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Introduction - The Italian Diaspora after the Second World War

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Introduction

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The conference held at Bivongi on the Italian diaspora, which saw some four million Italians leave their native land in the years after the Second World War, had its origins at Stilo, Calabria, in 1995, and a conference at the University of Wollongong, Australia, in 2004. At both, scholars from European countries, Australia and Canada presented papers about Italians who lived, worked and wrote in countries far from their homeland.

A special feature of their papers was the concentration on the literature the expatriate Italians created, and the way in which it interpreted their experience in another land as well as the social and cultural dichotomies which the process of migration had produced. But none of the papers dealt in any depth with the forces that had pushed Italians out of their home country, or had shaped their role in the new societies of which they had become part. It seemed to us that we needed a better way of understanding their experiences both in their new and old countries before we could evaluate their artistic expression more fruitfully.

So in March 2006 we decided to hold a conference that would focus on these questions. We wrote to our authors (and to others) suggesting that they submit papers which would examine three themes: the reasons for departure, the adaptation to a new society, and the expression to the migrant's experiences in film and literature. The structure of the conference and of this volume reflected that design.

In the first section, Diana Glenn and Michele Costanzo examine reasons for Campanians leaving their country in the late 1940s and the 1950s. The testimony of those they interviewed, and their interpretation of these oral histories, add significantly to our understanding of what scholars so far have been satisfied to refer

to merely as ‘poverty.’ Salvatore Murace discusses how in the Locride area in Calabria, historically characterised by emigration due to ‘poverty,’ emigration has continued for employment purposes and, recently, because of the disenchantment produced by the hopes vested in the substantial but not altogether successful socioeconomic transformation of the area. Philip Cooke’s paper examines an aspect of emigration which affected a small but significant group of Italians: clandestine political exiles, who were safer out of Italy, but who might one day return as cadres in the formation of an Italy very different from that supported by the Marshall Plan. Laura Errico evaluates reasons for dissatisfaction among Italians who left their country, but then decided to return.

Laura Errico’s paper bridges both the first and second sections of this volume, and its themes come close to those of Sonia Floriani, who writes of the experiences of Calabrians who set up businesses in Canada, and the ways in which they coped with the difficulties which the contrasts between the two societies presented to them. A parallel paper is Antonella Biscaro’s, which examines, through five case studies, the ways in which Sicilian and Sicilian Australian business people have adapted to the customs of consumers in Sydney, New South Wales. She found that help was not always forthcoming from the Italian Australian migrant network. Bruno Mascitelli and Emiliano Zucchi look at the bigger picture of the effect of Italian immigration on trade relations between Australia and Italy.

All these changes took place while immigrant Italians were making adjustments between the customs and traditions of their homeland, and those of Australian society. Diana Glenn and Michele Costanzo examine the adaptation (and non-adaptation) of Campanians to society in and around Adelaide, South Australia, in the 1950s and

after. Jim Hagan outlines the same process in Griffith, New South Wales, and analyses its political expression in changing voting patterns for the New South Wales Legislative Assembly.

How did the immigrants themselves see and interpret the changes they felt were affecting the way they lived? How did they cope with the prejudice and misunderstanding they encountered, and the problems they caused in their social and working lives? In his discussion of the two versions of Giorgio Mangiamele's film, *The Spag*, Gaetano Rando analyses the social interaction between several Australians and one Italian migrant in Melbourne. Working in the same city some time later, Gerardo Papalia examines the poetry and urban architecture of Italian immigrants specifically as it relates to the dissonance between their understanding of their homeland society and the new one in which they find themselves. Franco Manai's review of Italian immigrant literature in New Zealand suggests that the tensions that Mangiamele and Papalia found in Melbourne had their parallels in New Zealand. The issue of return is taken up by Alfredo Luzi who provides an analysis of Carmine Abate's recent novel *La festa del ritorno* [Homecoming celebration] (Mondadori 2004) which through a story a father tells his son presents a drama of endless dislocation and the resulting impossibility of perceiving locale as a fixed place. Periodic arrivals from Germany and departures from Calabria lead to continuous fragmentation between the father and the ethnic Albanian setting of the Calabrian town of Carfizzi as well as fragmentation in linear time while the desire for return, nostalgia, does not present consoling or prospectively euphoric characteristics but is rather a cause of anguish both for the migrant father and for the son who mourns the absence of the father figure. Finally, Pasquale Verdicchio writes of the failure of Italians in Canada to produce a literature which takes proper account of their new independent identity.

Some chapters in the unrefereed section of the book discuss the same themes as those in the refereed section. Broadly, they reinforce the arguments presented in the latter, but they also extend and modify them. Franco Merico's chapter argues that emigration still occurs in some areas of the south and analyses the motives of Southern Italians who have migrated to the north of their country since the eighties; and

Milena Rizzo emphasises the importance of networks in the settlement process.

The arrangement of the papers in this volume is deliberate and suggests interpretations with which the reader may not agree. Whether agreeable or not we hope, nonetheless, that they will contribute usefully to the discussion of the complexities of the Italian diaspora.