of reunion with friends or family, a brief immersion in

Figure 2 Procession route and 'Little Italy' in 1854



For the sake of comparison, I transposed today's procession route onto the streets of former Little Italy to highlight how the procession re-maps a small section of nineteenth-century Holborn.

'Italian culture' for their children or grand-children.²⁰ This yearly performance is a celebration of the Italian presence in London, where demonstrations of faith and culture are simultaneously displayed. In contrast to the weekly masses, this version of religious worship is much more secularised. Worshipers, organisers and participants celebrate Italian culture, or, rather, Italian religious culture, displaying their difference in a non-Catholic, English world.

The procession brings together diverse segments of the Italian population. However, this is not specific to the procession: the pilgrimage to Aylesford, or the annual Scalabrini picnic, are as multi-generational, multi-regional and multi-class events. What distinguishes the procession from other Italian gatherings is not its internally diverse character, but its multicultural one. In other words, the procession is a 'public' event, held in selected streets of Clerkenwell, open to a public of spectators who are not overwhelmingly, though perhaps predominantly, Italian. It symbolises the multicultural fabric of London and in this respect, is distinct from other Italian 'community' events. It publicly states the Italian presence in multicultural London. To make another distinction, other 'community events' are more internally directed: in order to take part in them, one needs to be 'in the know'. The procession, for its part, is less policed by this internal network. It is not as well-known as the Notting Hill Carnival, but it is listed as an 'Ethnic London' event in *Time-Out London Guide* (1992 edition) and attracts many tourists and non-Italian Londoners.

It is easy to label such manifestations as 'ethnic' and to encase them as traditions that testify to some authentic, discrete culture. Yet the origins of the procession have already alerted us to the issues of historical construction and syncretism. In terms of patterns of devotion, the procession is not unique. Irish Londoners, Portuguese Montrealers, and other Catholics world-wide hold their own processions honouring the Virgin Mary. This devotion is religiously, not ethnically, specific. Its ethnic specificity is rather the outcome of particular practices: language, food, etc.

Yet the procession is lived as specifically Italian, and by extension, re-asserts St Peter's church as *the* Italian church. Without engaging into a detailed analysis of the meanings of this devotion in (Italian) Catholicism, it is worth pointing out that the two institutions where local particularity is staged — the family and the church — are

²⁰ In one procession day, I witnessed a little boy grimacing at an Italian sausage his grandmother was trying to feed him. "He is used to English food", she explains. "It's a big shame. A good two months in Italy would do him good!".

blessed with the presence and care of a woman — the wife/mother and the Virgin Mary. It is interesting that this hallmark of Catholicism is wheeled out and displayed in migration as a public statement of cultural difference. What I want to suggest is that the procession della Madonna is not exclusively about cultural (re)production. It also concerns the construction of an ideal of femininity that interacts with the creation of local particularity (see chapter 5).

In sum, St Peter's church and its surroundings are invested with memories and forgettings that produce a second place of origin for Italians in Britain. The politics of identity reveal that genealogy and geography disturb each other in the recovery of an ideal original culture located in Italy. In contrast, the creation of a second place of origin calls upon the conjunction of genealogy and geography, and establishes a congruence between them. Furthermore, though genealogy rather than ethnicity constitutes new grounds of identification, it complexly combines masculinist ideas of mobility with community-based (rather than family-based) narratives of descent that echo a post-national essentialism characteristic of contemporary diasporas (Gilroy 1993)

St Peter's is the stage where the drama of settlement is enacted and re-enacted. As such, it plays the role of the guardian of Italians' second origins. In contrast, the Chiesa del Redentore, though it also relies on memories, looks more to the future than to the past, in an attempt to proceed from the drama of emigration in order to create itself anew and differently.

Chiesa del Redentore: from 'ethnic church' to Christian universalism

The *Chiesa del Redentore* (Church of the Redeemer) is a small church, part of the Centro Scalabrini in Brixton. Its interior was recently renovated in Italian classical style "to bind ... a Church loved by many of our community, to our history, to our cultural tradition".²¹

The Chiesa and the Centro Scalabrini in Brixton, are commonly associated with the 'new community', that is the immigrants arriving in Britain after 1945. The presence of the Centro/Chiesa is unequivocally tied to the drama of emigration. Indeed, the entire *raison d'être* of the Scalabrini mission revolves around migration.

This is the mission that the Church has entrusted
itself through the Founder, the bishop of Piacenza

²¹ These were the words of the designer of the renovations, quoted in the Centro's 25th anniversary booklet. See Centro Scalabrini di Londra 1993: 9.

Giovanni Battista Scalabrini: to make itself migrant
with the migrants...²²

The mandate of the mission is captured in one of the Chiesa's four stained-glass windows (figure 3). In this window, we see the founder of the congregation encountering emigrants at the Milan train station in 1887, the incident said to be at the origin of the foundation of this missionary order. The tracks trace a central line in the scene, drawing our gaze towards a globe, which covers the opening of a tunnel. The tracks and the globe meet at the centre of the image, symbolically linking Italy with the world, the present with the unknown future. In the foreground, stands the founder himself, and, slightly behind him, two 'pioneers' (sic) of the London Mission — P. Walter Sacchetti, founder of the Centro, and the late P. Silvano Bartapelle. In the background, on the left of the tracks, stand two figures, a man and a woman, with their luggage, looking towards the globe, their back turned against us. In this representation of the Scalabrini mission — a similar version of which exists in the Chapel of the Scalabrini see in Rome — the train station symbolically portrays a zone between Italy and abroad. A zone where emigrants escape poverty in search of a better life. The train station, or more specifically, as Cavallaro suggests, the train tracks, act as a symbolic hyphen joining two national boundaries and two timespaces. In Calabrese immigrants' life stories, the railway figures as a trace — a hyphen — linking Italy and Bedford, the space of origins and the industrial space (Cavallaro 1981: 93), tradition and modernity. The railway, in Italian historicity, is a border zone bringing together two distinct, yet overlapping, timespaces constitutive of the present day London Italian identity formation.

Like in the textual narratives of chapter 2, emigration is the inaugural moment of the Centro/Chiesa's ethos. It is where Italians in London come from, and, as we will see below, it is re-articulated in the constitution of a new, localised, yet plural discourse of identity. "People do not know where they are going, if they ignore where they are from", writes Umberto Marin (Centro Scalabrini di Londra 1993: 7). It is the task of the Centro/Chiesa to make the link, to act as the hyphen in the transition from the drama of emigration to the consolidation of a renewed and emancipated identity.

The role of the 'ethnic community', in a view expressed by Padre Parolin, is essential for the "safe process of integration of immigrants into the host society", a process proceeding from a position of strength rather than the state of weakness and premature disruption resulting from migration (Parolin 1979: 131). According to this

²² Scalabrini vade-mecum, quoted in a leaflet commemorating the centennial of the congregation. See *Missionari di San Carlo Scalabrini* (1987).

Figure 3
Stained glass window, Chiesa del Redentore
Scalabrini in the Milan train station

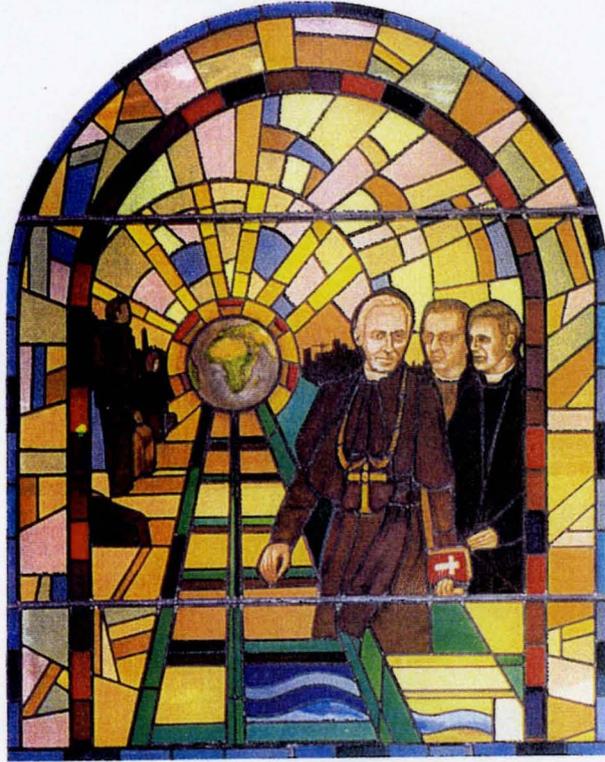
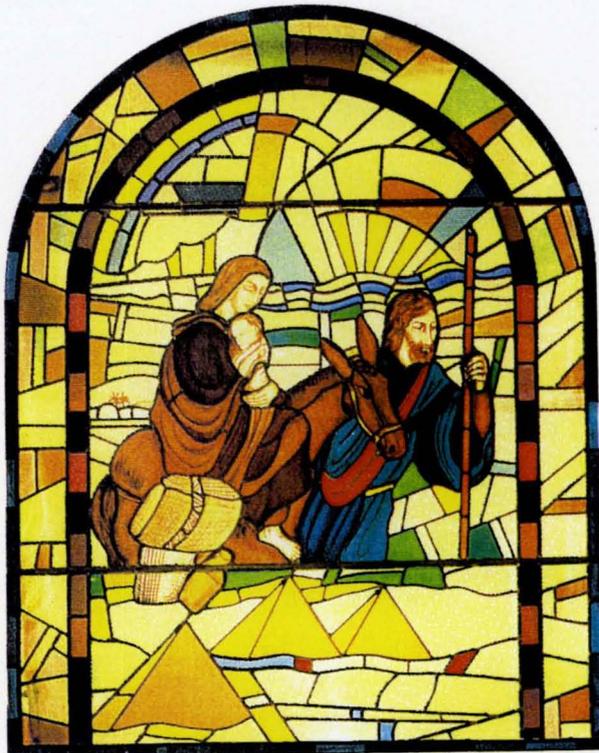


Figure 4
Stained glass window, Chiesa del Redentore
The flight to Egypt



argument, it is the role of the 'ethnic associations' in general, and of the 'ethnic church' in particular, to provide the cultural resources and surroundings necessary to support immigrants in their adaptation to the alien environment. Its role is to create a community, and to sustain it. In this respect, the church-cum-social-clubs are spaces for (re)constructing communities by aggregating members of the same 'ethnic group'. They are "institutions where the old environment is somehow recreated" (idem: 73), where Italian emigrants will find an "Italian atmosphere" (idem: 132).

From Parolin's standpoint, this is what distinguishes 'ethnic' churches from local, Irish Catholic or Anglican churches. He argues that 'ethnic churches' place less emphasis on religious beliefs, but rather on the possibility of expressing beliefs in a way familiar and habitual to the immigrants. Ethnic churches 'shelter' the ethnic group from assimilation, while securing a smooth transition into the 'host' society. In other words, the 'ethnic church' is presented as enabling newcomers to 'remain ethnic' in the integration process. It is the role of these institutions to enhance and reproduce ethnic religious practices, thus to reinforce the sense of belonging to, and inheritance of, a particular ethnic background. And it is from such a position of strength that integration within, and contribution to, the local English social fabric will be possible.

This adds a layer of meaning to the assertion that "the church *is* the community", cited above. What it says is not that the community is reducible to religious affiliation and practice. It is, rather, speaking of some kind of osmosis between religion and cultural belonging. In the context of diaspora, this may acquire particular meanings. For these Catholics who no longer live in a Catholic world, religion and culture are intertwined, inseparable, each feeding into and enforcing the other. The 're-creation' of an Italian setting in the church means that the immigrants religious beliefs and practices are embodied and expressed in a particular cultural form.

But what Parolin sees as the *re*production of a culture, is rather the production of an ethnic space and of cultural difference that results from the activities taking place in these settings. Religion and culture blend together and produce a communality that is simultaneously local and global. To illuminate this point, I refer to the use of the Italian language in the Holy Mass.

The use of Italian in the churches can be viewed as an important signifier of particularity. The relationship between language, rituals and localised community is, however, not straightforward. I want to suggest that vernacular language is a particular way of expressing a belonging to a wider, transnational Catholic

'community'. Italian vernacular is, at one level, a means of communication that allows those present to pray 'together'. But religious services are deeply ritualised performances. They are endowed with invariance and as such, enclose their performance into a format that ensures their identity through time and space (Connerton 1989: 57). It follows that the use of the vernacular is framed by a format *recognisable in all languages*. When I attended mass at St Peter's or the Chiesa del Redentore, I was able to follow what was going on and would have been able to mutter the 'Our Father' in my own French vernacular and still participate in the 'Holy Communion'. The ritualisation of language fosters two forms of continuity and communality at once. The communal prayer that the assembly performs in unison creates a sense of both particularity *and* transnationality, as if language was a threshold linking locality to globality. This is indeed at the heart of modern Catholic thought that defends not only the right to, but the necessity of culturally specific ways of expressing a universal faith (Lacombe 1993).

Hence the whole setting of the 'ethnic church' in diaspora, creates a space where belonging is lived as a continuity. The formalised, ritualised and iterated bodily postures and gestures produce the image of an enduring identity, but an identity that may be both localised — being Italian and Catholic in a non-Italian, non Catholic world — and globalised — being part of the global Christian/Catholic family.

Yet the difference between individual sense of belonging and community awareness remains unresolved. In this respect, Parolin suggests that the disproportionate amount of energy 'ethnic churches' put into cultural reproduction obscures the social and spiritual functions of religion itself. This question is a central concern for Padre Parolin, whose MA thesis addresses the changes in the religious practice of Emilian emigrants (1979). What Parolin found was that Emilians (like most Italian emigrants) practice a form of 'familistic religion'. That is, their religious practice is mainly connected to family related ceremonies of rites of passage (from the christening through weddings to funerals). As such, Parolin concludes that this form of religious practice "will be fundamentally anchored to 'memory' and become functional to family life" (idem: 6). He opposes it to religious practices in rural areas of Italy, where the compactness of the village community provided a social support no longer present in emigration. Thus,

[r]eligious practices which had individualistic and social functions in the village now take on solely familistic roles leaving aside the social functions of religion. (ibid.)

In other words, village churches were stages for the expression of a form of community awareness that seems to be withering away in the context of migration. For Parolin, familistic religious practice signals a form of private devotion that isolates individuals from the 'community'. And for Italian children brought up in this way, this disconnection will intensify.

Another trait typical of the religious personality of the Anglo-Italian youth is the scant community awareness and socio-political concern. Religion is confined to a private sphere and has not anything to do with other people's needs and social commitment... [T]he religious practice of the Italian young people almost entirely depends on the primary family acculturation and on personal choice once they have come of age. As they were born in England, they did not live the unifying experience between religious participation and social life which their parents lived at the village" (idem: 80)

A feeling of uneasiness for private practice irradiates from Parolin's thesis. His discomfort with the privatisation of religious practices by Italian emigrants is associated with his concern for the future of religious faith, on the one hand, and for the future of community awareness, on the other. Familyism and individualism are different in Parolin's understanding, for he does not see the new religious practices as a move from community to individualism, but from community to family. Interestingly, Parolin equates this with a move away from traditional culture (idem: 6), which provided a form of support now absent in the London context. The passage from rural Italy to metropolitan England, old and new, past and present, is signalled by familyism, not individualism; but a familyism that is not 'traditional' and that menaces communitarianism.

This seems to be the initialising moment of the cultural agenda of the Centro Scalabrini. Among the special lunches of the Centro Scalabrini are those for Father's Day, Mother's day and Grand-parent's day — all of which are preceded by a Holy Mass. The Centro brings together family and community, where family celebrations take place in a public space rather than in the privacy of households. The equation between family and private is challenged by attempts to bring the family back into the communal space, more specifically, into the religious communal space.

Parolin is not alone in his disquiet. The Catholic Church has, over the last 30 years, instigated important transformations of religious rituals that reveal a scepticism of private worship (Rodriguez 1983: 106). Before the demise of high ceremonies ratified by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, each person stood before God as an individual and was simultaneously joined to the others *in the institution*, through

the priest. Catholics were institutional worshipers, not individualistic ones, like Protestants (idem: 110). But a crisis of faith in Europe and North America motivated the Vatican to introduce changes in forms of worship that would 'popularise' religion and breakdown its stiff, hierarchical and authoritarian character. The use of vernacular languages, pop music²³, 'rites of peace' where communicants shake hands with each other exchanging wishes of peace, were introduced to unite Catholics living in a non-Catholic world. The display of collective worship not only left little space for private prayer, but concealed an increasing suspicion for it. Collective worship could no longer allow for private prayer in a world that was gradually becoming less Catholic.

To such Catholics – increasingly alone in their faith – the Church says: You are part of a community of believers. You are not single in your faith. Not solitary. We are together, Catholics. *We* believe. We believe. We believe. This assurance is necessary because, in a sense, it no longer is true. (ibid.; emphasis original)

In migration, we might think that saying 'we believe' in 'our' language would add an additional power of communalisation to collective prayer. But as I discussed earlier, regular masses in Italian express, in a particular way, a belonging to a wider community. I have met a number of Italians who rarely attend either of the two Italian churches, as they don't mind attending their local English speaking church. In this respect, Parolin's observations apply to a large proportion of Italian emigrants, who only go to the Italian churches for special, family occasions.

It is in these circumstances that the redemptive power of Christianity, and the use of religious language to emancipate immigrants from the 'forever-foreigner' condition, were emphatically celebrated in December 1993, when the Centro/Chiesa celebrated its 25th anniversary. Five days of activities were organised to mark the occasion, culminating in an evening choir concert, followed by a lunch and dance the next day. It was an important affair, which coincided with the inauguration of the renovated Chiesa del Redentore.

During this momentous week, the Centro assessed its role and, more importantly, asserted its ecumenical character. On the night of the choir recital, Padre Giandomenico Ziliotto, from the London Scalabrini centre, affirmed that in order to secure its future, the Centro/Chiesa must deploy "its creative capacity to create a

²³ The introduction of pop music led to amusing epithets for the religious services, such as the 'go-go masses' (*messes à go-go*), in nineteen-sixties Québec.

community".²⁴ And the terms of this new community seem to rest on the recovery of the religious element.

On its 25th anniversary, the Centro presented its project for the future in a discourse that moves away from the nationalist politics of identity, into the universalist idealism of Christianity. Thus the very foundation of the Centre is explained in these terms:

Residing in a nation where Catholics are a meagre minority, and with ecumenical sensibility, we thought to dedicate [the church] to the Redeemer under whom all, at least all Christians, may and must find themselves, thus cancelling the notion of *foreigner*. On the façade, alas rather modest, we have had done a mosaic of Jesus-Christ *Pantokrator* with, in one hand, the globe to indicate the Christian universalism which is a fundamental instance of the migrant people.²⁵

The cancellation of the idea of the foreigner is possible through the universalist character of Christianity, and the communal character of Catholicism. "In emigration, Umberto Marin argues, the Holy Mass is not only the private devotional practice of individuals who happen to be priests: it represents the major force of aggregation and liberation." (Centro Scalabrini di Londra 1993: 5) In this text written for the 25th anniversary commemorations, Father Marin invites the readers to cross cultural boundaries within Christianity and to identify with other migrants of London.

Running through and stitching together the different elements of universal Christianity is the experience of migration. The 'emigration event' is the central vector from which both localised and universalist ideals proceed. The localised identity is signified by the minority position of Catholics in Britain. Universalist ideals are evoked by capturing and detailing the drama of emigration.

Construed as a signifier of eternity, migration links contemporary Christians to the life of their Father and Brother, Jesus. Another window of the Chiesa represents the flight to Egypt (figure 4), the "first drama of emigration" and as such, is the ultimate symbol of all migrations which are still today "one of the most complex and dramatic events of history" (Pope John-Paul II in Centro Scalabrini di Londra 1993: 12). This image symbolises forced migration, against which the founder of the Scalabriniani Orders has always stood:

"Freedom to emigrate, not to me forced to emigrate"
[*Libertà di emigrare, non di far emigrare*]: this is

²⁴ Padre Giandomenico Ziliotto, 25th anniversary choir recital, 4 December 1993.

²⁵ U. Marin in Centro Scalabrini di Londra 1993: 6.

the call that Mons. Scalabrini sends still today to the conscience of who believes and works towards making the world the fatherland of human kind.

The flight to Egypt is also about 'receiving countries': "I was a foreigner and you welcomed me". The texts chosen to accompany this image in the 25th anniversary booklet, bring together both ends of the migration continuum: leaving (forcefully), settling, and integrating. For the 25th anniversary celebrations, a sketch of the Flight to Egypt was also seen downstairs, in the social club. It hung alongside the colour print of a man walking away, head down, shoulders slightly hunched to convey a sense of sadness. The caption repeated: "I was a foreigner and you welcomed me".

Another episode of the life of Jesus was deemed "[t]he most dramatic story of migration" by Padre Giandomenico on the night of the choir concert: the Calvary. But, he continued:

we carry this treasure within ourselves, like a clay vase. Because clearly this extraordinary power comes from God (and not from ourselves). We are oppressed, but not crushed; distraught but not desperate. We are persecuted, but not abandoned; hit, but not destroyed. We always carry in ourselves the death of Jesus, because his life manifests itself within us.

Just as individuals thrive from Jesus's power and suffering, emigration is 'animated' by sufferance and hope (Marin in Centro Scalabrini di Londra 1993: 6). The emphasis on images of suffering is most strikingly represented in the fresco of the Chiesa del Redentore.

Behind the altar, substituting the traditional crucifix, this giant painting of Christ dominates the church interior, and caused much talk, whispers, frowns and smiles amongst parishioners (figure 5). Deemed postmodern by Padre Parolin, this fresco symbolically captures all that the Scalabriniani fathers are striving for: unity with diversity, without forgetting suffering, aspiration and hope. In theological terms, this figure is strikingly innovative. Firstly, it emphatically emphasises the human, physical, bodily nature of Jesus. Secondly, the fresco breaks away from the traditional crucifix by leaving out the cross. This gesture simultaneously enhances the suffering and spiritual strength of Jesus. Hence the fresco further troubles traditional Catholic representations of the crucifixion by suggesting the strength of hope and redemption, rather than overemphasising the suffering and pain of an earthly life of sacrifice. As such, the fresco constitutes a significant motif against which community languages are deployed in the Centro Scalabrini. The relationship between migration and power

Figure 5
Fresco behind the altar of the Chiesa del Redentore



is once again iterated here, along with the repeated emphasis on suffering.

Religious images, in the Chiesa, are part of a system of representation founded upon the migration moment, while, in turn, they constitute a particular source of meaning to the experience of migration by infusing it with ideas of eternity and holiness. Recollections of the lives of Jesus and the Holy Family establish similarities between their sacrifices, and the immediate experiences of migrants. Religious evocations provide a sense of eternity and of sameness between migrants. Their experiences are immortalised and located at the foundation of a particular language of kinship, based on similarities of experience rather than of blood ties. In this respect, the Pentecostal family stands as a paradigmatic figure. "The experience of human migrations is a stimulus and a recall to the Pentecostal fraternity, where differences are harmonised by the Spirit and charity lives in welcoming the 'other'" (Scalabrini Order vade-mecum quoted in Scalabrini Centro di Londra 1993: 13).²⁶

The encounter between peoples, cultures and religions will only be possible if inequalities caused by injustice, domination and abuse of power are overcome. We are called, as Church amongst migrants, to contribute to the emergence of a new world, open to the experience of the gift God made in the person of his Son, denouncing the inhuman world of forced migrations as expressions of relations of interest and exploitation, and announcing and testifying to the absolute gratuitousness of God. From migrations themselves come the call for a concrete and symbolic mobility, which breaks all structures of rigidity and of absolutism: Exile always precedes the Ascension, which prepares for the Pentecost.

The crossing of religion and migration produces a language of kinship which is about *contextualised* characteristics. It is a language of 'family resemblance', to borrow Wittgenstein's phrase, that implies an interplay of similarity and difference.²⁷ Christianity emerges from these narratives as a kind of border zone, where cultures can meet and share, perhaps mix and change, but where differences are not totally assimilated. Consequently, the dangers of assimilationist universalism are interrupted by the localised practices of the Centro Scalabrini. However, from the outset, the daily practices of the Centro/Chiesa appear as conflicting with such ideals. Indeed, compared to St Peter's, this institution seems less of a border zone. At the Centro, the boundaries of a 'community' are repeatedly enforced and performed through

²⁶ Another window of the Chiesa is dedicated to the Madonna, the Apostles and the Pentecost.

²⁷ Marie-Nathalie Leblanc uses Wittgenstein in some theoretical reflections about ethnicity developed in an unpublished paper (1993).

unilingual masses, Italian food, music, remembrances of migration, etc. These Italians are perhaps migrants, but they are also, and foremost, Italian. The Centro is, for many of them, a shelter, a buffer zone where they can express their faith in their own language/culture. St Peter's, for its part, remains predominantly Italian, but its boundaries appear less hermetic. It holds a weekly mass in English, prints bilingual mass sheets and the menus of the lunches are not predictably Italian. Moreover, as mentioned above, St Peter's is a world of extremes and distances brought together, even if rarely mixing, under the same roof.

But these disparities may be no more than different forms of culture that change over time. St Peter's presumably had a very uniform cultural life in the days of mass migration from Italy. What I want to suggest is that the difference between the two churches may be understood as a symptom and a signature of a shift away from Catholicism — it bears repeating that St Peter's was built in the years of the Catholic emancipation in Britain — towards the more globalising Christianity. A shift that reveals the challenges of universalist aspirations. The Centro's universalist discourse is partly a language of 'strategic universalism' — encouraging global Christian identification — but also, and perhaps foremost, it is a language of dilution of differences within one, single, unitary Spirit/God/Father — the Pentecostal family. As well-intentioned this ideal may be, the refusal of these sermons of hope and redemption to critically, creatively and radically engage with difference is problematic. If Christianity now appears as a 'new ethnicity' uniting peoples from different national, cultural or class backgrounds, it remains embedded in quests for coherence invested with ideas of authenticity and purity — whether cultural or spiritual — that are configured around the body and personal behaviour. The 'fresco episode' can illustrate this. Some people disliked this representation of Jesus because, as my friend Monica expressed, "he is too muscular". This echoes recent popular debates around the humanity of Jesus. Films like the "Last Temptation of Christ" still fuel animosities between outraged or offended Christians, and lenient and more amused ones. What interests me is how conflicts between conservative and progressive Catholics/Christians revolve around issues of the body and personal behaviours of Jesus. Such theological debates are beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is worth noting that they are indicative of the contemporary obsession with personal behaviours, as signifying the stability, authenticity, continuity and legitimacy of collective values and beliefs.

Hence the Centro Scalabrini/Chiesa del Redentore is an enclosed space invested with particular meanings. It is a space where 'we' remind ourselves of

where we come from (the drama of emigration) and of what we are (Italian Christian emigrants). Migration, travel, movement, displacement, *caminare*, permeate the Scalabriniani religious discourse and make migration into the inaugural moment in the formation of a community. The Scalabriniani fathers' discourses suggest that redemption can be achieved without discarding memories of suffering and furthermore, that such memories are not necessarily paralysing. Here, the notion of forced migration is revised and individuals are given agency in the process. However disturbing, troubling and frightening migration is, the suffering can be a source of power found in the hope for redemption. Ultimately, the priests of the Chiesa advocate that ethnic differences do not matter in the face of God, and the redemption is found in the 'world fraternity' of Christianity.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have outlined the array of 'memory work' in St Peter's and the Centro/Chiesa, which I viewed as producing the identity it purports to be expressing. These ceremonies and events consist of weaving together elements and strands of histories and culture. They speak of different things, in different ways, but they are similar in that they all constitute operations of creating localised surfaces of belonging. What is common to St Peter's and the Centro/Chiesa, is that Italians use the past to make sense of the present and to re-invent themselves. The repetitive and formalised recollections of 'The Hill' or of the drama of emigration produce a sense of duration that is more than the mere accumulation of accidental re-enactments of a pristine culture. In this respect, memory is more than nostalgic returns to the past, as Graziano Tassello once implied (see introduction). It is more than simply overlaying images from the past onto the present. It consists of a creative process that extends a plurality of moments into one another, adding substance to the immediate, lived experience of the present (Bergson [1939] 1993: 31).²⁸ Temporality and spatiality, genealogy and geography, weave together in a web of meanings that produce new grounds of identification. They constitute complex movements of *détours* and

²⁸ This carries important implications for the theoretical understanding of temporality. As Judith Butler points out "it is important to underscore the effect of *sedimentation* that the temporality of construction implies" (1993: 245n8; emphasis original). The notion of temporality, here, is not to be construed as a simple succession of discrete moments, equally distant from one another. It is rather to be understood in bergsonian terms. Henri Bergson challenges mathematical models of multiplication and substitutes it for a spatialised mapping of multiplicity, where different states have no beginning or ending, but rather extend into one another. The French philosopher refutes an opposition between the One and the Multiple, but he nevertheless proposes a refined perception of multiplicity (Deleuze 1966: 40). The latter is not to be confused with the mathematical notion of multiple, which refers to the multiplication, the expansion of a fixed and immutable core. Multiplicity, for Bergson, corresponds to 'duration'; and continuity is a constitutive feature of multiplicity (Bergson [1934] 1985: 182; also [1939] 1993).

retours (Glissant 1981: 30-33). Returns to the past in the quest for origins, for a unifying principle of solidarity: tracing trans-generational links, tracing a second place of origin, linking different experiences of migration to a teleology of human suffering. But they are also detours, or diversions, that is displacement *somewhere else*: Little Italy or, more radically, the Christian 'community'.

The construction of a second place of origin transposes new origins in a new location that is not Italy. In Little Italy, genealogy and geography come together in the rootings and routings of London Italian specificity. By contrast, the Chiesa's 'drama of emigration' is projected into a different timespace: the sacred, the biblical. It is from there that ideas of redemption may flourish and provide new terrains of solidarity. While St Peter's negotiates difference and identity through the construction of imagined boundaries, the Centro/Chiesa collapses them by way of transcending boundaries.

Religion encompasses the diverse practices of London Italian identity formation. In the Centro/Chiesa, it moves beyond the nation and Catholicism, and projects the local 'community' into the macrocosm of 'humanity', where differences are subsumed under universalist ideals of family resemblances configured around Eurocentric conceptions of Christianity as a 'world religion'. By contrast, nation and religion meet on the grounds of St Peter's church, making it the cradle of London Italian particularity.

Both these churches nevertheless display an emphatically Catholic presence in multicultural Britain. A presence characterised by its familistic form of practice and its worship of Mary. To paraphrase Aihwa Ong, the subjectivity of Italians is at once deterritorialised in relation to religion, but highly localised in relation to the family (in Clifford 1994: 312). The implications of this in relation to gender are investigated in the next chapter, where I look at how 'familistic religion' works in St Peter's church.

Chapter 5

London Italian familistic religion: gender, generations and ontological securities

Thank you, *every woman*, for the
simple fact of being *a woman!*
Pope John Paul II

When I think of Italian American
girlhood, I think above all of being
parcelled and bound.
Marianna de Marco Torgovnick

This concluding chapter follows from the previous one by maintaining the focus on religious practices and expressions in the production of local particularity. Here, I pay particular attention to the way religion summons ideas of sexuality and gender, and how these ideas converge in the construction of tradition. In other words, I look at the intersection of gender and community in practices of local identity.

London Italian popular religion is mediated through the family frame of reference. That is, Italians of London are likely to return to St Peter's Italian church for events that coincide with family celebrations. Apart from Easter and Christmas, these include rites of passage that punctuate people's lives: baptism, first communion, confirmation, wedding, funeral. This is what Gaetano Parolin means by familistic religion.¹ It is a religious practice that is predominantly cultural and social, rather than merely liturgical.²

I have already established the cultural significance of St Peter's in the previous chapter. What I want to suggest here is that the rituals that attract Italians back to St Peter's are not only about (re)producing ethnicity, they are also about producing gender systems of differentiation, norms of sexuality and generational systems of responsibility. This chapter, then, strips familistic religion to its barest bones: gender, sexuality, and their interaction with generations. How does familistic religion work? What is displayed in these religious practices conceived as typical of Italian emigrants?

¹ And what Bruno Orsi has labelled the 'domus centered' Italian-American popular religion (Orsi 1985).

² Indeed, for a large number of Italian faithful and regular church-goers, St Peter's has no particular religious significance. They will attend the local Catholic parish for their weekly worship, and occasionally go to St Peter's or the Chiesa del Redentore – one Italian woman told me she goes to St Peter's when she needs to buy supplies from the deli next door. My assumption is supported by research conducted in the United States, which reveals that Italian churches fill more of a socio-cultural role than a religious one for Italian immigrants and their descendants (Tomasi 1975; Orsi 1985; Primeggia and Varacalli 1996).

My analysis is informed by Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" (1976) and "Thinking Sex" ([1989] 1992), which offer complementary conceptual tools to think about the relationship between gender and community in London Italian identity formation. "The Traffic" was an important contribution to feminist theory because it underpinned the Lacanian political stance of many lesbian writers that followed in Rubin's footsteps. For Rubin, psychoanalysis has no parallel as a description of how phallic culture domesticates individuals in early life (1976: 198; also 1994: 79). Yet by moving between Marxism, structuralism and psychoanalysis, Rubin avoids the Lacanian trap of conceiving the symbolic in a non-social manner. In her later work, however, Rubin disengages herself from psychoanalysis because of its limitations in accounting for sexual variation, that is, "the shifting historical and social content of [the] meanings" of erotic practices (Rubin 1994: 79).³ In "Thinking Sex", Rubin appropriates Foucault, calling for the development of "an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality" ([1989] 1992: 309).

There are three features of Rubin's work that I find useful in order to unpack Italian emigrant familistic religion: her early definition of sex/gender systems, her later distinction between sexuality and gender, and the way "Traffic" moves between the universal and the particular.

Sex/gender systems are about the systematic ways in which societies translate raw material supplied by biology and invest them with specific meaning. Rubin is interested in the transformation of biological sexuality into products of human activity, relations and exchange. In contrast to more recent theories of sexual difference⁴, Rubin is not concerned with the construction of the material itself (i.e. the body) but, rather, with "the social organisation of sexuality and the reproduction of the conventions of sex and gender." (Rubin 1976: 168) For Rubin, sexuality and gender are socially organised, and the concrete manifestations of this organisation are found in kinship systems. She argues that kinship systems do not, as Lévi-Strauss maintains, merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, lineage names, social status, etc. Kinship systems are expressions of the social organisation of sex that produces genders (males and females), obligatory heterosexuality (gender is not only identification with one sex; it also includes the direction of sexual desire toward the other sex), and the constraint of female sexuality (idem: 180).

³ This interview with Judith Butler provides interesting details of Rubin's theoretical and political journey that lead her to write "Thinking Sex".

⁴ Found in the work of Judith Butler, Elspeth Probyn, Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens.

The distinction between sexuality, sex and gender is not clear in "The Traffic in Women". While Rubin speaks of sexuality as socially organised, she conceives the social organisation of sex as the basis for producing gender. Sexuality, in short, is subsumed under gender. In "Thinking Sex", however, Rubin brings a corrective to this conceptualisation. Here, sexuality is defined as the basis of a system of stratification that is distinct, though it may be related, to gender stratification. Thus the social organisation of sexuality is to be problematised separately from the social organisation of gender.

In the light of my immediate concerns, the analytical distinction between sexuality and gender is relevant. Though I am not discussing the intricate mechanisms of policing, normalising and constructing sexuality (in the Foucauldian tradition), I nevertheless want to consider the institution of the family, and the religious culture that surrounds it, in relation to the social organisation of sexuality and gender. By distinguishing sexuality from gender, I contend that social rulings of gender and sexuality are not necessarily coterminous, though they are related. For example, Catholic taboos about sexuality are not gender specific. They relate to a general disgust for 'things of the flesh' that supports a stratification of erotic desires, where virginity is on top, followed by heterosexual sex in wedlock, with paedophilia down at the bottom of the scale (Rubin 1992 [1989]). Yet the organisation of sexuality interacts with gender: it works differently for men and women. Hence in what follows, I propose to examine how London Italian 'familistic religion' includes practices that partake in the social organisation of sexuality and gender.

But, as Rubin points out, gender differences run deep, and are not adequately explained by looking at them as social systems of exchange. How, then, are such ideas reproduced? How, in each distinct kinship system, does

[e]ach new generation... learn and become its appropriate status within the system[?] (1976: 183).

How are conventions of sex and gender engraved on children? What are the reproductive mechanisms of sexuality? What inspires me in Rubin's earlier paper, is that her theoretical eclecticism is motivated by a desire to understand the deep seated character of gender and sexuality without denying their social nature. If Rubin turned to psychoanalysis to explore the assimilation of gendered identities, I want to look at religion as a metaphysical discourse that projects humanity into a divine order that is hierarchically higher than the earthly, material order of reality. Moreover, the impact of Christian thought and taboos on sexuality in present day conceptions of identity and selfhood should not be neglected. Catholicism remains a dominating discourse in

the cultural, social and political landscape of Italy today, while the increase in sexual oppression in the United States and in Britain over the last 15 years is deeply embedded in the Judo-Christian distaste for 'things of the flesh'. This should alert us to the way religious languages sanction the social organisation of sexuality. Without denying that these may be contested, rejected, adapted to fit individuals' needs and beliefs, the religious discourse is important, here, because it highlights the metaphysics which support and transcend the irreducibility of gender differences. In short, Rubin's theoretical model in "Traffic" allows me to move from the universal to the particular, and to intersect metaphysical discourses with institutional practices of differentiation.

The chapter includes two headings. First, I will summarise two dominating Catholic dogmas: the cult of the Virgin Mary, and the rule of apostolic succession. In doing so, I aim to sketch out key elements of Catholicism that inform the particular ways in which femininity and masculinity circulate in London Italian Catholic culture. Running through these doctrines is a special relationship to the flesh that sanctions specific norms of sexuality. This section could be read as a counterpart to chapter 3 on nationalism. It explores the ways Catholicism summons particular definitions of gender differences and sexual norms.

The cult of Mary is wrapped in images of purity and holiness that reify womanhood/maternity as symbols of love, goodness, human worth and dignity. Women, in this discourse, are always-already 'woman'. Moreover, Mary is the mediator between 'man' and God, between earthly life and eternal life, and as such acts as the ultimate model of the 'New Woman'. The rule of apostolic succession, for its part, establishes the authority of the Father. This figure of domination embodied by the priest serves as an icon in my exploration of a particular version of masculinity and power. Like femininity, masculinity is conceived as an essence and a commodity in Catholicism, but in contrast to the former, men are less bound to the primacy of manhood, but more to its achievement. Moreover, Mariolatry and the rules of priesthood are deployed within a patriarchal framework that naturalises the irreducibility of gender differences and the power relations between men and women.

In the second part of the chapter, I explore the gendered and sexualised meanings which are spelled out in two rituals: weddings and first communions. These rites of passage are seen, by Italian intellectuals, as expressions of Italian particularity in London. In addition, the popularity of each suggests that they both constitute important moments in the religious life of a number of Italians in London. The First Communion is a collective celebration that draws large numbers of Italians

to St Peter's church each year. As for weddings, St Peter's consecrated 90 unions in 1994 alone, more than in any other church of the Westminster diocese.

In this section, I move between First Communion and weddings to emphasise how they mirror each other. Read in the light of Catholic dogmas of virginity, I further look at how the image of the bride sublimates women's sexuality, and serves as an icon in representations of virginity and purity, while it confines their destiny to the family realm. I argue that both rituals, each in its own way, legitimate and produce sexualised and gendered subjects who are re-located into the community through a family-based narrative of generational responsibility and continuity.

In sum, this chapter is a contemplation of the way gender circulates in London Italian popular religion, beginning with a discussion of Catholic dogmas that naturalise the patriarchal system of authority.

The cult of Mary and the rules of priesthood: on the primacy of womanhood in a patriarchal framework

In October 1993, the Centro Scalabrini of London celebrated its 25th anniversary with a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Fatima. This weekend of prayer and devotion to the Virgin Mary constituted an appropriate way of marking the silver anniversary of the Centro, given the centrality of the Virgin within Catholic religious culture. In London Italian 'community' life, two outings are devoted to the Virgin Mary: the pilgrimage to Aylesford and the annual procession in Clerkenwell.

Since its inception in Medieval Europe, the entire cult of Mary hinges upon a particular relationship to the body and flesh: her divine motherhood; her virginity; the immaculate conception; her bodily assumption into heaven (Warner 1990; Boxer 1975, chapter IV). In sum, Mary is idolised for having won over evil, her body and life unstained by any taint of the original sin. From the Immaculate Conception, through her virginity to the Assumption, Mary's body was the only human body to have been exempted from the penalties of the fall: childbirth in pain, and decay in the grave.

Mary's virginity expresses the ideal of human virtuousness.⁵ Tied to the Incarnation, it stands as the symbol of the mystery of life. The liturgy invokes Mary

⁵ That Mary was elevated as the most perfect human being ever to have existed was the outcome of extensive debates and a "symphony of patristic writings" (Warner 1990: 67) that sought to purify the woman who was to be the Mother of God. The issue, here, was to salvage the body of Jesus from all stains coming from 'bodily sins'. Hence Mary was not hailed as the purest human being out of an idealistic conception of womanhood as inherently 'holy'. As Marina Warner argues,

"as *radix sancta*, the holy root of salvation, because through her the Incarnation was possible" (Warner 1990: 47). Mary's virginity is a victory against evil and sin, correlated with sins of the flesh driven by sexual desire. Temptation, in Christian thought, is equated with concupiscence. And the life of Mary is said to be unblemished by sinful desire (*idem*: 237). Virginity, to this day, figures as the emblem of purity. Though it is spoken of as desirable for men and women alike, it is insistently prescribed to women.

The stigma traditionally attached to sexual desire has been slightly diffused in the Second Vatican Council, yet Catholicism remains deeply uncomfortable and oppressive with sexual conduct. As such, it systematically regulates sexuality and produces a hierarchy that privileges abstinence and virginity, followed by procreative sex. This was clearly spelled out in a talk given by Padre Gaetano Parolin, in June 1993, at one of the Italian Women's Club evenings.

Entitled "The morals of our time", the presentation was about the Vatican's position on sexuality. The priest explained that since the Second Council Vatican (1962-65), sexuality is no longer exclusively linked to procreation. It is rather considered an act of *comunione* between *due persone*. A communion which is first and foremost essential to the foundations of a solid family unit. This communion is to be aspired to and consolidated before having children. From this, he draws the conclusion that sexuality is more important than procreation, and that the stigma attached to it as a sensual need no longer stands.

Running through this talk, and through the ensuing discussion, is that the *padre* was talking about heterosexuality as the only recognisable, acceptable and mentionable sexuality. Furthermore, it is a sexuality which remains linked to procreation, since it is the founding basis for a stable family unit. As an act of intimacy through which the partners learn more about each other, it constitutes an essential step in the building of a solid and stable family. The first, necessary, step leading to the second, that is procreation. If sensual desires and pleasures are now recognised, thus marking a slight shift away from traditional Catholic taboos related to the flesh, sexuality remains linked to procreation, and sexual practices are ruled and normalised according to this equation. In addition, sexuality is defined as the expression of our *basic*, hetero-sensual *needs* (*sic*), as well as an expression of love between two persons. 'Making love' is seen as expressing our inherent heterosexual desires and confirms us as male and female beings: male meets/mates female.

it was a deeply misogynist and contemptuous view of women's role in reproduction that made the idea of conception by the power of the Spirit more acceptable. (1990: 47)

Though the father's viewpoint may appear as relatively progressive discourse — by Catholic standards — Catholicism remains imbued with a distaste for things of the flesh that generates systems of sexual stratification and gender differentiation. A distaste that emerges from the hierarchical ordering of spirit and body. In this respect, the rule of celibacy for Catholic priests testifies to the protracted belief that "things of the body are less important than things of the spirit." (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 695) The body, conceived as a shrine to the Holy Spirit, must be protected against sins of the flesh (Ariès 1985: 36).

This obsession manifests itself in the intricacies of the myth of the Virgin Mary. The purity of Mary's body achieved perfection with the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception as a Catholic dogma in 1854 by Pope Pius IX (Warner 1990: 236). This doctrine was the outcome of prolonged debates since its inception in early Christian times, and its details remain little known to most Catholics today. According to this belief, Mary was a miracle child, born to parents in their old age, with the mother, Anne, thought to be barren. It was perhaps not a 'virgin birth' as such, but Mary's birth remains the result of direct divine intervention. In sum, the Immaculate Conception is the dogma "by which Mary is set apart from the human race because she is not stained by the Fall." (idem: 254).

With the consecration of the Immaculate Conception as a Catholic Truth, Mary embodies the epitome of virtue and purity. She was the most perfectly created being after Jesus Christ. Mary, in short, is (the) sublime. She stands alone, above all human beings, past and present, underscoring their inferiority and their life condemned by the Original Sin.

Hail, Holy Queen, mother of mercy; hail our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in the vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy towards us; show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. (excerpt of a prayer, Annual Procession booklet 1993 and 1994).

Surrounded by such an aura of holiness, Mary brings a message of hope and solace to humanity. According to Padre Giandomenico Ziliotto, current director of *La Voce degli Italiani*,

[t]he Immaculate Conception is a message of hope for men: it reminds us that our life is essentially a

positive story, constituted from the possibility of accomplishing the good.⁶

The myth of the Virgin Mary also brings proof of the intimacy of God with humanity. The virgin birth is a unique miracle that displays the divinity of humanity — that is, that God creates in each individual a unique soul.

Yet there is a central contradiction in the myth of the Virgin Mary. As Marina Warner writes, the "immaculately conceived Virgin" was also, for centuries, "goddess of... fertility." (1990: 269) What I want to discuss here is how the two poles of this paradox are stabilised, in contemporary Catholic thought, by the reification of motherhood.

The inaugural moment of salvation was the Annunciation: when God's emissary, the Angel Gabriel, announced to Mary that she had been chosen to mother Jesus. The moment Mary accepted to act as the Lord's mother, Pope John Paul II recently wrote, she rescued humanity from eternal condemnation because through her, the Word made flesh was possible.

Mary's consent at the Annunciation and her motherhood stand at the very beginning of the mystery of life which Christ came to bestow on humanity. Through her acceptance and loving care for the life of the Incarnate Word, human life has been rescued from condemnation to final and eternal death. (John Paul II 1995a: n. 102)

Mary's superiority is born out of motherhood. Had she not been faced with, and overcome, the challenge of motherhood, Mary would not have been consecrated. As Julia Kristeva suggests, the sanctified representation of femininity is absorbed in maternity (1983: 225), the construction of which was given to the Western world through the Virgin Mary (idem: 242). But this construction results from the sublimation of sexual energy into a socially venerable activity: motherhood.

The conflation of femininity and maternity lies at the basis of the present pope's veneration of women. In March 1995, John Paul II published his eleventh encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, which reinstates the Vatican's staunch opposition to contraception and abortion. This document is a plea against the "culture of death", and establishes the sacredness of all human life: apart from contraception, it also condemns abortion, scientific experimentation on human embryos, euthanasia, suicide and the death sentence (the latter deemed acceptable under exceptionally rare circumstances) (John Paul II 1995a).⁷ This virulent condemnation of "the structure of

⁶ *La Voce degli Italiani*, #899, November 1993: 6.

⁷ A summary of the encyclical was published in *La Voce degli Italiani*, #930, April 1995: 1-2.

sin" and of the "ethic of relativism" concludes with a strong entreaty in support of the family and maternity, where the Pope turns to women, encouraging them to support a

'New Feminism', which rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination', in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation. (idem: no. 99)

It may be conceded that the Pope's invitation to women to unite in a "new feminism" is a striking and innovative move, not only by Catholic standards, but by his own standards — the present Pope is notorious for his conservative and archaic views on gender relations. Yet his concession to women's issues is deeply embedded in essentialist conceptions of femininity. The Pope's idea of feminism is that women avoid imitating male models of domination in order to preserve their "true genius", that is, their true nature of mothering and caring for others. It is through women's unique experience of motherhood, according to John Paul II, that they learn, and subsequently teach others, the essence of authentic human relationships: to be open and to accept the other.

Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb... This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings not only towards her own child, but every human being, which profoundly marks the woman's personality. (ibid.)⁸

Women's bodies, their wombs, become the sites of authentic human experience, while motherhood is invested with ideals of human relationship. This discourse follows directly from an apostolic exhortation to the cult of Mary, written in 1964 by Pope Paul VI. The *Devotion to the Virgin Mary (Marialis Cultus)* emulated the Virgin as the 'New Woman' and model for all Christians (in Warner 1990: 337). She is "the disciple who builds up the earthly and temporal city while a diligent pilgrim towards the heavenly and eternal city." (ibid.). She is the woman who will redeem humanity from the Fall, brought upon us by another woman, Eve.⁹

Contemporary Catholic Mariolatry displaces the centrality of virginity — without dismissing it altogether — to replace it with an emphasis on Mary's motherhood. The relationship between Mary and Jesus, translated as that of a mother

⁸ The Pope is quoting his own words from an apostolic letter dedicated to the 'mystery of woman', published in 1988: *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

⁹ The feminisation of purity (Mary) and danger (Eve, Mary-Magdalene) illustrates the special connection between women and sins of the flesh in Christian thought.

and son, envelops Mary in a human body capable of deep suffering. Through her suffering for her son, the mystery of Redemption reaches human emotional understanding. In the booklet for the 1993 procession in honour of the Madonna, we find the following text:

Today we honour a woman who, in human terms, should hang her head in shame. She gave birth to a child, not fathered by her husband. Her son had the audacity to claim to forgive sins. Her son was condemned to death as a blasphemer who dared declare to be the Son of God. But throughout her life she never questioned the motives of the Lord, never doubted His actions, never criticized His ways. Her Faith, her trust in the Lord, never faltered or wavered, however little she understood. Rather than condemning God she praised him. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord." (Luke 1:46) When we look at Our Lady's life, not through a rose coloured filter or sentimentality, but in the harsh reality of how it must have been, one can understand why she is revered above all other human souls. For do we never question the Lord's motives? Never doubt His actions? Never criticize His ways?

In a way, Mary is no longer "alone of all her sex" (Warner 1990): she becomes a model for all women, who are called upon to join her in leading humanity towards redemption.

The moral primacy of womanhood is further affirmed in the Pope's letter to women, written in June 1995. Praised by *La Voce* as an important step forward in building a new relationship between the Catholic Church and women¹⁰, the Pope's message further entrenches traditional Christian views of essential gender differences, moreover, of sublimated womanhood. In sum, John Paul II returns with the notion of the "feminine genius" (1995b: n. 10) to characterise womanhood.

Necessary emphasis should be placed on the "*genius of women*", not only by considering great and famous women of the past or present, but also those *ordinary* women who reveal the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday life. For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfil their deepest vocation. Perhaps more than men, women *acknowledge the person*, because they see persons with their hearts. (idem: n. 12; emphasis original)

And so we return full circle to maternity, the source of women's knowledge and acceptance of others 'with their hearts'. In this respect, the Pope expresses a

¹⁰ *La Voce degli Italiani*, # 936, August 1995: 1-2.

special gratitude to women involved in areas of education and who "exhibit a kind of affective, cultural and spiritual motherhood" (idem: n. 9).

The Pope's appeal to women is summarised in the first pages of his letter, where he thanks "*every woman*, for the simple fact of being *a woman!*" (1995b: n. 2; emphasis original). Womanhood/motherhood is essentialised, reified and sanctified as something to be respected and protected. Women are esteemed *qua* women. As *La Voce* writes: "A woman deeply esteemed for the simple fact of being woman."¹¹ Womanhood, in the Vatican's discourse, is a hyper abstract concept ('the woman'), that is immediately universal. 'Woman' is never multiplex or heterogeneous (Kristeva 1983: 237). To put it simply, *women* are *woman* before being anything else; they are always already woman. The central organising principle of this rhetoric lies in the simultaneous erasure of women's sexuality and absorption of womanhood in maternity. Womanhood is manifested by maternal love, or the like; the true vocation of womanhood, the true nature of women, is the *service* of love, not its sensual or sexual expression. Womanhood and maternity collapse into a single entity that is a-historical, universal and the expression of human superiority: the wilful accomplishment of 'service' "expresses the truly "royal" [i.e. holy, or divine] nature of mankind" (John Paul II 1995b: n. 10). By extension, the redemption of humanity is configured around women's bodies. As Mary anchors the humanisation of the West (Kristeva 1983: 234), so womanhood/maternity is the pedestal from which humanity rises above all living beings and moves closer to God.

This is not to say that men are not interpellated, or acted upon, as 'man'. Gender systems of differentiation rely on discursive routes that work differently for men and women, but that both give substance to ideas of pre-existing gender differences. The Pope asserts the equal dignity of men and women based on their mutual complementarity that is not confined to a matter of mutual support in terms of action, but rather in terms of 'being'.

Womanhood and manhood are complementary *not only from the physical and psychological points of view*, but also from the *ontological*. It is only through the duality of the "masculine" and the "feminine" that the "human" finds full realization. (1995b: n. 7; emphasis original)

It follows that the relationship between 'man' and 'woman' is the "most natural relationship", endowed with the power to procreate (idem: n. 8). The Pope

¹¹ *ibid.*

labels this rapport as "relational 'uni-duality'" (ibid.), which he naturalises by subsuming sexuality under biological reproduction.

Manhood, however, is not explicitly defined. In the Pope's exhortations, and in Catholic teachings more generally, manhood is slotted within discourses on the primacy of womanhood. It exists in contrast to the latter, as its necessary and natural complement within ontological definitions of humanity.

La donna ['the woman'] has her own rules, her own mode of being, an originality that is specific to her and complementary to man's own originality, in humanity's history.¹²

Womanhood is repeatedly described, unpacked, defined, fixed, circumscribed. The very necessity of such repetition may be questioned as signalling the shaky grounds essentialist contentions stand on. By contrast, manhood is, to an extent, accepted as the outcome of a process of becoming. While womanhood pre-exists and pre-defines women's lives and obscures their specificity, men are not pre-determined by a universal and fixed manhood: manhood is constantly *in the making*, in the acting. Surely, the Pope does not deny men their capacity to live up to their 'holy' nature, but this they will *learn* from women/mothers. Maternity becomes the condition of possibility for the accomplishment of 'true' manhood. In this respect, masculinity is something to be achieved, measured, or lost (Cornwall and Lindesfarne 1994: 13). Since early Christian times, manhood has been conceived as a social reality, the product of acts that make a man what he is. "Men are not born, they are formed", wrote Erasmus (Bonacchi 1994).

Yet the primacy of womanhood does not mean that women have more power than men. The sanctification of the 'new woman' rather naturalises the very power relations the new Catholic discourse seeks to obscure by 'recognising' the role of women in the betterment of human kind. In the Marian cult, the reified power of Mary the Mother of us all, is located within her relationship of submission to God, the Father. Though Mary may be seen as a powerful matriarchal figure — a woman who bore a child without a man (Warner 1990: 47) — she refuses *him* (Joseph) in order to submit to *His* word: she remains the servant. She conceives not from him, but from Him (Kristeva 1983: 243). Mary's superiority lies in her ultimate devotion to, and faith in, two forces represented by male figures: her Son and her Lord.¹³ As Marina Warner suggests, Mary is an instrument for the argument about the structure of

¹² *La Voce degli Italiani*, # 936, August 1995: 1.

¹³ See Kristeva (1983: 232-233) on the triple metamorphosis of Mary who is simultaneously mother, daughter and spouse of her son.

society presented as a God-given code (Warner 1990: 338). In the myth of Mary, the power relations between men and women are naturalised through the hierarchical ordering of earth and heaven. If Mary leads humanity to salvation, she can only do so under the direction of the Father in heaven. This stratification lies at the basis of the rules of priesthood.

To be sure, the dominant figure in Catholic rites is the priest. Although the power of Catholic priests on individuals' daily lives has considerably waned in Western over-developed countries, they remain a very particular community of men. The Catholic hierarchy is staunchly patriarchal — and as such, anachronistic — with women distinctly relegated to service roles and denied access to priesthood. In his letter to women, the Pope suggests that the different roles of men and women in the Church are not to be understood in the lower order of social terms, but rather in the higher order of sacramental terms. Men were entrusted with

the task of being an “icon” of his [i.e. Christ's] countenance as “shepherd” and “bridegroom” of the Church through the exercise of the ministerial priesthood (1995b: n. 11; emphasis original)

This, the Pope argues, is the outcome of the Apostolic-Petrine principle. Indeed, the Catholic Church has retained the necessity of apostolic succession, that is, the uninterrupted transmission of spiritual authority from the Apostles through successive popes and bishops. According to this principle, consecrated men are set apart from other mortal beings, and are confined to a life of humility and celibacy. In order for men to rise above humanity, they must not indulge in sins of the flesh. These men are not ordinary men: metaphorically perhaps, they embody the male counterpart of Mary. Here are men who lead a sinless life. Their body is not immaculate, of course, but they are endowed with a particular spiritual legacy, that they may lay claim to if they renounce their sexuality. Virginity, or more accurately, chastity, is yet again the condition of possibility for the manifestation of the ‘royal’, divine, nature of human kind. The principle of virginity, however, works differently for men than it does for women. Men have to promise that they will lead a chaste lifestyle, while women's sexuality is always already erased, subsumed, engulfed in their maternal role.

In a world where the possession of an anatomical penis is equated with maleness, these eunuchs stand somewhat on the very margins of conceptions of masculinity. For if their vow of celibacy may be perceived as a symbolic form of castration, they nevertheless remain ‘men’, whose power emerges at the junction between holiness and humanity. Within the Catholic family romance — complete

with the figures of the Mother, Father and Son — the naturalisation of the authority of the father works through the hierarchical ordering of humanity and divinity; body and spirit; earth and heaven. Catholic priests are chosen men who mediate lay people's relationship with God. The dominating Catholic fathers — the priests, the Pope — are not the subjects of the same veneration as the Virgin Mary. They receive respect and are sometimes feared, but not praised, venerated and sanctified as immaculate figures of purity. They are rulers whom we must obey. In other words, languages of authority are written on these men's bodies, while languages of purity are inscribed on women's. Both are presented as sources of power, but one is spiritual, while the other is material, and they are arranged in a hierarchy.

It is against this backdrop that I want to look at Italian First Communions and weddings in London. These rituals are places where metaphysical ideas collide with institutional practices of identity formation. The entire staging of the ceremonies follows a pattern steeped in a 'tradition' that is construed as emblematic of Italian Catholicism. Weddings and First Communions are heavily ritualised, which renders them highly predictable and repetitive. I argue, in the previous chapter, that the formalisation of bodily postures or utterances produces the image of an enduring identity that is both localised (Italian Catholicism) and deterritorialised (Christian). What interests me here is how local particularity is mobilised in two rites of passage that repeatedly produce gender systems of differentiation and summon the social organisation of sexuality.

Rites of passage, rites of continuity: gender, generation, and ontological securities

She's standing in front of the church, in her white dress, her hands covered in white gloves, her hair adorned with white flowers. She smiles shyly as she is being photographed before the ceremony starts.

The inside of the church is decorated as for festive days. Flowers adorn the altar and the pews of the central aisle, and all the church lights are brightly shining. This is a big day.

After the photo session, she must get ready to enter the church. We don't want to keep the assembly waiting, do we? She kisses her mother on the cheek and, nervously, lets go of her hand. The mother enters the church and finds her seat.

The church is packed. Families meet, laugh, hug, wave to each other or call out to those hovering at the entrance, looking for their party. Excitement fills the air, disturbing the usual solemnity of the church interior. Men in dark suits, women in

colourful dresses move around, leaving traces of perfume and after-shave behind them. Children run around as teenagers cast an indifferent look on them, sticking together at a safe distance from the parents, sitting in separate pews or, even better, standing in the side aisle, near the doorway, where they can step out during the service.

The ceremony finally begins and silence slowly settles. They enter the church, in a double file. Girls in white dress, boys in suit and tie. There are thirty-six, this year of 1993, who are receiving the First Communion, la *prima comunione*.

The First Communion, within the Catholic Church, is seen as an important spiritual moment for children. It is the time when they become full members of the Church, when they actively take part, for the first time, in the Holy Communion. But, for Italian children in London, there is more, as Terri Colpi suggests.

The First Communion of Catholic children is the most important event in binding children to the Church. It is at this point that they truly become members, being considered sufficiently spiritually conscious to undertake such a step. The *prima comunione* is especially important in another sense too, for children of the Italian Community. Often at non-Catholic schools, particularly in England, this coming together in the Italian-Catholic environment is culturally as well as spiritually educational. The period of religious instruction puts them in touch with their Italian peers and they begin to learn about Italian institutional environment. (1991b: 126)

The First Communion is part of what Gaetano Parolin calls 'familistic religion'. As Terri Colpi explains, these rituals are not only liturgical: they are invested with cultural meanings that serve to mark out Italian Catholic particularity. In other words, rituals such as the first communion or the wedding are seen as emblems of an enduring Italian identity. These rituals, in turn, foster 'family reunions'.

All of the major life-cycle events, most of which are ritualised through church ceremony... provide the main opportunity for the extended family, often separated geographically by migration, to reunite. All of these events are steeped in ritual and tradition and it is mainly in this area that differences between British and Italian Catholicism are highly visible. Each ceremony provides the occasion for the meeting of a large body of persons who are either blood relatives or relatives by marriage. Such occasions very often offer the means for more distant relatives to remain in contact with each other, as well as for younger members of the family to learn the

names of, and to meet personally, those who make up the kinship network into which they were born and which will become increasingly important to them in their own social life. (Colpi 1991a: 235)

In these moments, community, family and generations articulate together to inscribe a terrain of communality that is set within the church's premises. St Peter's church, *the* Italian church, is a space where trans-generational discontinuity is challenged head on. Positioned as the 'rock' of the community, the church offers some salutary comfort to dispersed families (in both geographical and generational terms) who gather regularly for the different rites of passage which punctuate their members' lives. "My father took me here for my First Communion", said an Italian man during the 1993 First Communion mass, "and I want my children to have their First Communion here." Another parent confided that the whole event reminded her of her own past.

Each year, First Communicants parade in the yearly procession in honour of the *Madonna del Carmine* (figure 6). Dressed in their white dresses and dark suits, they walk in double file, displaying the year's youngest additions to the London Italian Catholic 'community'. In 1993, a number of them were also introduced to the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Basil Hume, on the occasion of the 130th anniversary of St Peter's church. A few girls and boys, groomed exactly as they had been only the week before, took part in the ritual of the gifts, where they brought fruit and bread to the altar. After the mass, the first communicants posed for a photograph with Cardinal Hume. The photo was published in the following issue of *Backhill*.¹⁴ The First Communion, then, is both cultural and spiritual. Children are included as active agents — and paraded — within 'community' practices of identity and, as Colpi suggests, put in touch with cultural institutions that are said to be Italian. One of these is the wedding.

For the occasion, boys and girls are groomed and dolled up in their new outfits and cracking new shoes. Boys wear suits and ties (or bow ties), dressed up like little men. But when seen standing next to the girls, the 'little men' become grooms. The girls are all in white: white dresses, white gloves, white stockings, white shoes, and something white in the hair (veil, head-band, or flowers). As they walk down the aisle, the evocation of a wedding ceremony is unmistakable. Marianna de Marco Torgovnick remembers her own confirmation as being a dress rehearsal for the wedding.

¹⁴ *Backhill*, June 1993: 8.



Figure 6
First communicants in Procession in Honour of Our Lady
St Peter's Church

Figure 7
First communicant and Madonna



Although no one has made the comparison out loud, confirmation is a dress rehearsal for marriage, and the girls understand it that way, in white dresses and veils, walking down the aisle. At confirmation, Catholics confirm allegiance to God, their willingness to be 'soldiers of Christ'. It is a strong, thrilling rhetoric and seems egalitarian, since the boys are there too, dressed in suits and ties, walking down the other aisle in the church. But the aura of equality is a dodge, and the girls know it. The boys will be soldiers; we will be wives. We are really agreeing to be obedient and virtuous – the same values we have been taught in relationship to males: stay in place, keep quiet, make a gesture of submission at the appropriate moment. (1994: 151-152)¹⁵

That the boys will become soldiers, priests, businessmen, lawyers or caterers, is underpinned by the fact that they are wearing the common suit and tie. The girls, for their part, have their virginity and their destiny written onto their white outfits that anticipate the extra-ordinary bridal gown (see figure 7).

The image most commonly associated with weddings is the figure of the bride. What does this image speak of? What is inscribed on the Italian woman's body when she goes to the altar on her wedding day? Her body in the white dress, her hair adorned with white flowers, her face and hands covered with the white veil and gloves, produce an image of purity and virginity. The bridal gown wraps her body in an aura of extra-ordinariness. Her body melts into the dress, sublimating her sexuality into the more venerable virginity. The dress speaks not of the bride's nor the first communicant's individualities, but carries their bodies into a system of signification that lives beyond them. The denial of the brides' bodies — both adult and children — is deeply enmeshed with Catholicism's distaste for 'things of flesh' that work through a particular connection with women. It speaks of a particular system of erotic stratification that is contained within a patriarchal framework of authority that converges in the nuclear family. This, however, is not specific to Italian Catholicism. It is through the interweaving of Christian symbolism and institutional practices of identity that meanings of tradition and ethnic specificity are projected onto the rituals.

Girls will be brides. Boys will be men. Already, lines of becoming scratch the surface of their bodies. Lines that link up this experience to another, putative one

¹⁵ There seems to be no particular consistency as to whether the 'wedding rehearsal' occurs, if at all, in the first communion or the confirmation in the Catholic Church. At St Peter's church, the Confirmation ceremony gathers teenagers and adults in a less elaborate ritual whereby they confirm their willingness to enter the Christian family.

(the wedding). Lines of make believe, perhaps, but which nevertheless substantiate sexual differences between boys and girls, future men and future brides. As Rosi Braidotti would say, "[i]t is as if some experiences were reminiscent or evocative of others" (1994: 5-6).

This 'as if' experience is particularly appropriate to qualify the first communion, where London Italian children are becoming members of the Roman Catholic community. The ceremony is not merely a discrete and accidental moment in the re-production of a tradition, the signification of which is not inherently built in. The meanings emerge in 'lines of flight' (Deleuze 1989) that connect two segments, located in the present and in the future: the virgin-girl and the bride; the boy and the man. It is a trajectory that moves beyond the immediate injunctions of the Christian ritual, and turns onto the bodies of the children themselves. The ritual, in this regard, is a process of subject formation that works differently for boys and girls. Girls are projected into the family, boys, into the more open-ended world of manhood. At the same time, the wedding rehearsal emphasises obligatory heterosexuality that speaks to boys and girls alike. As Torgovnick says, it constitutes a rehearsal for the ultimate consecration of heterosexual love: the wedding.

The wedding, in its meaning associated to marriage and family, legitimates the expression of heterosexual emotions, and celebrates, by the same token, abstinence and virginity outside of wedlock.¹⁶ The wedding ceremony, in this respect, signals and inscribes the passage from inactive sexuality to active sexuality, from sexually inactive woman/man, to sexually active wife/husband. It constitutes an instance in the social organisation of sexuality, circumscribing the acceptable time and space for heterosexual sex.

The wedding ceremony is the ritualisation of a 'becoming'. It ritualises, immortalises and emphasises the movement of *becoming* wife and husband. It establishes a break between the past status of celibacy and the marital status. The wedding marks out the *passage* into the institution of marriage. It signals the movement of generations, who leave the family home to build their own.

For migrants and their children, generations are points of suture between past and present; they are the living embodiment of continuity and change, mediating memories of the past with present living conditions, bringing the past into the present and charged with the responsibility of keeping some form of ethnic identity alive in

¹⁶ Also, the prohibition of homosexuals from the institution of marriage invalidates homosexual love, desires and emotions.

the future. And, as we have seen in chapter 2, this responsibility is symbolically transmitted at the altar of St Peter's church.

St Peter's is represented as the cradle of the London Italian community. It is a space where Italianness is lived as an enduring and distinct identity through the practice of familistic religion. But the services of the family as the cornerstone of the community are mobilised through gender. In other words, the rites of *passage*, or rites of *becoming* said to express this undying identity are drawn from deeply held ideas about gendered identities and sexual norms. The investment these practices of collective identity make in gender and sexuality align family and community on the same continuum. To paraphrase Gilroy, gender is the modality in which ethnicity is lived (1993: 85).

Concluding remarks

"[R]ituals", wrote Mary Douglas, "work upon the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body" (Douglas [1966] 1984: 168). The rituals that occur in St Peter's church constitute a meeting ground between metaphysical ideas and institutional practices of identity formation. Within rites of passage such as the wedding or the first communion, the irreducibility of gender difference and heterosexual complementarity are emphasised. Moreover, they display a metaphysical understanding of femininity that is clearly distinctive. Images of purity, chastity and virginity are invested with ideals of femininity and the primacy of womanhood/motherhood emerging from the Marian cult. Such ideas are woven with a deep disgust for the body, which is constitutive of the social organisation of sexuality that works differently for men and women. They are articulated into a patriarchal framework where languages of authority are written on men's bodies, while languages of purity are inscribed on women's, and they are arranged in a hierarchy.

First Communion and weddings are steeped in a 'tradition' that relies on formalised, predictable patterns of behaviour, to the extent that all ceremonies mirror each other, repeatedly re-presenting gender differences and heterosexuality. This iteration provides, to paraphrase Gilroy, a supple confidence and stability to notions of ethnic particularity (Gilroy 1994b: 36). The repeated rehearsals of irreducible gender differences and heterosexuality comforts the uncertainties and stabilises the ongoing process of identity formation. In sum, as old certainties about the fixed limits of ethnic identity lose their determining power in the formation of London Italian particularity, gender supplies a form of ontological security that fixes and

secures the relationship between family, local particularity (ethnicity) and community.

Part of this chapter focuses on the array of ways in which Catholicism summons ideas about the irreducibility of gender differences and sexual norms. But this is not only to do with Catholicism — or nationalism. The rituals examined here reveal how gender marks out generations in what may be qualified as the ‘sacraments of ethnicity’.¹⁷ Gender and ethnicity converge in and through each other in a way that calls into question our theoretical understanding of identity formation. This is what I discuss in the concluding chapter.

¹⁷ Thanks to Paul Gilroy for suggesting this evocative phrase.

Conclusion

Gender, ethnicity and power

Languages of solidarity, in the two London institutions, are generated by a group of claims about the historical, political and cultural presence of Italians in Britain. Written histories, politics of identity and popular religion are three primary areas where London Italians create a community that exists beyond the retention of food and folkways. Here, themes of suffering, tradition, spatiality, temporality and the social dynamics of memory acquire a special significance resulting from their association with ideas of emigration, alienation and settlement. Though it signifies a distinctly mobile, multi-local and transnational collectivity, the London Italian imagined community is highly localised in relation to the family.

The family trope permeates all forms of self-representation examined in the previous chapters — written narratives, politics of identity and popular religion — and it gains a special significance arising from its relationship with emigration and settlement. Family, here, means migration, movement and supranational kinship networks, but also settlement, stability and continuity. It pushes against national borders within Fortress Europe, while its representation remains emphatically patriarchal, a-historical and universal. The family is more than a building bloc in the construction of the London Italian community. Which is not to say that the family is the primary ground of communal identity formation. The ‘community’ is not represented as a family, nor is the family the sole generator of ethnic identity/difference. As Bottignolo writes:

An immigrant community does not identify itself and must not be confused with the families which constitute it at any given moment. An immigrant community takes shape and defines itself in part beyond the nuclear families and the possible personal relations which branch out from them to some levels where other factors contribute to consolidate its basis and to extend its solidarities. (1985: 86)

These solidarities are indeed ‘extended’ within institutions such as the church, which is charged with the task of *preserving* and *reproducing* a distinct Italian (emigrant) culture. Defined as the first ethnic network and cradle of fundamental values (Tassello and Favero 1976), the family is a necessary but insufficient condition for the realisation of communal solidarity.

The family, in migration, is a crucial stage for the trial of ethnicity. It is elevated as the site where ethnic emblems circulate, riding on a system of inter-

generational responsibility. It is a space where ethnicity is rehearsed and systematised before spilling out into the collectivity. The family, then, stands on a continuum with community and nation, mimicking culturalist conceptions that view ethnicity as a primary ground for nationalism, and the family as the primary ethnic network.

While the relationship between family and cultural continuity is mediated through generations, the link between family and authenticity is mediated through gender. To put it differently, the services of the family in the construction and elevation of ethnicity, community and nation, are enlisted through gender. This constitutes the main finding of this thesis, the theoretical implications of which I discuss in these concluding pages. The essence of my argument is that we cannot fully separate 'ethnicity', sexuality and gender as lying at the basis of distinct systems of power that criss-cross in group identity formation. They are deeply embedded in one another, and their entwinement, I want to suggest, is to be understood as the outcome of their construction along similar lines. By way of illustration, I return to the initial moments of my enquiry, which were marked by a process of 'locating' my self in terms of ethnicity and gender, and which shed some light on the outcome of this thesis.

This research project was born out of a deep dissatisfaction with 'ethnic studies' and a frustration with attempts to define ethnicity, to the extent that I was tempted, for a moment, to dismiss the concept altogether. In the context of new racisms and ethnic absolutisms, I had become weary of the kind of scientific reasoning that seeks to distinguish social categories by listing some of their 'characteristic features' and obscuring others. However, my study taught me that ethnicity sometimes emerges from signifying practices that are usually associated with 'race' or gender. For example, the comment of my first interviewee, mentioned in the introduction, about 'passing' as an Italian, suggests that there is some form of bodily coding that takes place in the construction of ethnic identity/difference. This, in my view, troubles the assumption that ethnicity is invisible; that "[i]n England, most commonly, race is what can be seen, ethnicity is only what is felt" (Wallman 1978: 307). Though the body may not figure as the bearer of immutable cultural or biological difference in the formation of ethnicity, it is conscripted to render 'visible' what is not. There is something disturbing about this: it leads onto queries about what happens when difference is not 'visible', and evokes disturbing images of the physical 'marking' of 'Jewishness' — from 'hooked noses' to tattoos — before and during the Holocaust. It opens on questions about the relationship between 'invisible' difference and violence in genocidal wars such as those that tore apart former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. These issues reach beyond the scope of my reflections. I simply want to stress that

differentiating between the social construction of gender, 'race' and ethnicity on the grounds that the first two project meanings onto the body and the third does not, hinders our understanding of the significance of the body in cultural identity formation.

A second episode from my fieldwork concerns the implications of thinking about ethnicity as something that is 'felt'. I want to engage with Judith Butler at this point for she was a highly influential figure in the initial moments of this study, namely because of her sophisticated argument about the performativity of identity.¹ Though she does not extend her discussion beyond gender, her emphasis on the effect of sedimentation that iteration provides helped me come to terms with the tension between viewing ethnicity as a social construct, and accepting it as embodied. The following incident will clarify what I mean.

When I first walked into St Peter's church, I was overwhelmed by the sense of *déjà vu* conveyed by the surroundings: the aromas, the light, the statues and icons, the flowers, the pews, the priests' robes... I easily performed the proper bodily movements, drilled by the cues of rising, sitting, kneeling, crossing, heart-pounding with a closed fist while repeating *mea culpa*... Despite the fact that I renounced Catholicism years ago, the familiarity of these weekly masses alleviated the sense of estrangement one might feel when engaging in a new research world. More importantly, this place constituted a small terrain of comfort in a country where I am constantly reminded of my Catholic specificity as if it were *the* determining factor behind my idiosyncrasies and 'quirks'. Indeed, I have never been as 'Catholic' as I have been over the last four years of living in London, where I am constantly reminded of my difference. Thus my first visit to St Peter's struck me because it was a place where my 'difference' seemed to dissolve, even though the ceremonies were not performed in the French vernacular I was brought up with. I found myself in a space where I recognised my self, in a way. It was a space of familiarity and identity: where I could actually witness my/our identity. A space where I need not try to make sense of what was going on: all was familiar, intelligible, even if unpleasant and troubling. I

¹ In short, identity as performative means that identities are constructed by the "very 'expressions' that are said to be [their] results." (Butler 1990: 45). Gender identities stem from the "stylised repetition of acts" (ibid.: 140), a repetition which produces an effect of substantialisation and naturalisation of our gendered and sexual identities. Repetitive acts which also reiterate regulatory norms of sexuality. This is not to say that performance is voluntaristic. Butler de-naturalises sex and locates it as an extension and an enforcement of regulatory discourses. However, it has been rightly argued that Butler emphasises the disciplining of identity formation and neglects considerations of identity as an enabling strategy (Smith 1994; Boyarin 1995), or the possibility of non-subversive negotiations of identities (Nash 1994). Though, to be fair, Butler brings some important correctives in this respect, in *Bodies that Matter* (1993). For the purpose of my immediate concerns, I limit my use of Butler to her definition of performativity and her emphasis on iteration in identity formation, leaving aside the complex argument about subversion.

suppose that for the first time, being myself a 'foreigner' in London, I truly realised that, as constructed and political as it may be, 'ethnicity' too, is personal. The "stylised repetition of acts" (Butler 1990: 140) reached into some deep seated sense of selfhood that had sedimented into my body. It made me realise the extent to which cultural identity is embodied as a result of iterated actions (Connerton 1989). And how these, in turn, are *lived* as expressions of a deeply felt sense of identity, though the latter rather results from the former. This small experience gave me some insight into what it may mean, for some Italians, to return to St Peter's, or the Centro/Chiesa; how these places may allow them to feel good about themselves. How these churches may be places, outside of the home, where people need not think about being Italian. The church, in a way, momentarily solves the ontological problem about belonging to the Italian culture in a non-Italian, non-Catholic world.

In these socio-religious centres, Catholicism constitutes a space of struggle for, and affirmation of, identity/difference. But the rituals that are deemed as "steeped in tradition" (Colpi 1991a: 235) are those where the irreducibility of gender differences and the universality of heterosexuality, are emphasised. What is more, the gender divide is marked by a very specific — and minority — understanding of femininity: from the procession in honour of the Madonna through to the First Communion, the primacy of womanhood in these London Italian settings calls into question the assumptions that gender systems of differentiation in the Western, Christian world, are uniform and universal. It also testifies to the embedment of ethnicity and gender in group identity formation.

In this respect, my membership of the Women's Club was revealing. For if externally, my links with the CDI gave me access to the local Italian associative life, internally, my relations with these women were not as straightforward. From the moment I entered the Women's Club, a gendered and sexualised identity was marked upon my body — just like, as Teresa de Lauretis evocatively illustrates, when women tick the F box when filling out an application form (in Moore 1994: 85) — and I walked into a world where specific injunctions of womanhood were spelled out. My gender, in other words, did not dissolve the distance between myself and these women: "being a woman and being with women is not necessarily the same thing" (Probyn 1993: 32). In 'the field', I was positioned as a young single heterosexual woman and perceived somewhat as an oddity because of my unmarried and 'unspoken for' status — and jobless to boot! I was expected, however, to aspire to marriage and to look for a husband. I have never been asked if I want to marry, let alone if I want to share my life with a man. It was assumed that this was the case.

My marital status was a point of curiosity, if not concern, for many of the women I was in regular contact with. In this context, my ambiguity was *fixed* (i.e. both stabilised and mended) through projecting me as a future wife-lover-mother. Though I was a 'young woman', I was yet to journey on the consecutive routes of accomplished womanhood: to be a heterosexually desirable object, a wife, a lover, a good mother, a fit worker, in sum, to perform my gender through a multiplicity of guarantees that are organised in sequence. Discursive routes that are constructed as segmentary lines (Deleuze and Parnet 1983) where I would move from one stage onto another.

I did not slip painlessly into the Women's Club. My participation was fraught with ambiguities, conflicts, masquerades, mediations. I continuously negotiated the very boundaries I intended to analyse. Processes of inclusion and erasure were simultaneously at play: I was both part of 'them', as an assumed Catholic or 'honorary' Italian, a young white woman, and on the margins, as a single, not courting (a man), student. Indeed, erasure seemed a necessary strategy that allowed me to 'blend in' and to act with/as these women.² It was through the Women's Club that I accessed the 'Italian' community world. As stated in the opening chapter, the fact that I was not Italian did not really matter beyond the initial process of 'locating' me. It was as a particular *kind of woman* — heterosexualised, Catholic — that I moved freely in these settings. The 'lines of becoming' inscribed on my self are what positioned me as a respectable (Italian) woman. Just as the young first communicants become Italian Catholics through gendered practices of identity that project them (especially the girls) into family life. My experiences brought the complexities of the lived coherence of gendered/ethnic identity disturbingly close to my own narrative of selfhood.³ They helped me understand even further the necessity of thinking identity as both lived and constructed. As such, the double process of gendering/ethnicising my self fed into my inquiry about the intersection of gender and ethnicity in community formation.

My project, to be sure, was modified in its own course. That is to say that I was continually drawn back to the centrality of gender in cultural identity formation, and to the fundamental question of the relationship between gender, sexuality, ethnicity and power. Ethnicity, sexuality and gender are constructed along similar lines and as such, cannot be viewed as fully independent axes of power (Butler 1993: 116). This analysis calls into question pluralist approaches to cultural identity that effectively

² Erasure of some political or religious (dis)beliefs, of my personal life, or even the erasure of my ethnicity, that led to amusing things such as receiving a letter addressed to Anna-Maria Fortieri. On disavowal as an enabling strategy see Butler 1993: 116.

³ For a fuller account of my 'troubles in the field', see Fortier 1996.

separate and reify as uniform categories, that which they purport to connect. Thinking about gendered ethnicity is not only a matter of relating ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and honouring them as separate pieces that are brought together, through an array of different practices, within an imagined community. It means more, in my view, than probing the ways in which ethnicity excavates particular values that have specific consequences on men and women. Such theoretical attempts separate systems of domination that develop along similar lines. There is, for example, a potentially important contribution in this thesis towards a politics of identity that does not disconnect sexism, ethnic absolutism and racism into distinct systems of power, "as if oppression only comes in separate, monolithic forms." (Trinh 1989: 104).

This dissertation constitutes an elaborate response to Judith Butler's too short digression on the entwinement of ethnicity, 'race', gender and sexuality (1993: 116-119). I agree with Butler when she calls for

an economy of difference... in which the matrices, the crossroads at which various identifications are formed and displaced, force a reworking of that logic of non-contradiction by which one identification is always and only purchased at the expense of another. (idem: 118)

Indeed, what the conclusions of this study reveal, is that an economy of identity/difference that rests on a mathematical logic of additions and subtractions shed little light on the complexities of identity formation not only at the individual level, but also in institutional practices of collective identity. However, Butler's use of Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of crossroads does not befit her theoretical claims. 'Crossroads' speaks of the synthesis of social categories within a "third element", a "new consciousness" (Anzaldúa 1987: 80) that works out the tensions and contradictions of belonging in different social spaces at once. Anzaldúa rightly challenges dualistic western thought, but suggests that we refuse to consider 'gender' or 'ethnicity' as structuring categories.⁴

In contrast, the results of my enquiry suggest that at the local level, "the gender divide is always crystal clear" (Trinh 1989: 106). Our challenge, as social theorists, is to avoid salvaging it by laying out a set of consistent rules that encase gender as an accessory to group identity formation. What I have shown is that gendered and ethnic

⁴ This notion converses with 'borderlands', both of which are not easily exportable in the context of British Italian daily life. The idea of 'borderlands' presupposes a territory that is sectioned by a geopolitical line (Clifford 1994: 304), and as such, leaves untouched the very boundaries that are claimed to be broken down. London Italian politics of identity, in this regard, should alert us to the construction of 'third spaces' that are located *between* what absolutist discourses such as nationalism, construct as mutually exclusive categories (national/foreigner; native/alien).

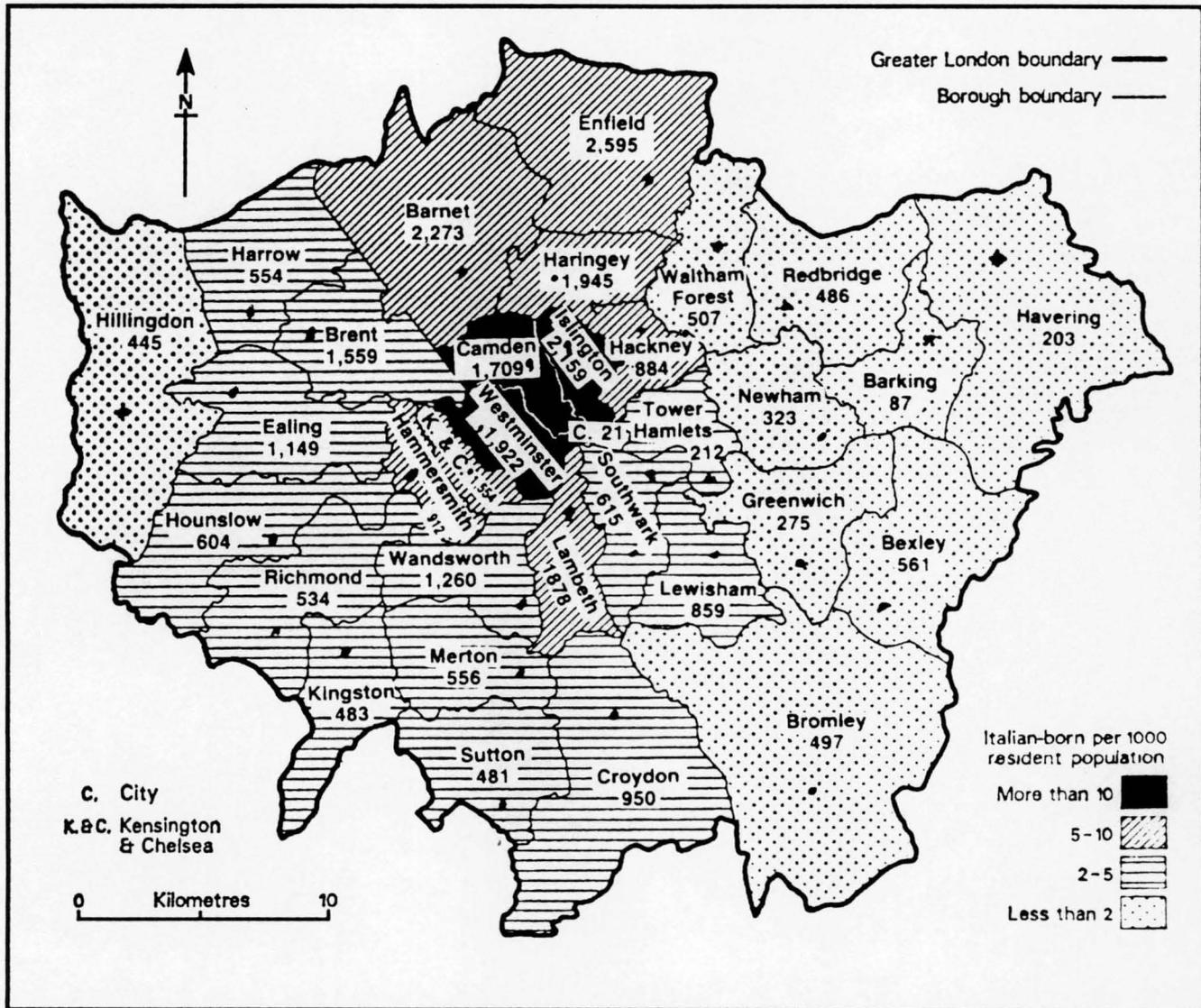
subjectivities are deeply embedded in one another in processes of identity formation. Which is not to say that there is no prioritisation. The systematic imbrication of gender and local particularity in my analysis of different versions of 'community work' stresses the centrality of gender in the construction of cultural identity. The thesis culminates in a discussion about metaphysical and institutional practices of gender/sexuality and their intersection in the production of particular ideas of tradition. The very structure of the dissertation emphasises how gender is a key stabilising principle in projecting new meanings onto the ebb and flow of London Italian social life. Gender is the central vehicle for the mobilisation of family and generations in the collective re-enactment and display of cultural continuity. It is the modality through which young Italian boys and girls participate in the communal expression of local particularity. It was the principle means of my insertion in the London Italian associative life. It frames the political inclusion of Italian men and women in the Italian national fold. Running through the different institutional practices of identity is the repeated rehearsal of heterosexuality and irreducible gender differences. These, in turn, mobilise the services of the family as a crucial stage in trials of ethnicity. In addition, the reification of family values places the relationship between men and women at a special pitch, thus crystallising definitions of ethnic authenticity. In sum, while definitions of identity and continuity are drawn from social dynamics of remembrance and systems of inter-generational responsibility, ideas of authenticity are disproportionately defined in terms of fixed gender roles and sexual norms. Gender signals the way ethnicity is lived, at a time when ethnicity has lost its definite appearance and its determining power.

Looking back at my earlier anxieties about ethnicity, I want to echo Trinh T. Minh-ha and suggest that, like gender, ethnicity is relevant to our theoretical understanding of culture and identity as long as it remains unsettled and unsettling, and as far as it denounces certain fundamental attitudes of imperialism, absolutism and essentialism (1989: 113). Though I remain alert to the tendency of ethnicity to acquire a definite appearance, I now view the unsettled nature of ethnicity as potentially enabling. Essentialism, imperialism, absolutism, familyism, sexism, have all been denounced in this thesis, and destabilised by unveiling their relationship with pluralist tendencies — diasporic consciousness, post-national familyism, mobility of roots and origins. This points to a theory and practice of ethnicity that respects cultural difference without entrenching it in absolutist definitions. A politics that accepts ethnicity as an ongoing process of identity construction, that maps out the multiple points of suture and buds that momentarily stabilise it, while denouncing racial roots and essences.

APPENDIX 1

Figure 8

Italian-born population in London, 1981¹



¹ Source: British Census 1981, reproduced in *La Voce degli Italiani*, #831, October 1990: 14.

APPENDIX 2**Associations and committees named in the thesis**

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| ACLI | Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani (Associations of Christian Italian Workers) |
| ATI | Association of teachers of Italian |
| CDI | Club Donne Italiane (Italian Women's Club) |
| Circolo Veneto | Association for Italians from Veneto (Northern Italy) |
| CGIE | Consiglio Generali Italiani all'estero (General Council for Italians Abroad, Rome) |
| COASIT | Comitato di Assistenza Scuole Italiane (Committee for Italian Schools) |
| COMITES | Comitato Italiani all' Estero (Italians Abroad Committee) |
| CRE | Centro di Studi Emigrazione (Centre for Migration studies, Rome) |
| Direzione Didattiche | Education services, part of the Italian Consulate |
| ERMI | Ente regionale per i problemi dei migrante (Regional committee for problems of migrants) |
| FAIE | Federazione Associazioni Italiane England (Federation of Italian Associations, England) |
| FASFA | Federazione delle Associazioni e Comitati Scuola Fasmiglia (Federation of Parents' Associations and Committees) |
| FEDEUROPA | Federazione dei giornali italiani in Europa (Federation of Italian newspapers in Europe) |
| FMSI | Federazione mondiale della stampa italiana all'estero (World federation of Italian press abroad) |
| ICI | Italian Cultural Institute |
| INAS | Istituto Nazionale di Assistenza Sociale (National Institute of Social Services) |
| INCA | Istituto Nazionale Confederale di Assistenza (Institute of the National Confederation of Assistance) |
| SIE | Simbolo degli Italiani all'Estero (Symbol of Italians Abroad) |
| UNAIE | Unione delle associazione italiane all'estero (Union of Associations of Italians Abroad) |

APPENDIX 3

Interview sheet

Note: The interview sheet below includes a list of themes and questions that were addressed to all leaders, volunteers or employees of Italian organisations, as well as to the two unaffiliated clerics. The conversations were not structured, so that other themes may be discussed. This sheet was not used with the two academics, or with the author of a book on Italians in Britain.

1) About your organisation (or parish/church)

- history
- mandate
- membership: number, geographical distribution, annual fees, gender, age, 'generation', etc.
- activities, services offered
- governing body, structure
- employees
- links with other organisations

2) How do you view your role, as leader (priest)?

3) What kind of relationship do you have with the members (parishioners)?

4) What kind of relationship do you have with other leaders?

5) How would you define the Italian collectivity in London?

6) Personal biography, if they agree

- 'generation'
 - √ if immigrant
 - when arrived in Britain
 - why they came to Britain
 - family, children, partner (if applicable) Their involvement in community life. Ethnic origin of partner, place of wedding, christenings, etc.
 - languages spoken at home
 - relations with Italy
 - education, occupation (if other)
 - involvement in 'community' organisations, Italian classes,

when children

√ if born in Britain

- where
- education
- family: parents, siblings... Their involvement in community life
- current family (if applicable): ethnic origin of partner, place of wedding, of christenings, etc.
- languages spoken at home
- involvement in 'community' organisations, Italian classes, when children

APPENDIX 4**Table 2**

Result of the vote in the Italian Senate, on new voting rights for Italians abroad, November 1993. (in *La Voce degli Italiani*, #899, November 1993)

| Party | # Senators | For | Against | Abstentions |
|---------|------------|-----|---------|-------------|
| DC* | 112 | 84 | - | - |
| Pds | 66 | 4 | 4 | 45 |
| Psi* | 50 | 35 | 2 | 1 |
| Lega | 25 | - | 6 | 14 |
| Rifond. | 20 | - | 18 | - |
| Msi | 16 | 15 | - | - |
| Pri* | 12 | 2 | 4 | - |
| Psdi* | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Verdi | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Rete | 3 | 1 | - | 1 |
| Others | 12 | 2 | - | 5 |

* these four parties formed the majority government coalition in 1993.

List of parties

| | |
|---------|--|
| DC | Christian Democrats (changed name to the Popular Party in 1994) |
| Pds | Partito Democratico della Sinistra (Left Democratic Party; former Communist Party) |
| Psi | Unità Socialista (Socialists) |
| Lega | Northern League (right wing, alliance of secessionists parties from northern Italy including the Lega Lombardia) |
| Rifond. | Rifondazione Comunista (hard line communists) |
| Msi | Neo-fascists |
| Pri | Partito Repubblicano Italiano (Progressive on social issues, market oriented economics. Founded by Mazzini) |
| Psdi | Social Democrats |
| Verdi | Green Party |
| Rete | "The Network" (left-wing Catholic party) |

Comment

Though a majority of 144 senators did vote in favour of the new legislation, 217 votes (2/3) were needed for the bill to be adopted. The four parties in the government coalition voted in favour of the new legislation. They include centre-right, progressive and socialist parties. The Msi, the neo-fascist party also voted in favour. The new bill thus found cross party support. The situation today remains unchanged, that is that Italian emigrants still cannot vote from abroad for Italian elections, nor is the provision for the creation of a new constituency of Italians abroad likely to become a reality.

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