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Global Geography of 'Little Italy': Italian Neighbourhoods in Comparative Perspective

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Between 1870 and 1970 the migration of 26 million people from Italy produced an uneven geography of Little Italies worldwide. Migrants initially clustered residentially in many lands, and their festivals, businesses, monuments and practices of everyday life also attracted negative commentary everywhere. But neighbourhoods labelled as Little Italies came to exist almost exclusively in North America and Australia. Comparison of Italy's migrants in the three most important former 'settler colonies' of the British Empire (the USA, Canada, Australia) to other world regions suggests why this was the case. Little Italies were, to a considerable extent, the product of what Robert F. Harney termed the Italo-phobia of the English-speaking world. English-speakers' understandings of race and their history of anti-Catholicism helped to create an ideological foundation for fixing foreignness upon urban spaces occupied by immigrants who seemed racially different from the earlier Anglo-Celtic and northern European settlers.

Introduction

Neighbourhoods seem the most local sites imaginable. Yet it is precisely the easy conflation of intimate forms of sociality with spatially bounded households and neighbourhoods that a global perspective can problematize. By treating migrations from Italy as global phenomena, as worldwide networks or even as potential diasporas-in the-making, we can begin to map where migrants actually clustered and to identify which clusters came to be understood as neighbourhoods. We can also try to understand the particularity of social relations—to Italians at home and abroad, to immigrants from other backgrounds, and to natives—that defined neighbourhoods differently in Italy, transalpine Europe, North and South America and Australia. Such a comparison quickly reveals that the migration of almost 27 million people from Italy over the course of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries produced a skewed map of 'Little Italies' worldwide.

Little Italies–as many neighbourhoods of immigrant Italians and their descendants are known in North America and, to a lesser extent in Australia, and in

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the UK—simply do not exist in quite the same way in other parts of the world. This is not to say there were no areas where Italian immigrants or immigrant businesses clustered in Germany, France, Switzerland or Latin America. But only rarely, it seems, were such neighbourhoods called Little Italies. Of course, at the moment, we cannot be completely sure we have grasped the geography of Little Italies accurately because scholars of Italian migrants living in Europe or Latin America have not demonstrated as much interest in immigrant neighbourhoods and communities as their English-speaking counterparts did during the flowering of social history in the 1970s and 1980s (the classic text is Harney & Scarpaci 1981). But even their lack of interest in such analysis may be telling. In many countries, scholars have instead preferred to analyse Italians as workers and as participants in working-class labour or political movements (Ragionieri 1962; Bezza *et al*. 1983; Gabaccia & Ottanelli 2001). All this suggests that neighbourhoods, immigrants, and nations have been imagined and constructed in very diverse and often distinctively national ways. Historians of people on the move need to be particularly cautious about adopting as natural such classifications and terminologies; they were themselves generated by past nation-building strategies and may not be appropriately used in other national settings or for global analysis. By contrast, comparisons of national cases can be particularly helpful in revealing how differing terminologies for ethnicity, race, and nation emerged from processes of nation-building. A comparison of Italy's migrants in the three most important former settler colonies of the British Empire—i.e. in the USA, Canada and Australia, along with a brief nod towards England in the nineteenth century—highlights the roughly similar dynamics creating Little Italies in cities such as Toronto, New York, Chicago, Montreal, London, Sydney and Melbourne.

Why should we find Little Italies mainly in English-speaking places? Let me state my thesis as brashly as possible. Little Italies were, to a considerable extent, the product of what Robert F. Harney both termed Italo-phobia and specified as a particular 'malady' of English-speakers (Harney 1985). Italo-phobia could easily develop in settler colonies where political elites already felt challenged by the presence of colonized, racialized and incompletely subordinated native 'outsiders' (whether indigenous peoples or those of African descent). But in North America and Australia, unlike Latin America or France, earlier arrivals of European descent also sought to differentiate themselves from immigrant southern European 'races' because they were perceived as inferior to themselves and, thus, as a threat to their nations. English-speakers were scarcely alone in harnessing racial science to the cause of nation-building, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nor were they alone in drawing racialized circles of inclusion and exclusion around their nations (Gabaccia 2003). In doing so, however, they typically drew on an intense and popular hostility to Catholicism that had no exact counterpart in the former settler colonies of Latin America. A comparative exploration of neighbour-hoods, Little Italies and Italo-phobia within and beyond the English-speaking world helps us to see the complex elements that so often led English-speakers to mark urban spaces with national labels, providing us with a more nuanced understanding of Italo-phobia itself. Because they associated Italy with racial inferiority by the late nineteenth century, Little Italy seemed visible to English-speakers in a way that settlements of Swedes or Frenchmen did not.

Migration as Global Movement

At almost any time in a long history of migrations into, around and out of the Mediterranean, peoples from Italy lived scattered in many places. Residents of the peninsula of Italy (a mere 'geographic expression' in Metternich's age) had been leaving home as long as written records documented them. Biographical dictionaries trace the wanderings out of Italy of soldiers, artists, clerics, scholars and merchants from at least the advent of the last millennium. After 1500, migrants left every part of the Italian peninsula, and they typically scattered in multiple directions—first, around the Mediterranean into Asia and Africa and across the Alps into northern, western and central Europe, and later, across the oceans to North and South America and Australia (Franzina 1995; Gabaccia 2000; Bevilacqua *et al*. 2002).

Migration from Italy began to assume truly massive proportions in the aftermath of the French Revolution, with its redrawing of Europe's map. The political exiles and chimney sweeps of Italy's *Risorgimento* gave way after the formation of an independent Italy, in 1861, to a veritable exodus of the humble peasants and artisans of the country's rural districts. Between 1876 and 1915, over 14 million persons—most of them men—declared their intention to leave Italy; between 1916 and 1945, the numbers of emigrants dropped but remained quite impressive (especially given hostility to emigration and immigration in both Italy and the Americas) at 4.5 million. For 30 years after the Second World War, migrations continued on a mass scale with more than 7 million new departures (Rosoli 1976).

North America may be the best studied destination in Italy's global migrations but it was not, contrary to much popular belief, the one chosen by a majority of Italy's migrants. Even during the so-called mass migrations (1876–1914), the largest group of migrants from Italy travelled to other European countries (44%). North America (with 31%) was in second place, followed closely by South America (24%). In the twentieth century, Europe's importance for Italy's migrants increased. Between 1916 and 1945, over half of Italy's migrants traveled within Europe—mainly to France and Belgium. In the second postwar era, over two-thirds went to Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland and the UK. After 1945, while the majority of Italy's migrants headed north across the Alps, Canada and Australia also each admitted more Italian workers than did the USA (Gabaccia 2001b, Table 1.2, p. 4).

What this means is that, for example, in the nineteenth century, Argentina, and to a lesser extent Brazil, and in the twentieth century, France, Canada and Australia, have all at times challenged the USA as pre-eminent 'lands of promise' for Italy's migrants (Baily 1999). With large proportions of migrants returning home again (estimates range from 30% to 80% for varying regions and time periods), Italy too remained a sort of 'land of promise', notably for reproducing and preserving a family's place in a village community. Acknowledging the diversity of migrants' choices, destinations and migratory trajectories is important because it forces us to note which areas in migrants' global networks have actually been labelled and understood as neighbourhoods. It also forces us to assess the degree to which the neighbourhood was the key site of social interaction and identity orientation for such a mobile group of people.

Where is the Neighbourhood?

The term 'Italian neighbourhood' evokes images of dense, stable and urban clusters of immigrants from Italy. Although scholars have occasionally treated the neighbourhood as the structural equivalent of a village or *paese* transplanted from Italy, demographic analysis of the 1970s and 1980s established clearly that settlements of Italians abroad differed significantly from the villages of Italy. Demographic differences between homeland *paese* and migrant neighbourhood reflected the highly selective nature of Italy's migrations: they were male-dominated migrations, with sizeable majorities of working-age individuals with few children and nuclear family groups present (Harney & Scarpaci 1981, p. 4; Gabaccia 1984). Still, such neighbourhoods did exhibit visually many of the social and cultural characteristics of the villages of Italy: a lively street life, with vendors of food and businesses with Italian-language signs; crowds of children playing as women watched from open windows; men gathered around their clubs, cafés and bars; casual sociability within and between homes; workplaces dispersed among the residences; a Catholic church; and occasional street processions in honour of homeland saints.

As scholarship on the Italians of the period of the mass emigrations revived in North America in the 1970s, its focus was almost exclusively on immigrants living in urban settings. Most of the early and influential social histories of Italians in the US studied and compared community formation, ethnic institution-building, and family and cultural dynamics in specific urban neighbourhoods in cities such as Cleveland, Chicago, Boston and Buffalo (Nelli 1970; Martellone 1973; Barton 1975; Yans-Mclaughlin 1977; Briggs 1978). This interest in urban settlements reflects the considerable intellectual legacy of the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920s and 1930s, with its overweening interest in urban human ecology. The irony of that legacy was, of course, that scholars such as Rudolph J. Vecoli and Virginia Yans-McLaughlin viewed themselves as critics of the Chicago School, of the historian most influenced by its ideas, Oscar Handlin, and of the focus of both on the stressful but ultimately successful and complete assimilation of Europe's immigrants (Vecoli 1964; Yans-McLaughlin 1977).

Harney and Scarpaci's (1981) collection of essays on urban neighbourhoods, inspired by a desire to 're-emphasize and analyse again the role of the settlement area in the life of the ethnic group' (Harney & Scarpaci 1981, pp. 4–5), extended this type of neighbourhood-based analysis to Italians living in Canada's cities (Toronto, Montreal and Thunder Bay). Book-length studies of communities in Canada's early-twentieth century cities quickly followed, as did analysis of the still larger post-second World War II Italian settlements in Toronto (Ramirez 1984; Zucchi 1988; Iacovetta 1993). While most of the case studies published in *Little Italies in North America* acknowledged that immigrant neighbourhoods declined and sometimes even disappeared across the twentieth century as the immigrant generation gave way to its children and grandchildren, it was not until the 1990s that the decline of such neighbourhoods—the subject of some earlier studies by urban sociologists—became the object of scrutiny by historians and Italian-Americanists (Fried 1963; Gabaccia 1992).[1] As a result, the early social history literature on Italian immigrant neighbourhoods seems frozen in time—a snapshot, and a somewhat idealized one, of a very specific moment in the history of Italian migration and settlement.

Developing only in the past 30 years, Australian scholarship has been considerably less focused on urban space and neighbourhoods, but even here the association of Italians with urban territory can be noted. (In Australia, early studies of Italians instead adopted provincial or regional—western Australia, southern Australia—or even national frames of analysis; but see Huber 1977; Di Lorenzo 2001. 'Little Italy' is common in everyday contemporary Australian language, and is applied both to Melbourne's Carlton Street region and to Sydney's Leichardt district, with Norton Street at its centre.) By the late 1980s, studies of Italian urban communities in the UK also began to appear (Sponza 1988; Colpi 1991; Fortier 2000); and in the past few years, scholars focusing on Italians in Argentina or France have also on occasion studied specific urban neighbourhoods where large numbers of Italy's migrants lived and worked. But scholarship for Argentina suggests, for example, that Italians did not always cluster. In Buenos Aires, a somewhat anomalous but important example, Italians made up such a large part of the city's population that they were found in almost every urban quarter and the majority lived outside the identifiable Italian enclaves (such as the neighbourhood, La Boca), and not within them (DeVoto 1989; Baily 1999). In France the contrast between Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard's *Italiens dans l'Est parisien*: *une historie d'intégration: 1880–1960*, with its focus on swift spatial integration, and the earlier work of North Americans emphasizing the persistence, reproduction and preservation of territorially based Italian neighbourhood communities over the generations, is indeed striking (see also Maltone & Buttarelli 1993).

Awareness of the global scattering of Italy's migrants forces us to be more precise about which segments and strands of Italy's migrations actually clustered in urban neighbourhoods. When we survey the many destinations of Italy's migrants to existing mental maps of their settlements, we are forced to consider the possibility that neighbourhoods were the exception.

For the century between 1870 and 1970, the majority of Italy's migrants were transient male labourers, often recruited and working under *padrone* bosses or selected and financed by state- or employee-sponsored labour recruitment schemes (in the nineteenth century) or under guest-worker programs and bi-lateral treaties between Italy and the nations of Europe, Latin America, Australia and Canada, in the second postwar era (Gabaccia 2000, pp. 63–66, 75–6, 157–8). Their workplaces—often temporary—were in the bush logging and construction camps of Canada, along railway lines under construction in North and South America and in Europe or on mass public-works projects building dams, waterworks, reservoirs and water systems in the US and parts of Canada. During the era of the mass migrations, these 'men without women' (Harney 1979) did not work or live permanently in large cities, although they often passed through cities or lived there in sufficient numbers through the dead, winter seasons of unemployment to be supported by a male-oriented strip of businesses (bars, brothels, boarding-houses, labour agents, restaurants, etc.). In some places these male-oriented neighbourhoods for transients were spatially quite distant from Italian neighbourhoods of more settled immigrants; often they could be found near urban rail terminals or railway lines (Bradwin 1928; La Sorte 1985; Peck 2000). In the years after the Second World War, and especially in Germany, male guest-workers too lived in segregated barracks housing (Castles & Kosack 1973). Both the so-called *padrone* slaves of the earlier era and the guest-workers of the later

period typically expected to return to Italy, an expectation shared by the businesses that employed them and the governments that recruited them. Italy's global networks thus included heavily male settlements, as well as the more gender-balanced urban neighbourhoods where children were born, raised and attended schools, and where both men and women found work and sociability in their homes or outside of it; unsurprisingly, urban neighbourhoods, and not male labour camps, generated most of the institutions of ethnic life in North America (Harney & Scarpaci 1981, p. 5; Gabaccia 2000, pp. 85–6, 120–8).

A sizeable minority of Italy's migrants, furthermore, worked in rural areas, and not in cities. In southern France, Argentina and Louisiana, large numbers of transient men (and, in France, gangs of women harvesters) arrived to pick wheat, sugar, flowers, or grapes, only to depart again almost immediately for other jobs, for larger cities or for their homes in Italy (Foerster 1969, pp. 131–4; Gabaccia 2000, p. 75). For the minority of Italy's migrants recruited together with women and children family members, sharecropping or other forms of tenancy on the wheat-raising Pampas or coffee growing *fazendas* (plantations) of southern Brazil resulted in rural and scattered, not dense, urban clusters of Italian settlement. A very few scholars—specialists on the Italian sugar-growers of Queensland, the seasonal cane-cutters and plantation employees of Louisiana, the peons on Brazilian coffee *fazendas* or the wheat-growers of the Argentine Pampas—have attempted to limn the formation of community among such labouring rural groups but none has suggested they were the structural or experiential equivalents of urban neighbourhoods (Scarpaci 1981; Trento 1984; Douglass 1995; Silberstein 2001).

Finally, we cannot ignore in our geographies of neighbourhoods the postwar migrations of Italians to North America, Australia and northern Europe, and especially to New York, Toronto and Sydney—all cities that experienced rapid suburban growth in the 1960s and 1970s. Suburban areas like those in New York's Westchester County and Long Island's Suffolk County, and the Toronto districts described by Nick Harney, in this issue of the journal, today contain some of the highest proportions of Italian born and descended residents in the US and Canada (LaGumina 1988). Some recent migrants, in other words, have traveled directly from Italy to the suburbs, completely bypassing life in the dense, urban neighbourhoods that scholars—from the theorists of the Chicago School to the social historians of the 1970s and 1980s—envisioned as the most important areas of first settlement and early adaptation. In addition, the majority of the children and grandchildren of Italian migrants in all three countries now live in suburban areas. While only a few scholars have studied them there, none, again, has suggested that the neighbourhood remained the most vital unit for analysis in newer suburban environments. If anything, urban scholarship has portrayed suburbs, with their car transport, domestic orientation and social isolation, as the analytical opposites of the density, street-life and vivacity of urban neighbourhoods, including those (or perhaps particularly those?) occupied by immigrants from Italy.

In short, we know much more about the meaning, significance and linkage of urban neighbourhood and community in New York, Toronto, Tampa, London and Montreal than we do about Italian settlements in Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Sydney, Marseilles, Paris or Locarno. We know much more about urban than rural settlements and much more about those clusters of Italians where the presence of

women and children created the semblance of permanence and of settled community life—a presence which also, apparently, inspired men to form community institutions, making these too a concomitant of urban, neighbourhood life. It thus seems quite possible that it has been the US and Canadian scholarly preference for analysing Italian migrants in urban neighbourhoods and for assuming such communities to be territorially bounded that has created the common image of Italians as culturally predisposed to create, defend and preserve family and neighbourhood communities (Yans-McLaughlin 1977). North American scholars and Italians in Canada and the USA have consistently represented Italian immigrants as a people who value their own turf in the form of home ownership, high rates of residential stability and high expectations of face-to-face sociability in their urban villages. (Although he attributed these traits to Italian immigrants' class rather than their ethnic status, Gans (1962) still provides the classic statement.)

This portrait must, at the very least, be modified by an acknowledgement of the peripatetic male labourers of Italy's male-dominated migrations. Students of neighbourhoods, especially in Canada and the USA, where they have provided the single most important framework for analysing the life of migrants, need to take into account the possibility that it was male transiency, and not continuous, family residence in spatially circumscribed arenas, that defined the most important social networks, identities and experiences for Italy's migrants. No matter how insular and provincial life in neighbourhoods sometimes looked to outside observers—and observers did stress the supposed isolation of both southern Italian villages and urban immigrant enclaves in the US and of the Italian women living in both—the ever-mobile men of rural Italy guaranteed that all were in intimate connection with a world well beyond the neighbourhood. For over a century, migratory men also guaranteed that neighbourhoods throughout Italy's diasporic networks were, as one North American woman in New York also noted, sites of almost kaleidoscopic daily change as neighbours changed residences and jobs (Gabaccia 1984, p. 77). As Kenneth Scherzer pointed out over a decade ago, even very urban neighbourhoods were unbounded; their residents' most important social ties were as often to persons outside than within the neighbourhood they occupied. More recently, transnational and diasporic analyses of Italian migration have suggested much the same thing (Scherzer 1992; Gabaccia 2001a; Reeder 2003).

From Neighbourhood to Little Italy

Social networks and mental maps need not correspond, of course: the labelling of neighbourhoods as Little Italies did not necessarily reflect in any straightforward way their relative demographic importance in global networks of migrations. In fact, scholars following theorists such as Fredrik Barth have argued for two decades that it is not necessarily the social practices of an existing group, but rather a process of 'othering'—the differentiation of self from others and insiders from outsiders (creating either 'alterity' or 'ethnic boundaries', depending on one's theoretical perspective)—that defines ethnic, national and racial groups (Barth 1998). Viewed from this perspective, the geography of Little Italies around the world is best understood as a product of migrants' encounters with cultural and

linguistic diversity. That encounter began in Italy, where the creation of a national state intensified contacts among persons of differing local and regional backgrounds. It continued as Italy's villagers travelled abroad. Scattering, as they did, migrants' interactions with other immigrants and with natives varied from place to place. While these encounters determined which urban spaces would ultimately be marked as Little Italies, it was not the migrants themselves who invented the term or defined the boundaries of any particular Little Italy.

Already in the late Middle Ages a dialect poet had noted humorously that 'So many are the Genoese, scattered worldwide, that they build other Genoas wherever they reside' (quoted in Cocito 1966). At the time this poet wrote, there were technically no Italians. The firmest loyalties, the most important identities and the most extensive social ties in Italy were and long remained those at the local and regional level. Some scholars use the term *campanilismo* (the identification with the local church tower) as a kind of shorthand for Italian localism; others focus instead on the *paese* (local village) or *patria* (birthplace) as the main locus for identification and sociability (Levi 1979; Levy 1996). In either case, most scholars agree that Italy's political elite succeeded in making Italy an independent national state in 1861 without 'making Italians'. At least during the era of the mass migrations, Italy seemed a 'state without a nation' (Ciuffoletti 1993). Still, it was very much a nation in the making. Many men from Italy had their first cross cultural experiences with Italians of other regional origins during their years of obligatory military service. For older men, and for many Italian women and children, the first encounters with cultural difference instead came with migration.

While it is easy to imagine that contacts among Italians of differing regional origins might foster Italian nationalism, in fact, these as often made new Italians aware of the regional differences that divided them. Italian historians describe the years between 1860 and 1920 as one of intense polemics over the so called problem of Italy's *mezzogiorno* (the south); throughout these years, positivist scientists and political leaders purported to document the sharp racial and cultural differences that differentiated residents of the new country's northern and southern provinces (Schneider 1998). Meanwhile, in thousands of small villages, another form of differentiation occurred as emigrated men began returning home. There, more sedentary neighbours sought their own labels to distinguish themselves from the returnees who seemed both more worldly and possessed of more cash. They called the new, modern houses the returnees built *case americane* (American houses). They poked fun at the appearance, and drinking habits of returned migrants whom they called *americani* or *germanesi*; they classified still other returnees as the 'French' or the 'Swiss' (Gabaccia 2001b, pp. 98–9).

This differentiation among Italians at the local level continued with migration abroad. Most of the studies published in *Little Italies in North America* noted chain migrations from particular towns and regions producing local and regional clusters even within relatively small neighbourhoods; any sizeable neighbourhood in North America typically housed dozens, if not hundreds, of small mutual-aid societies for residents from particular villages in Italy (Scarpaci 1981a, pp. 116–18). Only in the years around the First World War did community institutions in Toronto, to give just one example, commonly begin to include the title 'Italian' in their names (Harney 1981, pp. 52–4).

Yet all scholarship on Canada and the US at the turn of the century, as well as newer work on the earliest of Italy's diasporas, also agrees that Italians were more easily made outside of Italy than within the country's national boundaries. In the making of Italians, the encounter with strangers was determinative. Despite the fact that Italy remained a mere geographic expression, foreigners by the time of the French Revolution were already labelling inhabitants of the peninsula—whether Venetians, Milanese, Romans or Neapolitans—as 'Italians' (Gabaccia 2001b, p. 45). Leaving Italy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, migrants soon faced similar labelling; diaspora nationalism—which developed already during the *Risorgimento*—was one product of these encounters with foreigners.[2] Nationalist exiles, before 1861, and Italian councils, businessmen, professional workers, newspapermen and, ultimately, even Catholic clergy (although they were at first hostile to Italy's secular state) worked hard to draw ordinary labour migrants into their circle of influence and to represent them as Italians both to the political elites of the homeland and to the political institutions of the country where they worked and lived.

Still intensely aware of differences among themselves, Italians tended to homogenize the rest of the world, while, at the same time, gradually recognizing that those outside their migrant circles were doing the same thing to them. Thus, while nineteenth-century migrants from Italy tended to label any oversea destination (including Australia) as 'laMerica', they quickly discovered upon arrival abroad that Sydney's residents were not Americans but Australians (Bosworth 1996, p. 134). They also discovered that the neighbours they met spoke quite different languages and followed quite different customs in Canada (where immigrant neighbourhoods emerged in both French-speaking Montreal and English-speaking Toronto), in the USA (think only of the very different populations of Tampa, New York, Boston and San Francisco), in Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany or Switzerland and in Australia. Whether natives spoke French, Spanish or English, most viewed the newcomers from Italy not as Sicilians or Romans, but simply as Italians. By the First World War, and even more obviously during the worldwide battle between Italian fascists and anti-fascists, even Italy's localist migrants had begun to acquire the passions and identities that nationalism encouraged.

Dawning national consciousness among immigrants provided little incentive to affix the label Little Italy to immigrant neighbourhoods, however. The term *piccola Italia* was not part of Italian nationalist discourse of the early twentieth century. On the contrary, Italian nationalists of both imperialist and liberal tendencies instead developed alternative visions of *la più grande Italia* (a larger Italy), in which *colonie* (colonies) of merchant entrepreneurs or settlers (especially in Latin American), or state sponsored invasions and colonization projects for underemployed Italian farmers (usually in Africa) were to build international influence for the homeland (Choate 2003). In St Louis, according to contributor Gary Mormino, in *Little Italies in North America* (1981), residents of that city's Little Italy called their neighbourhood simply 'the Hill'. The same was true in London in the 1990s (Fortier 2000, p. 139). Even today, many Italian-speaking scholars and some Italian-American activists seem to avoid using the label 'Little Italy'. While rejecting an older terminology of imperialist nation building, the Italian scholars funded by the Giovanni Agnelli Foundation in the 1980s chose to call their journal *Altreitalie* (*Other Italies*), a term that resonates nicely with the centuries-past metaphorical

choices of the dialect poet of Genoa. More recently, a perhaps overly sensitive diaspora nationalist named 'Mike' chided 'Anna' (who had suggested collecting information about U.S. Little Italies on the website: www.italianamericans.com) with this response: 'Anna: The term "Little Italy" should be replaced by "The Greater Italian Community". Little is so demeaning, e.g. we do not see "Little Ireland" ...' Proud nationalists, then and now, have had little incentive to embrace the 'littleness' that the term Little Italy implies.

'Mike's' explicit comparison of Italian to Irish national pride also serves as a reminder that many of the neighbours Italian immigrants met in their new urban homes were foreigners, too. Decades ago, social historians of the USA used quantitative methods to challenge descriptions of immigrant neighbourhoods as homogeneous ethnic enclaves. They described neighbourhoods instead as multi-ethnic agglomerations of diverse groups of immigrants who shared mainly low incomes and unfamiliarity with American life (Chudacoff 1973; Conzen 1979). In New York and Toronto, and later in Sydney and Melbourne, migrants from Italy moved into older urban areas where large numbers of Irish, Scots, English, Germans or even Dutch had once lived. In US neighbourhoods immigrants from Italy lived among or next to immigrants from Jewish Eastern Europe (especially in New York and Chicago), Poles (in Chicago), Cubans and Spaniards (notably in Tampa) or Mexicans and Chinese (for example, in San Francisco) (Kessner 1977; Pozzetta & Mormino 1987). In France, too, immigrant populations of Italians encountered equally big or even larger numbers of Poles and Belgians among their immigrant neighbours or co-workers (Noiriel 1988). And Italians were also a relatively small group in Germany, where Dutch and Poles were far more numerous but often settled and worked in differing parts of the country, or took different jobs (Herbert 1984; Del Fabbro 1996).

In Argentina and Brazil, by contrast, Italians were instead among the earliest and the first or second largest of immigrant groups; in Buenos Aires, for example, Italians and their children were over half the population. There, Italians shared neighbourhoods with immigrants from Spain or Portugal but, nevertheless, dominated urban streetscapes (Moya 1998). Italians were also the largest group of immigrants in Switzerland, a country that also attracted French, German and Austrian immigrants (Holmes 1988).

Unfortunately, a historiography that focuses on ethnic histories of separate immigrant groups rather than on a shared history of interaction among immigrants of varied backgrounds, makes it difficult to assess the consequences of these neighbourhood encounters on ethnic group formation or consciousness. A student of US labour, James Barrett and, more recently, comparativists, Fraser Ottanelli and Donna Gabaccia, agree that it was cross-cultural encounters among immigrants that shaped the development of labour movements not only in the USA but elsewhere (Barrett 1992; Gabaccia & Ottanelli 2001). Ethnic segmentation and so-called language locals became typical in US unions, whereas in Latin America multilingual amalgamation and, in France, rapid integration into French-speaking syndicalism was the result. In the USA, Canada and Australia, the territorial parishes of the Catholic Church also became an important site of Irish/Italian conflict; in the US the result was the formation of nationality parishes or independent Italian mission churches (manned by Italian clerics working with the missionaries from the

Scalabrianian or other orders) (D'Agostino 1993, 1997). There seems little doubt that Catholic churches in the overwhelmingly Protestant Canada, UK and USA helped to identify urban territories as Italian, even if Catholic rhetoric did not itself produce the label Little Italy. In any case, both the conflict with the Irish and the formation of nationality parishes and Italian missions scarcely existed in Argentina, Brazil and France, where Catholic parishes, much like unions, became places of amalgamation and mixing, rather than segmentation along national or ethnic lines (Baily 1999).

Studies of immigration into the USA, which tend to focus on conflict and accommodations between immigrant newcomers and long-time natives, have undoubtedly underestimated the significant consequences of interactions among foreigners of different origins. Still, natives' reactions to the newcomers could be determinative in some arenas of life. It was the efforts of natives to understand and to interpret the significance of the arrival and clustering of Italians that first generated the label Little Italy. But only in the US, at first, then the UK and somewhat later in Canada and much later still in Australia, did this occur, and only after long years of referring to emerging clusters of immigrants in very different terms.

For much of the nineteenth century, according to the primary sources cited by Lucio Sponza, Londoners, for example, referred to Hatton Garden and Saffron Hill clusters of organ grinders and food purveyors as the 'Italian quarter' or the 'Italian colony' (Sponza 1988, ch. 7, fig. 1).[3] In the late nineteenth century, English-speakers in New York referred to the nearby Lower East Side neighbourhood of Jewish immigrants as the Jewish 'ghetto' or even Jewtown, much as they referred to the closeby Chinese neighbourhood as Chinatown (Riis 1890; Cahan 1896). And New Yorkers such as Jacob Riis also sometimes noted the existence of an Italian 'colony' that adjoined both the 'ghetto' and 'Chinatown'.

In seizing upon the metaphor of 'Little Italy', the English-speakers of New York City reached back to a terminology first used for the clustering of German immigrants in the nineteenth century, that of 'Little Germany'. (In that particular case, however, it may have been Germans themselves who originally called New York's Lower East Side *Kleindeutschland*).[4] Writing for a specialized audience of reformers, the German-speaking Danish immigrant, photographer and journalist Jacob Riis had begun to use the term Little Italy in his writings already in the 1899 (Riis 1890, 1899). But it was probably two works of fiction published in the USA in 1902 and 1908 respectively (Fry 1902; Ruddy 1975) that may have constituted the breakthrough of the term into the popular public sphere of print communication. Here we see, once again, the power of literary production to generate, spread and reproduce popular terminologies for ethnic and racial difference—as, for example, did Israel Zangwill's much better known play *The Melting Pot*, a few years later. Londoners were applying the term Little Italy to their own long-established neighbourhood clusters of immigrants by 1906 (see Sponza 1988). And by the years of the First World War, the term Little Italy was already becoming part of the American lexicon.

Still, the term Little Italy, once invented, was not applied universally or broadly. At the time Fry wrote in the first decade of the twentieth century, New York had, by one estimate, at least 70 distinctive Italian neighbourhoods. From its first use, Little Italy referred to only two of these (the area within the 6th and 14th wards and the

streets southeast and west of Mulberry, Mott and Canal Streets in lower Manhattan and the East Harlem settlement in upper Manhattan) (Pozzetta 1981).

Only in Canada, furthermore, did Little Italy find easy or early translation into a language other than English. The historian of Montreal's Italians, Bruno Ramirez, along with his collaborator, Michele Del Balzo, refers to a transition there from a 'colony' of sojourner railroad labourers to a more permanent settlement, 'petite Italie' (Ramirez & Del Balzo 1981). To this day, no equivalent term to Little Italy exists in Brazil, Argentina or France, whereas in Germany the term *Klein Italien* refers not to a neighbourhood occupied by persons of Italian origin, but rather to a wine or fruit growing region (such as Groningen or Zabergäu) that German-speakers believe to resemble the paradisical Italy of holiday yearnings. In short, Little Italy was a creation of the English-speakers monitoring the growth of Italian neighbourhoods in cities they regarded as their own; it was not a term generated by the occupants of those Italian neighbourhoods or by their immigrants' encounters with their nearest neighbours, most of whom were foreigners like themselves.

Little Italies and Italo-phobia in the English-speaking World

The major challenge of a global analysis of Italian immigrant neighbourhoods, then, is to explain why the geography of Little Italies is so skewed towards the English-speaking or Anglo-dominated countries where Italians settled in large numbers. Readers of *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Gabaccia 2001b) will be familiar with my observation that class and cultural dynamics varied with the very differing nation-building strategies of the multi-ethnic nations where Italians laboured and lived. Still, no nation was completely unique. Germany and Switzerland recruited foreign workers but insisted that neither work nor long-term residence were grounds for workers to become members of the national body (even though the proportion of foreigners in Switzerland, in 1910, was higher than in the US). Despite their radically different political histories, Brazil, Argentina and France all created unitary nations into which foreigners were either integrated as French-speaking citizens or amalgamated biologically and culturally through intermarriage and reproduction. In sharp contrast, the US, Canada and Australia all created multicultural nations that varied in the cultural distinctions highlighted (language, history, religion), yet all encouraged the development of hyphenated identities melding ethnic and national markers and distinguished racial from ethnic difference (Gabaccia & Ottanelli 1997).

Viewed from this perspective, the transformation of immigrant neighbourhoods into Little Italies might seem innocuous enough—it was little more than a spatial expression of the myriad forms of ethnic segmentation characteristic of English-speaking lands. Only recently has the burgeoning new research field of 'whiteness' studies forced enthusiasts of multiculturalism to consider alternative explanations (Guglielmo & Salerno 2003). Scholars in the USA, Canada and Australia—and now, somewhat belatedly, even the UK—are so accustomed to celebrating ethnic diversity and multiculturalism as forms of cultural democracy that they can easily forget that the conceptual roots of ethnicity and ethnic segmentation lie in the entanglement of nation building with scientific racism. As Roger Daniels's study of the late nineteenth

and early twentieth century has insisted, immigrants arriving in the USA between 1890 and 1920 did not enter a welcoming 'nation of immigrants' (Daniels 1997). They entered a country where Ellis Island officials after 1899 catalogued every newcomer by racial group and distinguished Northern and Southern Italians as different races.

When Robert F. Harney in 1985 called Italo-phobia a malady of English-speakers, he was not seeking to explain the genesis of Little Italies or the prevalence of multiculturalism in the English-speaking world, but rather the sharp restrictions that Canada, Australia and the USA imposed on immigration from Italy (along with other southern and eastern European homelands) between 1900 and 1924. At least since the 1870s, Italians had sparked hostile reactions from workers throughout the world. Initially hated as strikebreakers and wage depressors, such fears proved relatively short lived and they disappeared with the incorporation of migratory workers in labour organizations in much of Europe. In Australia and the USA, by contrast, labour movements institutionalized their nativism and became important advocates of literacy tests and national origins quotas (in the US) or of the 'white Australia' policy there. While hostility to Italians and other immigrants also rose in Latin America and France, these countries did not distinguish among immigrants by race, nor did their labour movements, churches or other key institutions develop ethnic segmentation as they incorporated newcomers. They did not seek to exclude Italians on the basis of race (and they reduced opportunities for immigration only in the face of the Great Depression). During the transition to immigration restriction, the English word 'ethnicity' came to replace race in labelling white foreigners from Europe; the term scarcely exists in Spanish, Portuguese or French (Gabaccia 2003).

The purpose of pointing to the scientific racist origins of the labelling of groups English-speakers today call ethnic groups is not to argue for the absence of notions of racial superiority in France or Latin America.[5] Nor is it to assert the 'non-whiteness' or even the 'in-betweenness' of Italian immigrants in the US or elsewhere. Admitted as immigrants with the right to naturalize in all three of the ex-settler colonies of the British Empire, the 'colour' of Italians, as Europeans, was always unquestionably white. But whereas Argentines and Brazilians in the nineteenth century had recruited immigrants, including those from Italy, in order to whiten their multi-racial populations through intermarriage, English-speakers adopted a different racial discourse of nation building. Theirs drew new boundaries (first, of race and religion, and later, of ethnicity) to fix the supposed differences among the white or northern European races (understood as Nordics, Anglo-Saxons or even Anglo-Celtics) and, thus, between themselves and the newcomers. In the USA, census takers even began identifying and counting citizens descended from foreigners and, thus, allowing discussions of 'second' and 'third' generation immigrants to become common by the 1930s; like race, this suggests nationality and ethnicity could be transmitted across the generations—it was inherited. The delineation of particular ethnic spaces as Little Italies is scarcely surprising in this context. Unsurprising, too, is the ambivalence—still marked by the frequent insertion of quotation marks—which nationalists and speakers of other languages continue to experience when confronting the 'Little Italies' of the English-speaking world.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] Although writing more metaphorically than demographically, Gardaphe (2004) also focuses on leaving Little Italy.

[2] The term diaspora nationalism comes from Gellner 1983 (see Gabaccia 2001b, pp. 45–52). Among the early urban histories, Zucchi (1998) especially emphasizes the making of Italians outside of Italy; see also Sanfilippo (1995).

[3] Sponza (1988, esp. ch. 7, figure 1).

[4] See Nadel (1990). In Germany, in the 1870s, Bismarck had argued for a *Kleindeutschland*, while the Frankfort liberals had asserted the necessity of bringing together a more democratic *Grossdeutschland* (much like the Italians' *piu grande Italia*) that included Austrians.

[5] France's understanding of the superiority of its national civilization had its own somewhat different roots in positivism and racial science, while Argentina and Brazil's claims to creating an 'amalgamated' nation out of many races also rested on assumptions about the unity of biology and culture; see Gabaccia (2003, pp. 58–9).

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