

## Introduction

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***WARNING:*** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that the following article contains images of deceased persons.*

This special Forum of *Altreitalie* explores some of the complex issues surrounding Italian migrants' relationships with First Nations people in Australia and their complicity in settler colonialism. It developed out of two main considerations: the first is that over the past 150 years many Italians migrated to settler colonial countries, such as the USA, Brazil, Argentina, Canada and Australia, yet the complicity of Italians in settler colonialism is seldom studied by scholars, or even acknowledged in public memory and public discourse. This is a major historical, epistemological and political issue. It means that we have a limited understanding of Italian migration history, having largely ignored one of its most prominent facets. And it also means that we underestimate and too easily absolve the complicity of Italian migrants in the violence, injustice and structural racism of settler colonialism. Transnational mass migration is a phenomenon that is strongly linked to imperialism and colonialism, and their evolution into contemporary capitalism and neocolonialism. As such, it cannot be rigidly separated from genocide, slavery and indentured labour, as too much of the historiography of Italian migration to date has done. Such overlooking has also compromised the quality of the work being done in other areas of national and transnational history, in which the link between mass migration and settler colonialism has been largely ignored. For instance, over the past thirty years there has been a strong insistence in the Italian historiography, as well as in public discourse, on the need to challenge the supposed amnesia about Italian

colonialism; yet this has been rarely linked to the settler colonial presence and role of millions of Italian migrants in the colonies and former colonies of the British, French, Portuguese and Spanish empires. While this special Forum focuses on the Australian context, we hope it will constitute an important step towards collaborative, comparative and interdisciplinary studies of Italian migration to settler colonies and settler colonial nations around the world.

The second consideration that guided and framed this Forum is the need to develop a decolonial historiography. This is not just about acknowledging imperialism and colonialism, and their deep connections to mass migration, but also about developing a series of decolonial scholarly practices, including the following:

- Recognising that settler colonialism is not an event concluded in the past, but a process continuing in the present time (Wolfe, 2006, 2016; Kauanui, 2016);
- Considering the relevance of past events for the present and the future - for instance by acknowledging the intergenerational transmission of trauma (see for instance Walters 2014; Tracey 2015), and the multidirectional memories through which different historical traumas can be named and told within transcultural and postcolonial societies (Rothberg, 2009);
- Developing a respectful and honest engagement with First Nations peoples, not just about the past, but also about epistemologies, ontologies and ways of being in the world today (see for instance Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2016).

In other words, a decolonial historiography must challenge the established boundaries of western historiography and be able to work beyond what is usually expected of scholars in western universities. This is not just because the colonial archives have left little and often biased tracks of the relationship between Italians and First Nations people, but also because the centrality and exclusivity of the archives as the only acceptable source of knowledge about the past must itself be challenged. Some more traditional or disciplined historians may, for instance, criticise the strong presence in this Forum of personal accounts and the importance of scholars' statements of personal relationships with Indigenous people. This, however, is part of a decolonial approach that privileges deep and respectful personal connections to Indigenous people, over any claim to objectivity, distance and a rigidly chronographic approach to history. The latter are all important pillars of the historical discipline, but too often have become insurmountable bastions of exclusionary and hegemonic scholarly practices. For the same reason, we have been happy and honoured by the decision by Paola Balla, a Wemba-Wemba artist and academic who

also claims Italian and Chinese ancestry, to participate in the project. Her participation is a structural and fundamental component of the dialogue that we have developed, first during the organisation and delivery of plenary panels at the *Diaspore Italiane* conferences in Melbourne and New York, and then when collaborating on this publication.

When I have had the opportunity to present my work on Italian migrants' complicity in settler colonialism and discuss the complexity of their relationships with First Nations people around the world, three usual objections have been made to me. The first is that, in most instances, Italians migrated in large numbers after the end of the frontier wars, and thus cannot be considered complicit with the genocide of First Nations people and the violent and illegal dispossession of their land. The second is that most Italian migrants have had little or no contact with Indigenous people. And the third is that Italian migrants, especially the southerners, were themselves subaltern, exploited and victims of racism and thus cannot be constructed as complicit to colonialism (i.e. as colonisers).

All three conjectures include an element of truth but are, to a large extent, false. First, while it may be true that the frontier wars had concluded by the time most Italians migrated, a significant number of Italians did migrate earlier; many of those who migrated after the supposed conclusion of the frontier wars settled as colonists in large areas from which Indigenous people had been ousted and were opened for deforestation and agricultural development. In this instance many Indigenous people remained at the outskirts of these areas, and therefore clashes and confrontations between Italian migrants and the Indigenous population were a common occurrence. This is for instance demonstrated by Brunello (1994) in his still fundamental book on Italians in Brazil.

Furthermore, the dispossession of Indigenous lands and waters has continued up to the present day, together with racist and violent policies and practices against Indigenous communities, activists and individuals. From this perspective, as argued by Indigenous scholars and by theorists of settler colonialism in Australia, settler colonialism should be considered as a long and structural process continuing into the present day, rather than an event concluded in the past (Wolfe, 2006, 2016; Veracini, 2010).

On the second and third objections, one should note that they clearly contradict each other. It is difficult to imagine that migrants who were considered racially ambiguous and occupied a subaltern position, both in the racial hierarchy and in socio-economic terms, would not have contact with people who occupied an even inferior position, including Indigenous people, former slaves, and indentured labourers, and more recent and darker migrants. In fact, I've argued elsewhere that Italians, and especially southerners, came to occupy an intermediate position between the black and the white, and between the

colonisers and the colonised; a position that has been instrumental to settler colonialism and has inevitably resulted in frequent contacts between Italians and Indigenous people (Ricatti, 2013, 2018). It is self-evident that many Italian migrants benefitted directly or indirectly from settler colonialism (for instance, in Australia, buying and cultivating land that had been usurped from Aboriginal people or exploiting Aboriginal workers). But we must also consider that they played an important role in the maintenance of settler colonial structures of power, even from their subaltern position in society.

For instance, Italian migrants working at the asbestos Wittenoom mines in the Pilbara region of Western Australia in the 1950s and 1960s suffered terrible health consequences from their work (Ricatti, 2018, pp. 42-43). Due to the way in which they were recruited and kept on the job, many of them considered working at Wittenoom a form of dangerous forced labour. Their mortality rate reached close to 40%. This was higher than that of Anglo-Australian workers but lower than the local Aboriginal workers (Banyjima people). As often happens in these instances, mortality rates were inversely proportional to salary rates and consistent with the position occupied in the racial hierarchy of black and white. This is a tragic example of the way class exploitation is deeply linked to racism.

One could argue that in this instance Italians were victims of the settler colonial logic that exploited them and condemned many of them to an almost certain death by lung cancer or mesothelioma. While this is true, one must also recognise that these Italian workers certainly came into frequent contact with Aboriginal workers and other Aboriginal people. And they lived and worked within a settler colonial nation in which the arrival and exploitation of migrants was functional to the genocide of Aboriginal people, the expropriation and exploitation of their lands and the development of a capitalist economy relying heavily on mining resources and cheap labour. In other words, the majority of Italian migrants were functional to and complicit with settler colonialism not despite their subaltern position, but *because* of it. Thus, Italian migrants' complicity in settler colonialism cannot be discounted just because they were, for the most part, subalterns to the colonisers and their descendants. On the contrary, it is precisely their intermediate position between the colonisers and the colonised that helps explain on the one hand why many of them developed close relationships with Indigenous people, and on the other hand why many others attempted to whiten and pursue socio-economic mobility to the detriment of Indigenous people and other non-hegemonic groups.

In developing a safe and fruitful space for a scholarly debate on these issues, we did not want to discard or underestimate the love, friendship, comradeship and solidarity between Italian migrants and Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander people. These relationships have in fact provided positive models of

active decolonisation and transculturation. At the same time, we were also aware that these more positive takes on such a complex issue could potentially be interpreted as a way to legitimate the Italian presence in Australia, without properly recognising and addressing its complicity in settler colonialism. This is a difficult balance to strike. We are firmly opposed to those who claim it is time to «move on» and forget the tragedy of colonialism and its profound ramifications into the present. But we are also highly critical of those who want to interpret the Italian presence in Australia as purely subaltern, forgetting the racial and cultural complexity already present *within* the Italian community in Australia. Within what is, in broad terms, a tragic history of involvement in settler colonialism, we also did not want to undervalue or reject those examples of subaltern resistance that brought Italian migrants and First Nations people together in friendship and solidarity.

We have decided that, following this introduction, Paola Balla's contribution should be the first, as to signal not only its theoretical and epistemological relevance, but also the need to develop decolonial scholarship in which personal, academic, and artistic contributions and collaborations operate in close collaboration with Indigenous scholars, academics and community leaders. Balla's contribution to this Forum is fundamental, in so far as it establishes a strong framework for scholars who want to embrace a decolonising historiography of Italian migration to Australia (and potentially to other settler colonial nations). She does so by emphasising three key epistemological strategies. The first is that we need to learn to *unknow* all we have learned about settler colonial countries, and we need to do so from the voices and perspectives of First Nations people, and women in particular. The second is that we cannot develop such work without listening to Indigenous scholars, artists and activists, and without entering into an honest and deep conversation with them, around their ways of knowing and their creative practices. The third is that we also need to listen to the stories and experiences of Italian-Indigenous individuals and families, not as a way to legitimise the Italian presence in Australia, but as a fundamental point of entrance into the complex and often contradictory realities of transcultural interactions within a settler colonial country.

Many of the other contributors to this Forum touch on some of these key strategies, and I hope that a clear thread will emerge from contributions that are inevitably preliminary and somehow scattered across an enormous and still unexplored field of studies. One of our aims was also to include different disciplinary perspectives. Federica Verdina and John Kinder explore from a linguistic point of view the importance of understanding the terms that were attached to Aboriginal people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century missionary and anthropological discourse in the Italian language. Their contribution reminds us of the importance of understanding from different disciplinary

perspectives the way in which anthropological and religious views may have spread into the broader society, and influenced Italian migrants as well.

Matteo Dutto explores instead the visual and cinematic representations of the encounters between Indigenous people and Italian migrants in Australia. Briefly sketching four specific case-studies, Dutto explores the role that screen media productions have played in either representing these encounters or in enacting them through transcultural collaborations, and artistic and political solidarity. To what extent can such cinematic encounters strengthen or, conversely, unsettle the way in which Italian migrants have framed, imagined, and interacted with First Nations people?

Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli provides a pivotal methodological reflection on the complex implications of exploring the rich relationships between Italian migrants and Indigenous people in contemporary Australia. Fundamental to her approach is the recognition that decolonial and intersectional frames are key to a respectful, multilayered, honest and fruitful approach to these stories.

Joseph Pugliese's personal account of his scholarly and activist involvement in decolonial practices closes this Forum. It is my conviction that any work on the Italian presence in settler colonial nations like Australia cannot prescind from Pugliese's path-breaking scholarship. In the past twenty years his scholarly and activist work has played a fundamental role in emphasising two aspects of the Italian migration to Australia that had hitherto been largely overlooked and that are deeply interconnected: the first is the racialization of Southern Italians as central to the migratory experience of both Southern and Northern Italian migrants; and the second is the amnesia about Italian migrants' complicity in settler colonialism and the strategies we can employ to challenge such amnesia (see Pugliese, 2002a, 2002b, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). Both his individual article in this issue of *Altreitalie*, and his contribution to this Forum, highlight the importance of rethinking Italian historiography of migration from an activist and decolonising perspective.

Linguistic, disciplinary and geographical distance have hitherto limited the opportunities for open and comparative dialogues around the need for decolonising the study of Italian migration to settler colonial countries. We hope this Forum will contribute to bringing such dialogue to the core of Italian migration history and hope to be able to engage in the near future with scholars who have been working on similar themes in other continents.

## Acknowledgements

I acknowledge that I live and work on the unceded land of the Kulin nations, and I pay my respect to their past, present, and emerging elders.

I am grateful to the organisers of the *Diaspore Italiane* conferences in Melbourne and New York for their support and for understanding the vital importance of decolonising the historiography of Italian migration. These conferences provided the opportunity for new and vital encounters and dialogues across the world. The original presentations from which this publication originated are available at <https://www.diasporeitaliane.com/melbourne-4-8-april-2018/videos-of-presentations/24-italian-indigenous-relationships-towards-a-decolonial-approach-round-table>.

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## Blak female acts of disruption (continued)

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*Cume ti vidanu te descrivanu!*

[As they see you, they describe you!]

(Calabrese proverb)

Seeing the sovereign Aboriginal warrior woman shifts the gaze, directs attention and brings into focus a different being. There is strong potential for her to be found in each Aboriginal woman

(Bunda, 2018, p. 5).

*Blak* women writers, poets, artists, scholars and community workers disrupt dominant colonial and patriarchal narratives in both community and public space in Australia<sup>1</sup>. Their work speaks back against dominant white voices and those associated with whiteness. The history of Italian settlers in Australia need to acknowledge and value blak perspectives. As a child of both an Aboriginal woman and a Calabrese migrant father, I have resisted the categorisation of Italians as white. I'm sure that when my father was called a wog<sup>2</sup> he wasn't associated with whiteness, but the racism he encountered was. And perhaps I resist whiteness because this means acknowledging a part of myself that I don't embrace, because it represents cruelty and oppression.

I am a First Nations woman who is Wemba-Wemba and Gunditjmara. I was raised by my mother, grandmother and Aunties, Aboriginal women in country Victoria, «on Country» and predominantly away from my father's Calabrese, working class and migrant family, who was living in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne. My sense of identity and knowing has been informed by what Moreton-Robinson (2000, p. 16) calls relationality, that is, «Knowing the self

through others, and others through the self». It also means that I simultaneously experienced «double» racism for my Indigenous identity and my Italian «otherness», including bullying and sexual violence.

Aboriginal women have been and continue to be the most marginalised people in Australia, and have been subjected to various forms of violence, both historical and ongoing. Though always at the forefront of political, psychosocial and cultural resistance and survival, our knowledge and practices are often omitted and rendered invisible in academic and public forums. My artistic practice, writing, academic work and community activism are all informed by my deep sense of Indigenous identity, but also by my experience of being viewed as being some kind of «outsider» by non-Aboriginal people and white people; and understood by my Koorie family as also having Italian blood, but being no less Aboriginal to them.

Figure 1. *I know what you did last century*



Source: Paola Balla, 2010

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have non-Aboriginal blood, including that of Italian migrant grandparents and parents. Yet the interest in their stories from Italian-Australian academics has not been evident until the work of the public Forum at the *Diaspore Italiane* Conference in Melbourne in 2018.

My invitation to this Forum was surprising, but welcome to me. Participating in the Forum was a slightly disassociating experience. Apart from socialising with my Calabrese family, I had never attended a large gathering of Italian people. For example, I had never visited the Museo Italiano in which the public Forum took place. Some of this brought a feeling of shame, not *cultural shame* as known in an Aboriginal way; rather the embarrassment that often visits me in relation to not knowing Italian language, religious or cultural customs, and feeling not «Italian enough» for my family, or the broader Italian community. Whereas in a white and settler Australian context, I have had to disrupt pre-conceived notions of what an «authentic» Aboriginal is and not really being «Aboriginal enough» (Smith, 1999).

Participating in the Forum, and feeling grateful for the invitation, I also appreciated the Forum's positioning of me to speak first and to situate an Indigenous presence and perspective. It is also a disruptive and challenging position for me to be placed in. As far as I knew I was the only Aboriginal person in the room, and I felt somewhat objectified and could feel the scrutiny from some members of the audience.

I was required to respond to what Joseph Pugliese that evening described as a «flattening» question, which was posed to me at the end of the panel. The question focused on an old argument, and one that I had already faced from my own Calabrese father. The question, which I also experienced as an accusation, focused on capital; it was prefaced with, «I know that there have been bad things that happened to Aborigines, but... (at this point I knew exactly what was coming)... why don't Aborigines just work hard and move forward like us Italian migrants have?».

In answering, I shared the fact that my father had already posed that question to me when I was only eleven years old, while visiting him on my yearly school holiday. At the time I was living three hours away, on Country, with my mother and grandmother, who were poor, discriminated against (historically and currently), and who had both suffered rape at the hands of non-Aboriginal men. In my mother's case, she had been the victim and survivor of my father's violence. In fact, this was the reason she left him. This included him not supporting me or Mum financially.

From this position I had to disrupt the flattening and reductive question that lurks historically within many migrant communities towards Indigenous people in Australia. The one in which migration requires participation in a particular, assimilationist racism towards Aboriginal people.

While the principle aim of the public Forum was to reframe dominant historiographies, memory and public discourse about the Italian diaspora from a decolonising perspective, I found myself disrupting the Forum as a black woman's voice, as both Indigenous and migrant, both sovereign and settler. I

have had to grapple intellectually and emotionally with the complicit nature of my father and his family's wealth building, whilst watching my own family struggle financially and die of preventable chronic illnesses, and trauma impact our collective wellbeing.

I believe I played both a contestatory and cohesive role within the Forum, in which I presented a lived experience first person account of sovereignty impacted by Italian settlers, as a member of a settler family, but not as a member of a settler community. If the aims of the Forum are genuine and followed through, I anticipate the new dialogues and outcomes of this Forum have the potential to utilise Italian settler privilege to advance the decolonial project in Australia.

My *nonna* was born in Motticella, Reggio Calabria in 1913. My father was born in 1948 and came to Australia with his parents as a thirteen-year-old in 1961, he didn't speak English and still speaks Australian English with a heavy Calabrese accent. My father's accent used to embarrass me as a child, which pains me now, and I was afraid that if he showed up (as he continually promised but never did) I would have had to deal with his presence amongst the ignorance and racism of a town I was already struggling with.

My Aboriginality already brought me much racism and attacks on my body. Being a «wog» was another burden I wasn't ready to carry at primary school. My staunch Wemba-Wemba and Gunditjmara single mother was raising my brother and me on Yorta Yorta Country, in a small country town on the Murray River. My parents got together on Boon Wurrung Country in St Kilda.

Despite school being a place of violent racial bullying for me, I loved learning and felt I had a future through education. My grandmother Rosie, an artist and poet, told me from the age of nine, to «get educated, go as far as you can, and beat them at their own game». I didn't start to comprehend the significance of this until my PhD commencement. Now a PhD candidate, I know my grandmother's spirit has guided this process, particularly in the most challenging of times. The struggle that Aboriginal women experience in Australia has also been my story.

Perhaps my *nonna* Paola is also smiling at my achievements, I know that she worried for me and was not able to be in my daily life in the way that my Nanny Rosie was. But, *nonna*'s insistence and proficiency with a microphone at weddings and family celebrations inspired me to speak up. My *nonna* also wrote poetry, and the story of her life and how she came to meet my grandfather.

My Nanny Rosie was so beaten down by life and racism that sometimes showing up to events was too much for her. I would watch her closely as she would ready her hair, make up, jewellery, outfit and bag to leave for somewhere my mother wanted to take her.

Many times I watched her nervously click her forefinger and thumb together in a rhythm that would end with her knee shaking, and then her head at

my mother with resignation that she would not actually be leaving the house. It was heart breaking. In 2012, I remembered my grandmother when I had a mental health breakdown and I was unable to leave the house. I was reminded of the paralysis that kept her home, away from the world that actually needed to hear from her, needed to hear her great laugh, her stories of colonial horror and survival.

Tracey Bunda (2018, p. 5) writes of the «sovereign care» practiced by Aboriginal women and their «primary roles in holding our families and communities together». Because of this care from my Wemba-Wemba matriarchs I was able to relate to my Calabrese identity and family history. They encouraged me to visit my Calabrese grandparents; my grandmother had great compassion for them missing me but worried about me being away too.

Aboriginal women's autobiographical work (Ginibi Langford, 1988; Tucker 1977) situates the *herstory* as significant to the understanding of Aboriginal women's care, love, resistance, identity and community. The story telling of my Nan and mother in my childhood echo this. Moreton Robinson (2000, p. 1) states that «the landscape is disrupted by the emergence of the life writings of Indigenous women whose subjectivities and experiences of colonial processes are evident in their texts».

Writing and art have afforded me an opportunity of disrupting the cultural landscape that does not see me and can only «read» me if I write myself into it. I do this through my curatorial, visual and community arts practice. Writing has been a process in which I enact my sovereignty to understand the place I was born into: the only child of my parents, but only one of many Aboriginal and Italian children born to Aboriginal and Italian parents.

I also write it for my children and my children's children. I refuse DNA tests and problematic commercial companies that mine people's ancestry. I refuse it because my identity is a lived experience, not a disembodied abstract scientific exercise. It is lived theory; a story of connection, reciprocity, responsibility and respect (Smith, 1999), and «relationality» (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 16).

So, how do I know my Calabrese-ness? I know it through knowing my Aboriginality. My Aboriginal matriarchs taught me to respect this within myself, despite being physically separated from my Italian family.

White historical and dominant narratives dictate that there are singular binaries in which to know the self. White people born in Australia often describe themselves as «just Aussie», assuming that whiteness is the norm. The most racist amongst them expect you to quantify your Aboriginality in terms of percentage: «half white, half Aboriginal». This is a form of genocidal erasure that denies the wholeness of Aboriginality. There is no half belonging to your family or culture. You either are Aboriginal or you are not. The knowing of the self, the being yourself, comes from others: in my case my matriarchs; my family

and community belonging and participation; my naming as Koorie, Aboriginal, First Nations; my mob, my clan, my language. My Country.

There are correlations between these ways of being and being named. My mother wasn't given a choice in naming me, though she was able to give me my middle name, by compromise with my Calabrese father. He informed my mother that I – like four of my other female first cousins – would carry my patriarchal grandmother's name, Paola. Many white people found this funny, and some touching; my name and its pronunciation has caused discern my entire life. Not many of my Aboriginal family could pronounce it, so they called me, as my mother did, Paula – the English spoken version. But the name is still written as *Paola* – which resulted in people calling me a variety of mispronunciations. I considered changing it, but I decided to honour it because I would never have disrespected my Aboriginal grandmother in this way. I tolerated people mispronouncing my name until I was about 38, when I decided to insist that people at least attempt to pronounce it, to resist the flattening of anglicizing names.

My Italian accent is terrible, and my Italian is non-existent, failed attempts to teach me on school holidays (the only time I saw my father or his family each year) was too difficult. I picked up basics, like «Paola, veni ca!» (Come); «Sette» (Sit); «Volu mangiari» (I want to eat); *acqua, carne, pollo*, and other names for food. I would blush with shame when old relatives would greet me, pinching and smothering both my cheeks with double kisses. «Paola! Bella, come stai? How's your mother? Your grandmother? Your brother?». I would falter and attempt, «bene, grazie!» (good, thanks!).

After I was greeted, the conversation would float away from me into Calabrese dialect, with aunties and uncles staring at me, assessing my second-hand clothes, my lack of gold jewellery, knowing I had not been confirmed in the Catholic Church: wondering how I could function outside of their lived reality. I knew that my world, my little black, Koorie, country town life was so radically different to theirs that they could never know because they never saw it. The road between us only went one way, from Echuca to Tottenham, from Echuca to Footscray. Yorta Yorta Country to Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung Country. Me, to them. Then me home to Mum, family, mob and community and Country.

Without language and the codes embedded within, I was lost. We were largely without Wemba Wemba, our matriarchal language, after it was banned during colonisation and English was enforced on our Peoples (relearning our Wemba Wemba language has been undertaken by a few family members now). Being proficient in only English was also a barrier to deep communication with my migrant grandparents. But I over relied on my English-speaking cousins to carry me through these times. Some tried to teach me, some confronted me as to why I wouldn't choose to live with my father and his family instead of my black mothers. Others scolded this cousin for upsetting me.

Like the girls in *Hey Sista* that Matteo Dutto writes about in this Forum, Aboriginal sisters of mine invited others into our circles, and we still do, if with trepidation, giving isolated and rejected people space and belonging. I felt loved and feel loved by my father's family, but still feel disconnected, like a visitor that still doesn't quite fit. There is a country town colloquialism that you are only a local after you live somewhere for at least fifty years. Perhaps after fifty years I will feel like a local in my father's family?

Fifty years is a short time line in this country, but a long time for an immigrant, asylum seeker or refugee to *start* to belong. The same towns in which they live saw Aboriginal people relegated to fringe dwelling in border towns, outside of white dominant structures like pubs, schools and shops. Relegated once off the missions and reserves onto the fringes of towns that manage our presence, erase our histories and erect monuments to genocidal governors, «pioneers» and convicts. In towns and cities where Aboriginal people die in jail cells, historically and continually, Aboriginal Deaths in Custody have continued since the 1991 Royal Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, with four hundred and seven Indigenous people dying in custody since then (Wahlquist, Evershed and Allam, 2018).

A significant shift towards avowing the un-ceded sovereignty of Indigenous peoples over our colonised lands must become a crucial part of any attempt to establish and consolidate new dialogues and alliances between diasporic Italian communities and First Nations people. In creating new spaces of dialogue, reciprocity and collaboration, diasporic Italian communities must support Aboriginal communities in the daily healing, repair and responses to structural violence and racism, including the ongoing deaths in custody.

The young activist and scholar, Latoya Rule, in writing of her brother Wayne Fella Morrison's death in Yatala prison in South Australia, noted that her mother was sent an invoice for one thousand dollars for the six days her brother spent on remand (Rule 2018, p. 14). The insult an additional injury to the violence of the settler state.

How valued is capitalism, settlement and empire building by Italian migrants? Can migrants transcend and unpack and ultimately dismantle the systems of privilege afforded to them by developing insights about the impact of their «new country» on Aboriginal lives and communities? And can they understand that beneath this lies Country belonging to Aboriginal Peoples who have been disadvantaged to their benefit? Solidarity and decolonial work require, well, work. Something not foreign to Italian migrants. Unpacking and dismantling where their racist attitudes towards Indigenous Australians emanates from is the beginning of *unknowing*.

It's hard to remember people if you have already participated in their erasure to accommodate your own passage to place, home and the future of your descen-



dants. When Italian migrants' children and grand-children ask how and why they came to be in Australia, do they ask at whose cost? In Australia, the United States, or Canada, whose Native American or First Nations homelands are they on?

As an Aboriginal woman, I not only inherit culture, language, practice and knowledge, but trans generational trauma caused by the invasion, genocide and ongoing colonisation of our Peoples and Country. This trauma is both historical and contemporary. It's the cost that genocide and white progress has had on the body of Aboriginal women in this country (Baker, 2017).

I am drawing on our collective situating of ongoing traumas and experiences and on the significant and rigorous work of global Indigenous, black and Aboriginal academics, writers, artists and community workers who name trauma as an ongoing legacy. This legacy is contextualised and conceptualised by Aboriginal peoples and is named within the de-colonial project.

Situating these collective traumas acts as a framework in my work and in my doctorate, as a sovereign practice. It is not just lived experience, but it is about placing it in the context of what others have done before me and do around me. My discourse references the work of Linda Tuhawi-Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies* (2012), Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *Towards an Aboriginal Feminist Standpoint Theory* (2013) and Tracey Bunda's writing on the Sovereign Aboriginal Warrior Woman (2007) as both global, Indigenous, de-colonial methodologies and theories.

I live with trans generational trauma, and attempt to recover from both the past and present concurrently. I look to the future for healing and for my children's. I am aware of the specific set of Indigenous ethics, obligations, and responsibilities that I am accountable to and that enable me to talk from a de-colonial and Aboriginal feminist standpoint in this space.

New ways of listening for diasporic communities require learning about respect, consideration and reciprocity as Indigenous practice (Smith, 2012) and learning about Indigenous theories and standpoints. This requires reconsidering the places that the diaspora have acquired to recreate place. It includes the acknowledgement that Country itself «holds» rights, memory and experiences of trauma, such as massacres, children being stolen, women being kidnapped and of sexual violence. It requires lifting back layers of «ownership» and looking at sites of cultural significance and cultural renewal that assist healing from historical and continuing traumas. I recognise that Indigenous research is an act of ceremony and honouring of Indigenous sovereignty and place making (Wilson, 2008).

Without awareness, migrants to Australia adopt racism towards Aboriginal people as a passage of assimilation. Hatred of Aboriginal peoples is a rite of passage that bonds all «others» within White Australia. During the public Forum, the presentation of rape statistics of Aboriginal women by Italian men in the Northern Territory by Pallotta-Chiarolli did not shock me. But it put my personal



experiences, and that of my mother, into perspective. Ours was not just personal or intimate violence enacted by my father, but by many Italian men who saw Aboriginal women as disposable and usable; a violence that was widespread across the nation.

My research situates the work of Aboriginal women artists as visual authors of their lives and the lives of their families, community experiences and stories. My project relates to artists like Tracey Moffatt (1989), Destiny Deacon (1995), Karla Dickens (2016) and Lisa Bellear's (1990-2007), for their clear disruptions of patriarchal colonial dominance.

Figure 2. *Tidda Murrup, (ghost sister)*



Source: Paola Balla with original image by Rosie Kalina, 2011

A patriarchal non-Indigenous view of art and art making as either traditional or contemporary art remains a dominant and highly problematic paradigm. It falls into a debate around notions of Aboriginal authenticity that distracts from the real work of de-colonising (Smith, 2012). The authenticity argument, as articulated by Smith (2012), is a global issue that ties Aboriginality to a male, nameless body. As stated by Moreton-Robinson (2016) the colonial project is a male story that erases Aboriginal women's presence, contributions and humanity. As sovereign matriarchal women we speak back and *blak* (Deacon,

1990) to the violence, trauma and silencing of structural trauma encountered in daily life, the academy and public spaces.

Decolonising the history of the Italian diaspora will require a deep consideration of complicity in racism, capitalism and various forms of violence. This cannot be done without listening to Aboriginal women artists and activists' practices of resistance, such as naming traumas and critiquing structural oppression. By situating the art and activism of Aboriginal women a space is created in which to consider endurance and resistance: a space for culture, beauty, truth and love.

Perhaps the numerous bodies of art and literature created by Aboriginal women can be places for the Italian community diaspora to begin the process of de-colonial reflection and critical self-analysis: to reflect on their place and role in *unknowing* so-called Australia.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The term 'blak' was coined by artist Destiny Deacon in 1990 and names the lived experience and identity of urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Destiny Deacon is a renowned photographic artist, born 1957 and her language groups are Kuku, East Cape Region, Erub of the Torres Strait region.
- <sup>2</sup> «Wog», in the UK, is a derogatory and racially offensive slang word referring to a non-white, or darker-skinned white person, including people from the Middle East, North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, other parts of Asia such as the East Indies, or the Mediterranean area, including Southern Europeans. A similar term, wop, has historically been used to refer to Italians. In Australia, the term «wog» refers to residents of Southern European, Mediterranean or Middle Eastern ethnicity or appearance.

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## *Selvaggi* or *nativi*? European and colonial perspectives on the encounter with the other in the experience of a missionary in nineteenth century Western Australia

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Our contribution to this Forum focusses on the words Europeans used to name the Indigenous people they encountered in the lands they occupied during the colonial period. Words have great power: they carry within them worlds of culture and ways of seeing the world. To understand what words mean, we must enter the worlds that language users come from. Some of the words recorded in the early encounters in the contact zone in Australia are still used today, while other words are avoided because of the past they carry. As our understanding of the world has changed over two centuries, we have changed the words we use and adapted the meanings we attach to words. Some words have dropped out of usage or have been branded as «unacceptable» or «inappropriate» because they are unavoidably associated with world views we no longer hold. New words have been coined to replace them, or old words have been brought into service to cover new ranges of semantic content that more accurately and more sensitively communicate how we now understand the world, our place in it and our relations with others.

To study the words used in the earliest encounters between Europeans and Indigenous Australians is to suspend our usual sense of «what those words mean» and to enter a different world view with its own system of semiotic reference. This process is always difficult, sometimes uncomfortable and at every step

challenging. In our case it is even more demanding since we are interested in the language of non-British persons in colonial Australia. We believe this is a necessary part of historical reassessments of the colonial period in Australia (and elsewhere). The colonial presence with which Indigenous people had to deal was never limited to just the dominant colonial power – in the Australian case, Great Britain – but was woven from the complex co-presence of other European cultures and languages.

In this contribution, then, we will look at the language used by Rosendo Salvado, the Spanish founder of the Benedictine mission of New Norcia, Western Australia (1846). We will focus here on his letters in Italian to Church authorities in Rome and also consider his use of English in the same period.

Early encounters in the contact zone were a complex and dynamic experience. The names used by Europeans to refer to the Indigenous populations reveal the different layers of experience that are present in these encounters. As Bruce Buchan (2008, p. 2) puts it:

the conceptual language spoken by the colonists framed their understanding of the policies and techniques of government they adopted. In particular, when colonists used terms drawn from the traditions of Western political thought, such as «government», «property», «sovereignty», «society», «savagery» or «civilisation», they did not only use them simply as descriptors. Rather, these terms formed part of a wider discourse in which moral and political claims about themselves and others were advanced.

Rosendo Salvado was Spanish, but completed his monastic formation in Italy (Russo, 1980; Stannage, 2015). In 1845 he arrived in Western Australia and established a «mission to the Aborigines» in a location 150 kilometres north of Perth. At first, he tried to live with the Noongar adopting their nomadic lifestyle but found it was too difficult physically and unsuited to missionary work. He therefore changed strategy: to create a self-supporting mission village, which would include both Benedictine monks and the local Yuat Noongar people, living by a modified version of the rule of St Benedict. Salvado remained the leader of the New Norcia mission for an extraordinary 54 years, from 1846 to his death in 1900. New Norcia has gone through many transformations since then but survives as Australia's only monastic town.

For this study we have analysed nearly a hundred letters Salvado wrote in Italian to the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, the Rome-based institution in charge of Catholic missionary activity all around the world. In his Italian letters, Salvado used the following terms, in this order of frequency:

1. *selvaggio*
2. *australiano*
2. *nativo*

4. *aborigeno*

5. *indigeno*

6. *nero*

These terms did not get replaced by others over time, but instead multiple terms co-exist in his vocabulary. One word that does not appear in Salvado's writing is «Noongar». This is the word used by the Indigenous inhabitants of South-Western Australia and covers a territory where fourteen distinct language groups, or clans, are identified (Tindale, 1974; South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, 2018).

What did these terms mean? Or, in the terms of Brian Buchan's statement quoted above, what moral and political claims was Salvado advancing about himself and the Indigenous people he was describing? These terms are semantically very dense with complex histories. Here we will examine how Salvado used two of these terms: *selvaggio* and *nativo*.

### ***Selvaggio***

When Salvado left Italy in 1845, Pope Gregory xvi wished him well with these words (Salvado, 1977):

Remember all those Apostles who were your brothers, who *converted* whole peoples and nations to the Faith, and educated them in the ways of *civilised* life. Remember that you are setting out on the same road as was trodden by them. (Italics added)

Pope Gregory was, like Salvado, a Benedictine monk. They traced the origin of their order to Saint Benedict of Norcia, who lived in the sixth century. Salvado knew the Pope was reminding him of the earliest missionaries who took Christianity to Northern and Eastern Europe, taking with them also the culture that had grown out of Judeo-Christianity. He remembered St. Cyril, who invented the alphabet still used today for Russian. He remembered the missionaries who later moved to all corners of the world. Salvado always described his reason for being in Australia as to «convert and civilise» indigenous Australians.

For someone like Salvado, an educated speaker of Spanish, Italian, Latin as well as English, the word «civilise» was etymologically transparent. The word was recent: it first appeared in English around 1600 (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and in Italian in 1725 (*Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*). It derived from Latin CIVILIS which ultimately derives from CIVES, a citizen, that is to say a human person who has the rights accruing from belonging to an organised, urban social grouping, a CIVITAS.

The opposite of «civilised» in nineteenth century political discourse was «savage». This term has a long history in European thought, beginning in the ancient world, through medieval theology to greater distinction during the Renaissance and ending up as the main synonym for the Enlightenment's potent category of «the state of nature». The term lost much of its historical texture in the nineteenth century and came to indicate plain, negative qualities such as cruelty or ferocity (Fullagar, 2012).

The Italian word *selvaggio* (*selvaje* in Spanish) was equally transparent. It is derived from Latin *silvaticus*, from *silva* «forest». First used to describe plants and animals, it was used to describe humans who lived «in a state of nature» from the fifteenth century in English and a little later in Italian. The semantic pairing of «savage» and «civilised» is evident in nineteenth century dictionaries of all the Romance languages. Two examples will suffice to show the dominant modes of definition. The first is etymological, relating the state of the *selvaggio* to the *selva* where they live. The second is negative: *selvaggio* is defined as the opposite, the lack, of *civile*.

*Selvaggio*: Uomo non domestico; che vive in selva; in istato di società imperfetta o discorde (Tommaseo and Bellini, 1861-1879)

*Selvaggio*: contrario di *civile* (Petrocchi, 1884-1890)

These two terms are expressions of Enlightenment theories of progress, developed in France, Scotland and elsewhere (McGregor, 1997). By the late eighteenth century, these theories had settled on a natural developmental sequence, common to all human societies: from «savagery» (hunter-gatherers) to «barbarism» (nomadic pastoralism) to «civilisation» (agriculture and commerce). In colonial Australia, the English were confronted with the dichotomy between two extremes, hunter-gatherer savagery and agricultural, early capitalist civilisation (Buchan, 2008). Salvado, however, understood «savage» and «civilized» as being two end points on a continuum of evolution, progress and civilisation. This view was articulated as late as the early twentieth century by Sigmund Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1913):

There are men still living who, as we believe, stand very near to primitive man, far nearer than we do, and whom we therefore regard as his direct heirs and representatives. Such is our view of those whom we describe as savages or half-savages.

The universalist claim of the stadial theories of development is clear in Freud's nuanced claim that savages stand «far nearer than we do» to primitive man.

Salvado became aware of these Enlightenment theories of human development through his friendship with the leading Italian archaeologists of the

day, especially Luigi Pigorini, first professor of paleoethnology at the University of Rome and first director of the National Museum of Paleoethnology. Pigorini integrated earlier philosophical theories with recent theories of cultural evolution developed by archaeologists. In particular he designed his museum around the three-age model he had studied in Scandinavia (Lerario, 2011). This theory supposed (i) that all human cultures developed – through the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages – along a common track from hunter-gatherer to literate civilisations, and (ii) that various intermediate stages of human development were contemporarily represented on the earth. Living cultures that Pigorini and his colleagues identified as primitive were understood, within this framework, to be «living fossils» of European cultures that had progressed through this developmental phase in prehistoric times (Tarantini, 2012). So Pigorini and other archaeologists received sets of Indigenous tools and weapons from Salvado and published on the similarities between arrowheads from Aboriginal Australia and similar objects they had unearthed in Emilia-Romagna as evidence of prehistoric Italian cultures (Chierici, 1875).

The way Salvado integrated this archaeological view with the prevailing Enlightenment theories explains how Salvado could on the one hand go along with Pigorini describing Australian Aborigines as being on the «lowest rung of civilisation» (Pigorini, 1876) and at the same time work so hard to convince the colonial authorities that the Noongar were capable of everything Europeans could do, given the opportunity. It is interesting in this respect to speculate how the circulation of these ideas in nineteenth and twentieth century Italy might have formed the attitudes that Italian migrants brought with them to Australia.

### Use of *selvaggio*

Salvado's use of *selvaggio* did evolve over time and there seems to have been semantic slippage towards the word becoming almost a neutral technical term. In 1871 we see Salvado referring to *i nativi o Selvaggi del bosco*, «natives or savages of the wood/bush». Leaving aside the fact that *bosco* may be a nod to the Australian «bush», the phrase is strictly speaking tautological, which suggests that some of the etymological meaning may be leaching out of *selvaggio*. Furthermore, from the 1870s we find curious uses of «savage» and «civilisation» in the same phrase: *i Selvaggi civilizzati* «civilised savages», *i selvaggi già civilizzati* «savages already civilised», *convertiti e civilizzati selvaggi Australiani* «converted and civilised savages». What these phrases might mean becomes clearer if we look at a lithograph of the settlement of New Norcia from around 1880 (see figure 1).

This shows the realisation of Salvado's dream of creating a self-supporting Indigenous village. The image shows two ways of indigenous life. In the top



left, a village of houses for Indigenous persons and families; in the bottom left, a group of Noongar living in pre-European style. The transition from savagery to civilisation was beyond anything else a physical transition from the bush, the *SILVA*, to the town, the *civitas*. It meant rejecting a nomadic life and adopting a settled one. From this would flow the moral benefits of «civilization» in its deeper sense. When Salvado was writing to the highly educated officials of Propaganda Fide, he used their shared vocabulary which included *selvaggio*, whereas *nativo* was very rare, and over time *selvaggio* came to be used almost neutrally, in other words leaving aside all the cultural stratifications contained in the word and simply adopting it to refer to indigenous people.

Figure 1. William Ewing, «Nuova Norcia: Missione Benedettina nell’Australia occidentale», Rome, 1864



Source: NNA 73671P. Permission of the archives of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia

### *Nativo*

While Britain during the eighteenth century debated the propriety and morality of territorial expansion in the so-called *New World*, the notion of *savagery* was a useful metaphor, the key and essence of an alternate society. This metaphor held up a mirror to a British society, throwing into sharp relief the value of the expansionist project – the fiscal-military culture, the lessening role of the

church and traditional morality. By the last two decades of the century, British resolve had hardened and the matters for debate now were *how* to achieve global expansion and territorial conquest and much less attention was paid to *whether* it ought to be done in the first place. Consequently, the inhabitants of distant lands were less and less interesting in moral or cultural terms. They became a legal and political problem. They were no longer «savages», they became «natives», a term that replaced «savage» in English colonial discourse at the end of the eighteenth century (Fullagar, 2012).

*Native* is the term of territoriality: the inhabitants of Australia are relevant in so far as they had, or might have, property rights by virtue of having been born there, being «native». When James Cook in 1770 and Arthur Phillip in 1787 sailed to the south, they brought secret instructions from the King (National Archives of Australia, 2011). These ordered the two Captains «with the Consent of the Natives to take possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain» and to «endeavour, by every possible means, to open an intercourse with the natives».

Salvado did not see himself as part of the colonial project in the same way as missionaries of the Anglican or Evangelical churches did. So *nativo* is not immediately part of his intellectual lexicon. However, in 1864, Salvado presented a report to the Colonial Secretary on the habits and customs of indigenous Australians (Salvado and Garrido, 1871). He wrote in English and the only words he uses to refer to Indigenous people are «natives», «aboriginal natives» and «aborigines». The English equivalent of *selvaggi* – «savages» – never appears. At the same time the Italian equivalent *nativo* begins to appear in his correspondence with Rome, presumably under the influence of his English writing.

We may explain this in part through the concept of *accommodation*, whereby a speaker or writer adjusts their language according to the identity of their listener or reader.

We hope that even this brief overview can open up the complexities in the language choices made by the participants in inter-cultural encounters. Getting inside their words is a privileged way to get inside their worlds of meaning. As we use words to understand the past better and as we face the challenge of making the present better, we should always remember that words have power because they can make the world: the words we use or the words we choose build the frame of our window on the world. They also give shape and substance to our relationships with the others we encounter. This seems very important to us in order to try to understand the past. In our work it is absolutely essential to build a better present and future.

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## Unsettling migrant frames: Reflections on the cinematic encounters between Italian migrants and Indigenous Australians

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In a key scene of Luigi Zampa's 1971 film *Bello, onesto, emigrato Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata*, Carmela, a young Calabrian mail-order bride who has only just recently arrived in Australia, finds herself lost in the tropical rainforest of Queensland. Frantically looking for help for her travel companion Amedeo, who is suffering from an epileptic seizure, she stumbles upon an Indigenous man, who first asks her for a cigarette and then points her in the direction of the nearest hotel and of help. Running through the rainforest in her swimming suit, Carmela then briefly encounters another group of Indigenous people, naked and armed with spears while gathered around a camp fire to cook a goanna. While non-diegetic tribal drums and the sounds of the forest build tension for the scene, Zampa alternates between long shots that frame the assembled group as part of this hostile and exotic landscape and close-ups of Carmela that convey her scared and puzzled reactions. This brief sequence encapsulates what Kamilaroi and Uralarai scholar and filmmaker Frances Peters-Little identifies as the dominant and most persisting representation of Indigenous Australians on both Australian and international screens: exotic, innocent and mostly voiceless «noble-savages» that guard the natural realm while being torn between their own world and settler colonial society (2003). Just one year after Zampa's film contributed to maintain and popularise dominant settler colonial ideologies and stereotypes also amongst the Italian audience, Italian filmmaker Alessandro Cavadini would provide a very different perspec-

tive on what encounters between Italian migrants and Indigenous Australians can instead consist of, showcasing the decolonising potential of transcultural filmmaking collaborations.

Cavadini moved to Sydney in 1969, where he initially worked as a technical designer before starting to develop animation shorts with other Italian filmmakers and creators. In 1972 he first got in touch with members of the Indigenous community living in the Sydney suburb of Redfern and quickly established long-lasting relations with key Indigenous activists and artists like Gary Foley, Chica Dixon and Bob Maza. The first outcome of this long-lasting relation was *Ningla A-Na*, the documentary that he realised that same year, that first brought the story of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and the 1972 Indigenous land rights movement to the attention of the world. Cavadini would then go on to work with his brother Fabio, with Australian filmmaker Carolyn Strachan and with a number of Indigenous communities across Australia on two more landmark documentaries and a short film: *Protected* (1975), *Two Laws* (1982) and *We Stop Here* (1977). As numerous Australian film scholars have stressed, these are amongst the first documentaries that set out to disrupt existing models of collaborative filmmaking, developing instead a participatory framework which exposed the enduring nature of settler colonialism through the lenses of indigenous aesthetics and epistemologies (Davis and Plate, 2008; Ginsburg, 2008; Kahana, 2009). The work of Cavadini thus provides an essential prompt for us to reconsider how dominant cinematic representations of Italian migration to Australia can be complicated and unsettled if we shift our gaze from how stories of encounters between Italian migrants and Indigenous Australians were framed «on screen» to how different Italian filmmakers have collaborated «behind the camera» with Indigenous Australian communities, activists and cultural producers.

Italian and Australian films and documentaries on the lives of first-, second- and third-generation Italian migrants to Australia have very rarely addressed how these stories intersect with those of Indigenous Australians or of other migrant communities, focusing instead on how Italian migrants' sense of belonging were constructed and negotiated through their relationships with Anglo-Celtic settlers (Dutto, 2016). As we learn from the work of scholars like Joseph Pugliese and Francesco Ricatti, this lack of interest is not incidental nor due to the absence of such stories, but should be understood rather as constitutive of how migrants' identities were and continue to be negotiated in settler colonial Australia (Pugliese, 2002; Ricatti, 2013). Discussions on national identities and belonging in the Australian context are often structured around a dichotomy that sees them falling either into the «Indigenous vs non-Indigenous» or into the «non-Anglo migrants vs Anglo-Celtic mainstream society» categories (Curthoys, 2000, p. 21). By positioning migrants as «perpetual foreigners within the

Australian state» and Indigenous people as «non-Australians» (Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos, 2004, p. 33), the settler colonial state can thus maintain the «white-nation fantasy» and silence the relationships between migrants and Indigenous people in Australia (Sonn, Quayle et al., 2014, p. 554). This does not mean that all interactions between Italian migrants and Indigenous Australians have the potential to deconstruct this dichotomy. Rather, they exist on a complex and multi-layered spectrum between complicity with colonial ideologies and opposition to the settler colonial project. Focusing on four specific case stories and on the role that screen media productions have played in either representing these encounters or in enacting them through cross-cultural collaborations, these reflections explore how cinematic encounters can both reinforce and disrupt migrant frames of representation.

Luigi Zampa's exotic and racialized representation of Indigenous Australians in his 1971 comedy is the result of anthropological theories formulated not only within the framework of English colonialism by English scientists,<sup>1</sup> but also of the work of nineteenth century Italian anthropologists and naturalists like Enrico Hillyer Giglioli, who in 1865 boarded the Italian warship *Magenta* for a scientific expedition to Australia that would last three years. Giglioli was a Darwinist interested in demonstrating the «ethnic unity» of Indigenous Australians and the collection, and production of portrait photographs played a key role in achieving his aims (Lydon, 2014, p. 78). Like Paolo Mantegazza and Cesare Lombroso, Giglioli was convinced of the scientific truth of physiognomy and of social evolutionism, often describing in his writings Indigenous Australians as a primitive population doomed to extinction and endorsing, as Lydon puts it, «the link between female appearance and male violence that has remained central to representations of Aboriginal gender» (p.79). If Giglioli advocated a clear hierarchical and evolutionist relationship between races in his writing, the portraits that he realised during his trip are somewhat less univocal and provide us with a more complex and layered representation of his own encounters with Indigenous Australians. As Lydon concludes, unlike in the work of previous anthropologists and ethnographers, the subjects of Giglioli's photographs are not portrayed as caricatures or as noble savages, revealing his ambivalent feelings towards Indigenous Australians and ideas of race (2014, pp. 87-93).

The complex attitude of Giglioli towards his own encounters with Indigenous Australians takes us to another story that showcases how this ambiguity is not only relational, but also embodied. As Francesco Ricatti discusses in his latest book, the long history of representation of Southern Italians as «almost African» and «almost black», proved popular also in Australia (2018, p. 55). Here, it was not enforced only by a settler colonial state that portrayed Italian migrants as white or black according to the needs of the moment, but also appropriated by the migrants themselves, who tried to exploit it by acting as «a relatively



permeable buffer between the colonisers and the colonised, or other subaltern groups (slaves, indentured labourers, darker migrants)» (Ricatti, 2018, p. 56). This might very well be the case for actor Paul Clarke, a third-generation Italo-Australian (Clarke, 2005), who in 1955 wore blackface to play the role of the Indigenous stockman Joe in Charles Chauvel's Australian film *Jedda*. While *Jedda* was the first Australian film to feature Indigenous actors in leading roles (Rosalie Kunoth-Monks as Jedda and Robert Tudawali as Marbuck), Chauvel chose to employ a non-Indigenous actor to play the key role of Joe, whose role in the narrative is not only that of the «civilised» Indigenous stockman who tries to rescue Jedda after she is abducted by the tribal warrior Marbuck, but also that of the narrator of the events. Clarke's blackface interpretation of the assimilated stockman, who, as Benjamin Miller notes, ultimately drives Marbuck and Jedda to their deaths leaving the land open to white occupation (2007), speaks to the complexity of Italian identity within a settler colonial context and asks us to reconsider how, even when technically «absent» from on-screen representation, Italian migrants played an important role in enforcing and promoting settler colonial racist representations of Aboriginality.

A different representation of the racial ambiguity of Italian migrants emerges in the 2001 short film *Hey Sista* by second-generation filmmaker Jan Cattoni. Here, the teenage Italo-Australian protagonist Lisa strikes a new friendship with a group of Indigenous girls after being rejected from the Italian community of a small town in Far North Queensland. Set in 1975 and based on Cattoni's own experiences, the short drama showcases the racism of Italian migrants towards Indigenous Australians and the unexpected network of solidarity that Lisa is instead able to create when she becomes part of the Soul Sistat Indigenous basketball team. Cattoni is part of a growing number of Italian and Italo-Australian directors and filmmakers that since the 1970s have created prolific «behind the camera» relations with Indigenous communities and cultural producers and consistently work on projects that are not connected to representations of Italian migrant experiences, but of Indigenous histories and cultures (Rando, 1997; Rando, 2004, pp. 179-226). Italian and Indigenous cinema share connections that can be traced back to the landmark documentaries of Alessandro Cavadini, passing through the work of director Fred Schepisi with Murrungun actor Tom E. Lewis on *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) and the involvement of producer/director Rosa Colosimo in the TV documentary series *Women of the Sun* (1981), to reach the ongoing collaborations of director/cinematographer Fabio Cavadini with Indigenous directors and producers like Larissa Behrendt, Jason De Santolo and Gadrian Jarwijalmar Hoosan.

What creates and sustains these connections though, and how do they differ from the cross-cultural collaborations set up by directors of Anglo-Celtic heritage? Speaking about her own experience of growing up in a small town

in North Queensland, Jan Cattoni stresses how having an Italian father and an Australian mother contributed to her «not belonging to one or the other of these distinct communities, but to a place somewhere in between» (2011, p. 32). Cattoni defines this particular place as «borderlands», an in-between space that pushed her to establish instead contacts with the local Indigenous community, who she felt shared a similar border perspective. Her experience resonates with that of Alessandro Cavadini, who recalls how the struggle of the Redfern community to take back their land and revitalise their cultures in face of the continued denial of land rights and sovereignty from the settler colonial state resonated with him in 1972, sparking a renewed sense of belonging and identity that finally made him feel at home after many years (2018). Similar understandings of belonging and identity emerge also from the story of Clely Quaiat Yumbulul, an Italian woman from Trieste who migrated to Australia with her parents in 1954 and today lives in Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island, where she married Warramiri leader and artist Terry Yumbulul. As she explains in Diego Cenetiempo's 2012 documentary *Far Away is Home: la Storia di Clely*, Clely identifies herself as «Triestine and Arnhem-Landa (from Arnhem Land)», rejecting models of representation that would see her identity as either divided between Italy and Australia or assimilated into Warramiri culture.

As I have argued in a previous paper (Dutto, 2016), these dissent stories can perhaps be best understood as what Walter Mignolo identifies as acts of «critical border thinking», that is, strategies aimed at «delinking» from the enduring colonialism that characterises Western rhetorics of modernity by taking seriously other epistemologies and recognizing the embodied and geographically located nature of knowledge (Mignolo, 2000). By locating their sense of belonging within a transcultural process of exchange with Indigenous epistemologies and rejecting established ways to frame migration and identity in opposition to the mainstream Anglo-Celtic society, these cultural producers achieve what Grosfoguel has identified as one of the key elements of border thinking: that is to say, a «redefinition/subsumption of citizenship (...) beyond the narrow definitions imposed by European modernity» (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 25). It's this decolonial redefinition of boundaries that informs also recent projects like *Black Post White*, where Indigenous elders from Gunai/Kurnai Country, located in the East Gippsland region of Victoria, share their stories of encounters and exchange with the Italian farmers that lived in the area.

From works like those of Enrico Hillyer Giglioli, which were crucial to establish and reinforce social evolutionist and racist views in Italy, to the story of an Italian-Australian actor wearing blackface: from the innovative use of collaborative filmmaking practices of Alessandro Cavadini and his ongoing legacy to dissent stories like those of Jan Cattoni and Clely Quaiat Yumbulul that challenge established migration frames, these are all accounts that add



complexity to our understanding of the position that migrants and Indigenous people occupy in contemporary Australia. They shed light on how encounters between Italian migrants and Indigenous Australians can work to reinforce settler colonial ideologies or instead towards decolonisation and the redefinition of new models of transcultural belonging that operate at the borders of different epistemologies and draw on embodied and localised sense of belonging and identity.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> For an excellent overview of the transnational origins of the myth of the «noble savage» and of its circulation see Ellingson, T.J., *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001.

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## «Mobs» and «Wogs»: Reflections on researching life stories and family histories

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### «We're Called "Wogarigines, Love"»: From Colonial Amnesia to Decolonial Actuality

It's Feast LGBTIQ Festival in Adelaide, November, 2014.

I'm sitting in the session on Indigenous Queer Intersectionalities and scan the packed audience, wryly musing on how we're on what colonial settlers named Light Square. The park is named after its designer, Colonel William Light, as part of his 1837 plan of Adelaide. He is buried there.

But before, during and after this colonial naming, it was part of the Kaurna people's country. In 2012 Light Square was named Wauwi as part of the Kaurna Naming Project. Wauwi was the wife of Kadlitpinna, one of the three Kaurna elders of Tandanyagga (Adelaide) at the time of colonisation. I sit and wonder how many Kaurna people are buried there. I wonder where Wauwi herself is buried.

I didn't know then that in 2016, another interconnected layer of historical amnesia would be shaken into awakeness: the City of Adelaide would install the Pride Walk to acknowledge the achievements and struggles faced by the LGBTIQ community in South Australia.

One of the speakers on this warm day in Wauwi, Tandanyagga, is Foxy Empire from the Tiwi Islands. I listen, I learn. Pre-colonial gender fluidity constricted and clinically classified into the Western term «transgender». Tiwi Islander queer histories. Christian missionaries erasing gender and sexual diversity and imposing gender and sexual duality.

«I want to thank my Nonni and my cousins here in the front row», Foxy Empire says.

Nonni? I follow Foxy's sweeping hand to a front row of darker-skinned smiling members of the audience. Are they Italian or Indigenous?

After the session, I grab my ignorance and ineptitude in both sweaty hands and walk up to Foxy Empire. I ask about the term «Nonni».

I listen and I learn. Foxy Empire is also Jason De Santis, renowned performer and playwright, whose Italian migrant grandfather fell in love with a Tiwi Island woman, and walked away from the shaming of the Italian community in Adelaide. His daughter, Jason's mother, would become the mayor of Tiwi Islands. «He's more blackfella than the blackfellas». But today, younger generations of his Italian and Indigenous family walk toward him and embrace his grandchild, Foxy/Jason.

I ask questions. Foxy/Jason smiles too patiently at my inanity. «We're called Wogarigines, love».

Thank you Foxy/Jason.



Source: courtesy of Annette Xiberras; photo by Rob Chiarolli, PhotosThatTell

This article introduces a larger research project exploring the life stories and family histories of «Wogarigines», a term often used by Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander (ATSI) people with Southern European (SE: Greek, Italian, Maltese, Portuguese and Spanish) migrant heritages (Pallotta-Chiarolli, in contract). The above story explains and acknowledges when, how and by whom this term was introduced to me. Since then, I have learned it is a problematic term. For many, often younger ATSI peoples, Wogarigine is a cool term of resistance and reclamation. A similar term is «Indigiwogs». But for many ATSI peoples, those terms are offensive. So immediately, a terrain of contested terms demands reflection on who constructs, who claims, who defines, who imposes, who resists labels; and how does decolonising research navigate this «neo-colonial assemblage» (Pallotta-Chiarolli, in press, 2020).

Via interviews, archival documents and ethnographic materials such as photos, letters and other personal items, the research is an emotional and evocative exploration of individual, interpersonal and family histories of ATSI individuals and families with SE heritages with a focus on three facets: the intersections, conflicts and connections; how these relations were framed/constrained by colonial, racist and multicultural national and state policies and colonial, racist and multicultural socio-cultural perspectives and practices; and strategies of resistance, redefinition and reclamation that remain buried in colonial, racist and multicultural versions of Australian history.

Thus, the research will be grounded in the sociology of the everyday (Kalekin-Fishman, 2011). It will foreground the complex relationship between external (discrimination/prejudice) and internal (self-doubt/guilt/shame) stressors that shape the experience of multiple-minority groups (Cyrus, 2017). It will acknowledge the everyday strategies of resistance and resilience against the three main forms of micro-aggressions of ongoing coloniality: micro-assaults, micro-insults, and micro-invalidations (Sue et al. 2007). It needs to be stated, however, that a focus on individual, familial and community resilience and strategic agency does not excuse or decrease structural and institutional responsibility and culpability. The concept of «situated agency» (Pallotta-Chiarolli and Pease, 2014, p. 35) allows for the scrutiny of cultural, religious, political, economic, social and health systems and their constraints within which Wogarigines persistently nurture a healthy self. As participants tell their stories and discuss their personal materials, the research asks:

1. What was life like for «Wogarigines» growing up in their families, communities, schools, workplaces, churches and in the wider Australian society, and what is it like today?
2. How did ATSI perceive, understand, resist or connect with SE migrants on national, community, familial and interpersonal levels?
3. What role did migrants play in influencing and condoning, as well as questioning and confronting, racist and colonialist ideologies on national, community, familial and interpersonal levels?

4. Did SE migrants «import» colonial and racial attitudes and convictions that they had acquired in their homelands and colonies, such as Italian colonies in North Africa, or did they learn these from Australian employers, neighbours, churches, schools and media?

As my pioneering colleagues in this Forum demonstrate, there is an absence of a framework or interrogation of Italian-Australian and Italian-First Peoples history and relationships within a decolonising framework (see also Ricatti, 2018 for an overview of existing research and writing). My work is framed by this evolving research and, via story and imagery, I aim to make the research more broadly available and accessible to the very communities we are researching about and with. Most urgent and most erased is the need to listen to and learn from the perspectives and experiences of Wogarigines themselves (see Balla in this Forum; Garcon-Mills, 2015; Sarra, 2012; Xiberras, 2018).

When interrogating erasures, denials and absences, I work with what Wieringa (2009) calls «postcolonial amnesia». I have already introduced the term «neo-colonial assemblage» to explain how coloniality continues in ideological legacies, economies and cultural effects after colonialism itself has (supposedly) officially, politically ended (Pallotta-Chiarolli, in press, 2020).

It is this sum total of modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about «freedom», which has come to be known as *neo-colonialism* (Nkrumah, 1965, 239).

Balestrery refers to «compounded colonization», a historical configuration of co-constituting discourses based on cultural and ideological assumptions «with consequential, continuing effects», concluding that «settler colonialism has not ended. Its effects and political exigencies are experienced even today» (2012, p. 634; Mignolo, 2002). Hence, what settler colonisers would define as post-colonial in their contemporary relationships with prior subjects, is experienced as configurations of residual, reclaimed and reformulated colonial power. This creates neo-colonial assemblages, both in contestation and confluence. It requires challenging another form of postcolonial amnesia enacted as privilege when prior colonizers believe they can simply forget the past and reset the future. Anzaldúa's (1987) term «mestizaje» refers to the assemblages of realities, inter- and intra-category hierarchies and borderland lives beyond colonial and post-colonial, also explicated in the theories and strategies of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). The aim of decolonial academia is to grapple with these neo-colonial assemblages of privileges and persecutions and challenge «wilful hermeneutical ignorance» (Polhaus Jr., 2012).

**«Don't do an Andrew Bolt on us»: Meeting on the borders**

I'm sitting in Annette Xiberras' lounge room. Her Mum, from a strong heritage of Wurundjeri leaders and activists, makes us a cup of tea. Annette points out her dogs allowed my entrance through the double gates of the large front yard. They hadn't barked and indeed accompanied me to the front door of this beautiful house set amongst sweeping lawn, flowering bushes and the fruit trees planted by her Maltese migrant Dad. We laugh and I say, «Well, I've come to ask for your approval to do some research and don't hold back barking at me».

I ramble on about my ideas, my concerns, my reflections, and my need to listen and learn. I pledge that the project won't happen if I don't have her approval and participation as a Wurundjeri elder, on whose land most of the research will be undertaken and written. I request that if she approves, would she honour the work by providing a «Welcome to Country and to Book» to the final publication.

Annette questions, comments and critiques. We share our similarities in upbringings and compare the differences. She shows me a black and white photo of her Mum and Dad: youthful, exuberant, in love, her pale cheek and his dark one blurring together. «Folks assume Dad was the blackfella cos he's the dark one. I look like him».

She shows me a colourful photo of her partner Cathy, another Indigenous woman, who died suddenly, leaving Annette to raise their two children. Two radiant women enfold their joyful son and daughter. «They went through the first three years of school with no friends. They weren't happy, but they weren't going to say that Cathy or I were not their mums».

And from this colonial/decolonial/neocolonial borderzone of laughter, love and loss, Annette grants me permission: «Maria, I'll trust you. We'll support your work. But don't do an Andrew Bolt on us!»

Thank you Annette.

A child of Dutch migrants who grew up in rural and remote areas of South Australia, Andrew Bolt is a very influential Australian conservative social and political commentator using print, radio, television and digital media to pontificate and promulgate racist, Islamophobic, misogynist and homo/bi/transphobic views. This includes his September 2010 media posts that it was «fashionable» for «fair-skinned people» of diverse ancestry to choose Aboriginal racial identity for the purposes of political, career and economic advancement. Nine individuals undertook legal proceedings and Bolt was found to have contravened the Racial Discrimination Act in September 2011. Despite this, the national con-



testation played out in the media gave permission to many racist Australians to challenge Indigenous people's claims of ancestry and authenticity (Gelber and McNamara, 2013).

This research will definitely not «do an Andrew Bolt». It will not endorse or support racist and biologically determinist constructions of ATSI identity and belonging such as «encouraging scepticism about the authenticity of fair-skinned Aboriginal persons and judgment by non-Aboriginal persons about the legitimacy of Aboriginal identity according to skin colour» or according to the «quantum of Aboriginal ancestry» (Gelber and McNamara, 2013, p. 472). This external colonial imposition of racial identity classifications is unacceptable. Such determinations must be the prerogative of ATSI people themselves, and the acknowledgment of SE heritage does not delete, denigrate or deduct from the right to identify as ATSI.

Thus, the research is framed by the following methodologies:

1. Indigenous Standpoint Research Methods (Moreton-Robinson, 2013) whereby atsi people's lived experience is the point of entry and central in the production of «post-colonising» texts;

2. Decolonising Research Methodologies (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) particularly in relation to making the work accessible; foregrounding participants' rights to publicly speak about, support or critique the work; participants' ownership of their transcripts, stories and materials and participants' rights to use the materials and stories in the development of their own projects;

3. «Storytelling Reconciliation» (Savvas, 2012), which recognises the contribution that writers/storytellers and others involved in the production and dissemination of stories can make towards achieving Reconciliation;

4. «Decolonising migrant historiography» (Pugliese, 2002) which addresses how migrant heritage projects risk reproducing colonial formations by failing to consult with local atsi communities about historical texts, sites and memorials.

At each step, contributors are given their interview transcripts and stories to edit, add to and veto, and they select any documents and photographs and other primary sources they wish to include in the research and forthcoming publication. A reference group oversees the conduct, progress and outcomes of the project to ensure personal and cultural safety which is «not something the researcher can claim to provide but rather it is something that is experienced by the research participant» (Walker et al, 2014, p. 201). I will also be ensuring that when I complete the book, «appropriate steps and processes are in place to be of benefit to individuals, families and communities with whom we have been working... [and] leave a positive legacy» (Walker et al, 2014, p. 206).

**«Why/what/who didn't I know?»: From autobiographical amnesia to decolonising memory**

I wish to state very clearly that although I am a «wog», I am not part of a «mob». Ricatti cites my autoethnographic book, *Tapestry* (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1999), as «a rare instance of literary memory and critical reflection on Italian migrants' colonial and racist attitudes towards Aborigines» (2013, p. 127). Accompanying my research and writing of *Tapestry* were waves of feeling cheated and deceived. I had been involuntarily, unknowingly subjected to historical amnesia. I had not known how immersed my family's history was in settler colonialism. Drawing from «cumulative biographically meaningful, epiphany experiences» such as my meeting Roxy/Jason (Williamson-Kefu, 2019, p. 7) that have led to the research, I tell the story of my migrant mother being taught to hate and fear Aboriginal people in the late 1950s, often through openly racist and extremely offensive expressions: «they were dirty disease-filled thieves who were one step above animals» (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1999, p. 69). I also attempt to undo personal colonial amnesia by remembering a childhood hospital stay through a decolonising memory lens:

Maria Giovanna is always careful to investigate the white sheet and blankets where the girl's skin has touched to see if she's left any chocolate colour behind. This is because she has a recurring dream that the little girl jumps out of her cot, comes over to Maria Giovanna, and begins to touch her, leaving streaks of black, like her father's shoe polish, on her face and hands...

The adults glance at each other and mumble words, especially a strange word that sounds like «Abrigginini», and then explain that the girl's colour doesn't come off (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1999, pp. 68-69).

As evocatively presented by Ricatti in the Introduction to this Forum, and as endorsed by the decolonial approaches of the four methodologies I have outlined earlier, emotive and personal narratives, biographies and ethnographies allow for accessibility to a wider readership and respect for the Indigenous tradition of oral story-telling «as a legitimate way of sharing knowledge» (Kovach, 2005, p. 32). I also come from a Southern Italian peasant oral storytelling tradition where «as a way of teaching and discussing political and sensitive issues...the anecdote is the explanation» (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004, p. 154). «Textual weavers» use theory, research and narrative, «each informing and augmenting the other» (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004, p. 153; see also Daozhi, 2018).

In my novel, *Love You Two* (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2008), I developed the character called Ralph/Raffaele, a Wogarigine, to begin to counteract their absence in fiction (Savvas, 2012). Ralph was based on an adolescent and his family who I «yarned» within the Northern Rivers region of NSW. I attempt to demonstrate

how easy it is to misrepresent and mis-interpret when erasures and exclusions have rendered Wogarigines absent from the realms of narrative identifications, realities and possibilities.

«My mother's Calabrian, but she was born here. So was my Dad».

«So you're third generation too».

«On my mother's side but who knows how many on Dad's side. All been a bit lost, or killed off». He can tell he's lost me. «You know, my Dad being a Murri and all that».

A Murri? Just for one pathetic second I find myself thinking, «Now what part of Italy are Murris from?» And then it hits me. His Dad is Aboriginal. «No, I didn't know». I'm such a dumb-ass loser! (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2008, p. 181).

Richardson argues that «narrative is quintessential to the understanding of the sociological... a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation» (1990, pp. 117-18). Narrativizing and telling collective stories is a way of using «our sociological imagination» to reveal personal problems as public issues» (1990, p. 131).

«At school which gang do you join? The wogboys? The blackfellas? What about when they're out to get each other? Only time I was allowed was when they ganged up against the skips!» He shakes his head with a grim smile. «Yet, it was all okay in me... I'm glad school's over, Pina. You sit in a class on Aboriginal history and you wonder where you are in it. Or you hear about Italian migrants and wonder, what about someone like me» (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2008, pp. 182-83).

Thus, I situate my fictionalised research methodology alongside Gabbrielli (2008) whose novel *Polenta and Goanna* is based on dozens of interviews and documents about the interfaces of Italian and Aboriginal cultures in the gold-mining areas of Western Australia at the turn of the twentieth century. While it focuses on love, intermarriage and family between Aboriginal women and Italian miners, it also accurately portrays the disturbing realities of oppression and misogyny from Italian migrants toward Aboriginal women.

### **From damage-centred to desire-based research**

Alongside my colleagues in this Forum, I support Connell et al.'s declaration that the «long shadow of colonial history falls across whole domains of knowledge» (2016, p. 29). A final question that will accompany my research is how to recognise and foreground the devastation that has occurred without collapsing into what the white Western knowledge economy perpetuates and is invested in: «damage-centred research and damaging research» wherein «oppression

singularly defines a community» (Tuck, 2009, p. 413). Tuck calls for a shift from damage-centred to «desire-based» research which interrogates and engages with neo-colonial assemblages in all their complexity, connection and contradiction, to the view of promoting the hopes, wisdoms and «the self-determination of lived lives» (2009, p. 416). Ultimately, reflecting on and researching the borders of the colonial residual and the decolonial emergent may lead to recognising and respecting individualism and intersectionality within and beyond neo-colonial assemblages, as stated by a young Wogarigine who, at the time of writing, did not wish to give his name: «What matters is that it's all here in me. Everyone, no matter which mob or wog you're from, or if you have whitefella in you from way back, have to deal with it all or get out of my way».

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## For the instantiation of migrant decolonising practices

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***WARNING:*** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that the following article contains images of deceased persons.*

This article recounts the personal story of my ongoing desire to materialise decolonising practices in the course of my life as an academic-activist coming from a migrant background and living and working within the context of the Australian settler-colonial state. It is a story of impassioned commitments, transformative moments and solidary convergences. It is a story inscribed within the hegemonic power formations of settler colonialism, white-supremacist racism and northern Italian anti-southern racism – as key factors that have shaped my itinerary. It is, crucially, a story of enduring friendships with Indigenous Elders, activists and artists and our collaborative moves to instantiate decolonising practices (Langford-Ginibi, 1988; Pryor, 1998; Birch, 2000 and 2007; Watson, 2007; Black, 201; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Bell 2014).

Some decades ago, at the end of a class that I was teaching at the University of Newcastle, one of my students approached me and apologised for not having submitted one of her assessment tasks. She explained that she had spent the weekend assisting in the organisation of a rally protesting for Aboriginal land rights. I was, at that stage in my career, a postgraduate casual tutor. It was 1990 and Indigenous communities were continuing to assert, as they had since the moment of colonial invasion, their right to self-determination and to land rights. I said to the student that I was genuinely glad to see she had her



priorities right and that her reason for the deferred submission automatically qualified her for an extension. Unbeknownst to me, this would turn out to be a pivotal moment in my life.

I would no doubt have forgotten this incident had it not returned to me in the most unexpected way a few years later. It was 1994 and I had commenced my first full-time position at the University of Wollongong. One afternoon I received a call in my office. The caller at the other end began: «You probably don't remember me, but I was in one of your classes at Newcastle. I once asked you for an extension for one of my essays and you granted it to me after I said I'd not been able to submit the essay on time because I had attended an Aboriginal land rights rally. I never forgot that». I actually remembered both the incident and the student-caller: Barbara Nicholson. We began to engage in an enthusiastic conversation on Aboriginal land rights and then Barbara mentioned that she was a member of the Wadi Wadi people of the Illawarra (I did not presume to know at the time of granting the extension whether or not the student before me was Aboriginal). Barbara then began to unfold a profoundly disturbing story of structural racism and how it had impacted on her family. She said that one of their Elders, Aunty Joan Wakeman, had recently died but that the funeral home that they had approached had refused to bury her unless the family paid the full sum for the funeral up front, and not in instalments as they requested, as, the funeral home director pointed out to them, «Aboriginal people never pay their bills». Consequently, a hugely respected Aboriginal Elder was left in a state of undignified suspension in a local morgue as the family desperately tried to raise the funds to bury her – which they eventually managed to do. I was upset to hear of this distressing incident and said to Barbara that we needed to make the story public in order to expose the racism of the funeral home. It occurred to me as we were talking that I had just been given the resources to turn one of my units into a distance-education module that would entail the production of a number of videos based on the unit's content and that would be screened as weekly episodes on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) television channel.

Barbara was excited at the prospect of collaborating on this project and we immediately decided to put the project into play. As we talked about the project, we realised that it would be best to situate the story of the funeral home's racism within the larger narrative of settler-colonial violence that attended the occupation of Wadi Wadi land. Barbara and two Wadi Wadi Elders, Aunty Joan Carriage and Uncle Alan Carriage, became the leads in telling the story in our documentary (figure 1).

Figure 1. *Aunty Jean Carriage, Barbara Nicholson and Uncle Alan Carriage. Still from Contemporary Colonialism and the Struggle for Aboriginal Self-Determination, 1996*



Source: photo by Joseph Pugliese

Barbara's daughter, Tess Allas, curator of Indigenous art, also came on board. Tess brought to the documentary an extraordinary cast of Indigenous artistic talent working in the Illawarra and on the aesthetics of resistance that they materialised through their creative works (figure 2). The two-part documentary was titled *Contemporary Colonialism and the Struggle for Aboriginal Self-Determination*. The documentary was a collaborative work in every sense of the word. It screened on SBS television in 1996.<sup>1</sup> The friendships formed in the time of that collaboration have been enduring.

Figure 2. *Tess Allas discussing Kevin Butler's painting Assimilation 1995. Still from Contemporary Colonialism and the Struggle for Aboriginal Self-Determination, 1996*



Source: photo by Joseph Pugliese

I tell this story as it underscores one of my life-long concerns: how do I, as a *migrant* subject, living and working on Awabakal, Wadi Wadi, Gadigal and Darug people's lands, and as someone who has clearly benefited from the ongoing usurpation of Indigenous land and sovereignty, proceed to instantiate decolonising moves *in practice*? I emphasise *in practice* as I have viewed my position, since the beginning of my career in academia, as one that must translate academic knowledges into transformative activist practices that are oriented by social justice outcomes. And I place the term «migrant» in scare quotes in order to draw attention to the manner in which it necessarily encompasses both Anglo and Celtic Australian subjects who continue to nativise their usurpation of Indigeneity by using the term «migrant» to refer exclusively to all non-Anglo-Celtic subjects – thereby working to consolidate their illegitimate host/guest power nexus.

The social justice orientation that has underpinned my pedagogy and research has deep roots in my own lived history as a Calabrese migrant growing up in 1960s-70s assimilationist Australia and from my first-hand experience (and study) of the northern Italian anti-southern racism that has so constitutively shaped South/North relations since the time of ostensible Italian «unification» (see Ricatti, 2018 and his list of relevant references). The fraught racialised location that I embodied – that effectively positioned me on the one hand as an unAustralian «dago» and «wog» in an Anglo-Australian context and, on the other hand, as a «*terrone*» who, in the white-supremacist view of northern Italians, was racially coextensive with either Africans or Arabs – obliged me to adopt an affirmative sense of double non-belonging: neither Australian nor Italian, rather, a diasporic outlier compelled to negotiate the locus of the non.

I mark this fraught embodied status as it fuelled my understanding of how racism impacts in both violently physical and symbolic modalities on its targeted subjects. I have also written on how migrant subjects, such as southern Europeans who were once racially reviled by Anglo-Australians, have often assiduously aspired to become what I term «super-assimilated» settler subjects; as such, they reproduce white-settler positionalities and values – often in stridently performative modes in order to appear whiter than white and more Anglo than Anglos (Senator Cori Bernardi, in the context of white-settler politics, is a case in point). Moreover, following the abolition of the White Australia Policy and the consequent migration of Blacks and people of colour to Australia, migrants who had previously been inscribed by a not-quite-white status (such as southern Europeans) have capitalised on their recalibration by the Australian state up the racial hierarchy towards whiteness. Super-assimilated migrants have laboured to secure their assumption of a white racial status precisely by reproducing the very racist values and practices of the dominant settler culture

and, simultaneously, by erasing their own complicity in the maintenance and reproduction of the Australian settler state.

Having said this, however, I want to pause for a moment in order to complicate my argument. Even as some not-quite-white migrant ethnicities have been conferred, following the racial recalibration that I mentioned above, a white racial status (and all of the privileges that accrue from this), not all migrants previously classified as not-quite-white have been enabled to make this transition – as though it were simply the case of designated subjects seamlessly embodying the racial categories or ethnic descriptors that a state decides to impose upon them, regardless of the embodied phenotypical differences that insist on racially marking them otherwise. Race, *qua* whiteness, is never a unitary nor homogeneous category. As a historically contingent and socially constructed category, it is always shot through with embodied contradictions. Specifically, some southern European migrants have continued to experience the lived racist effects of appearing to be racially other precisely because their phenotypical attributes mark them, for example, with the loaded descriptor «of Middle Eastern appearance» and the racist effects that ensue from embodying this charged configuration (Pugliese, 2003).

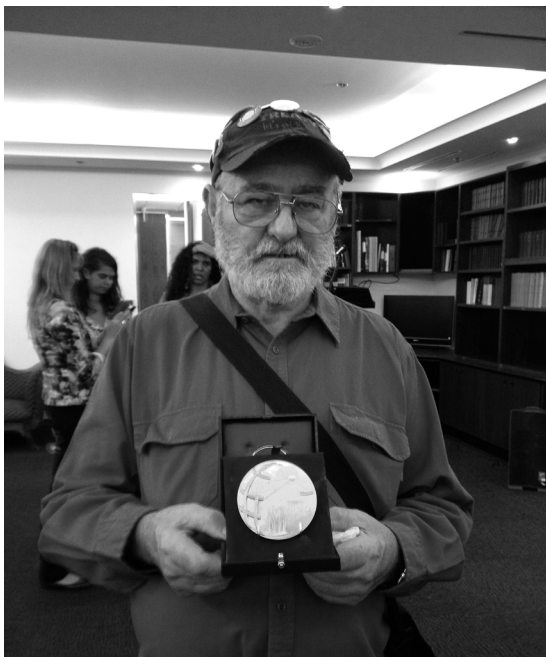
With the apparent validation of migrant cultures and heritage by the Australian state following the legislation of a number of «multicultural» policies, non-Anglo migrants began to reclaim key migrant sites, such as the Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre, and to revalorise them as heritage places. Concerned by the manner in which many migrant communities were writing their histories of migration and settlement in Australia without acknowledging the Indigenous peoples upon whose land they established their very livelihoods, I published an essay, «For a Decolonising Migrant Historiography» (Pugliese, 2002) exhorting non-Anglo migrants to acknowledge their own complicity in contemporary settler practices and to work with Indigenous peoples towards dismantling the colonial hegemony of the Australian settler state.

My desire to continue to develop and materialise a social justice politics committed to anti-racist and decolonising practices led me to join the Indigenous Social Justice Association (ISJA) in early 2000. Co-founded (with Ray Clark) by the late and great Uncle Ray Jackson, ISJA's mandate was to instantiate decolonising and anti-racist practices across a broad range of institutions and to work to achieve justice for the victims, and the families of victims, of institutional violence, racism and injustice (figure 3).

Uncle Ray was an extraordinary mentor.<sup>2</sup> He insistently brought into focus in his social justice work the manner in which the prison-industrial complex was instrumental in consolidating the settler state's desired elimination of Indigenous people through practices of incarceration and their serial deaths in custodial settings. All of his work was informed by this non-negotiable fact:

that Indigenous people had never ceded their sovereignty or their lands and that neither the Australian government nor its laws had the authority to speak on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. He evidenced this non-negotiable fact through such memorable events as the Aboriginal Passport Ceremonies.

Figure 3. *Uncle Ray Jackson holding his French Human Rights medal, French Consulate, Sydney, 2015*



Source: photo by Joseph Pugliese

The first Aboriginal Passport Ceremony was organised by Uncle Ray, together with a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ISJA activists, in September 2012; it was staged at The Settlement, Redfern. Uncle Ray described the aims of the ceremony thus:

The issuing of the Passports covers two areas of interactions between the Traditional Owners of the Lands and migrants, asylum seekers and other non-Aboriginal citizens in this country. Whilst they acknowledge our rights to all the Aboriginal Nations of Australia we reciprocate by welcoming them into our Nations (cited in Pugliese 2015).

I have vivid memories of the excitement felt by the ISJA collective in seeing the first Aboriginal Passport Ceremony come to fruition. That embodied sense of non-belonging that I discussed above was dispelled by Uncle Ray Jackson's moving conferral to me of an Aboriginal passport during the course of the ceremony (figure 4).

Figure 4. *Uncle Ray Jackson conferring an Aboriginal Passport to the author, The Settlement, Redfern, 2012*



Source: photo by Joseph Pugliese

In insisting on Aboriginal peoples' unceded sovereignty and their right to determine to whom they would offer hospitality, Uncle Ray overturned the settler state's illegitimate host/guest nexus, and its violent border politics, by also extending his welcome to the asylum seekers and refugees detained in Australia's onshore and offshore immigration prisons. In the context of the Aboriginal Passport Ceremonies, he not only issued passports to a number of asylum seekers and refugees, but he also proceeded to acknowledge, in an unforgettable gesture, the absent asylum seekers and refugees who could not attend the ceremony because they were locked up in Australia's immigration prisons or because they had died within those same prisons. In order to mark their enforced absence from the ceremony, he placed centre stage an empty chair over which was draped the Aboriginal flag (figure 5).



Figure 5. *The Aboriginal flag draped over an empty chair, Aboriginal Passport Ceremony, The Settlement, Redfern, 2012*



Source: photo by Joseph Pugliese

As a material continuation of Uncle Ray's legacy, Suvendrini Perera and I, working with an international team of collaborators in the US, Canada and the UK, developed the *Deathscapes: Mapping Race and Violence in Settler States* project. The aims of the project are to bring into focus the transnational structures of incarceration and elimination that so often result in lethal outcomes for Indigenous people living under settler rule; and, concomitantly, to underscore how the usurpation of Indigenous sovereignty by settler states is predicated on violent moves to secure its borders and thus to consolidate its illegitimate sovereignty (simply put, no control over one's borders, no legitimate claim to being a state). *Deathscapes* critically examines the nexus, with all of its inbuilt and crucial differentials, of Indigenous and refugee imprisonment and death in the context of three settler states – with the UK hub bringing into focus the originary point of empire and colonial power.



Figure 6. Dr Ray Jackson's academic gown with the Aboriginal flag. His Honorary Doctorate was awarded posthumously by Macquarie University, 2016, as Uncle Ray died just prior to the award ceremony



Source: photo by Joseph Pugliese

I titled this article «For the Instantiation of Migrant Decolonising Practices» as the preposition *for* critically emphasises both the commitment to practices of decolonisation and the fact that these practices have a futural orientation. The practices that I outlined above defy the seeming impossibility of dismantling the settler-state hegemon because they work to materialise points of convergence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects committed to the realisation of decolonisation. Such practices emerge as synchronic decolonising instantiations within the diachronic continuum of unceded Indigenous sovereignty that is scored by the timeless refrain: «*Always was, always will be Aboriginal land*». As material practices, they fissure the seeming impermeability of the settler hegemon; and, as ruptural acts, they open up a horizontal space in which non-Indigenous subjects within this country collectively acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Lands and the enduring Indigenous Nations that continue to challenge the illegitimate authority of the settler state. The Aboriginal Passport Ceremonies, understood in this context, proleptically delineate a destinal trajectory that encompasses both the pre-colonial and the genuinely post-colonial. In the schema of this trajectory, the violent interregnum of the Australian settler state will be seen, after its demise, as an interchronic phase marked by its own auto-immune expiry date.

### Acknowledgements

Photos of Aunty Joan Carriage, Uncle Alan Carriage, Barbara Nicholson and Tess Allas reproduced with kind permission of Tess Allas. Photos of Uncle Ray Jackson reproduced with kind permission of Carolyn Jackson.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Contemporary Colonialism and the Struggle for Aboriginal Self-Determination was subsequently nominated for an Australian Society for Educational Technology Award (1996), receiving a Commendation, and it was also nominated for the United Nations Association of Australia Media Peace Award (1996).
- <sup>2</sup> As way of paying homage to Uncle Ray's outstanding social justice achievements, in 2015 I successfully nominated him for the prestigious French Human Rights Prize, and he and ISJA were awarded €20,000 to continue their social justice work. In 2016 I nominated Uncle Ray for an Honorary Doctorate, which was awarded posthumously to him by Macquarie University.

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## Sommario

Il Forum esplora alcuni aspetti cruciali del rapporto fra i migranti italiani e le comunità indigene australiane, comprese la loro complicità nei processi di colonizzazione, e le forme di solidarietà con le lotte delle popolazioni indigene. Prendendo in considerazione il contesto australiano, questo forum intende stimolare un dibattito sul bisogno di decolonizzare la storia della migrazione italiana nel mondo. Un approccio decoloniale richiede non solo il riconoscimento del fatto che milioni di italiani sono emigrati in società coloniali, ma anche una riflessione teorica e metodologica su come la storia delle migrazioni debba essere influenzata dalle epistemologie indigene. Il forum è diviso in sei parti. Dopo l'introduzione metodologica di Francesco Ricatti, l'artista Paola Balla riflette sulla sua vita e sul suo lavoro come donna e artista Wemba-Wemba e Gunditjmara, il cui padre e la cui famiglia paterna sono emigrati in Australia dalla Calabria. Il suo contributo sottolinea la necessità di riscrivere la storia dei paesi coloniali dalla prospettiva delle donne indigene. Federica Verdina e John Kinder esplorano poi, da una prospettiva linguistica, la terminologia italiana sugli Aborigeni alla fine del diciannovesimo secolo e all'inizio del ventesimo secolo. La sezione successiva, a firma di Matteo Dutto, si concentra sulla rappresentazione visiva e cinematografica degli incontri fra indigeni e migranti italiani in Australia. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli riflette poi sulle complesse metodologie di studio che sono necessarie quando si considerano le relazioni fra migranti italiani e persone indigene. Il forum si chiude con una riflessione personale di Joseph Pugliese sulla sua partecipazione a pratiche decoloniali nel contesto australiano, sia come accademico che come attivista.

## Abstract

This special Forum explores some key aspects on Italian migrants' relationships with First Nations people in Australia, including their complicity in settler colonialism and their solidarity with Indigenous struggles. Taking into consideration the Australian context, this forum aims to instigate an intellectual dialogue around the need to decolonise Italian migration history worldwide. A decolonising approach requires not just the recognition that millions of Italians have migrated to settler colonial societies, but also a theoretical and methodological reflection on how migration history needs to be informed by Indigenous epistemologies. The forum is divided in six parts. After a methodological introduction by Francesco Ricatti, the artist Paola Balla reflects on her life and work as a Wemba-Wemba and Gunditjmara woman and artist, whose father and

paternal family came to Australia from Calabria. Her contribution emphasises the need to relearn the history of settler colonial nations from the perspective of Indigenous women. Federica Verdina and John Kinder then explore from a linguistic perspective the anthropological discourse in the Italian language concerning Aboriginal people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The next contribution, from Matteo Dutto, focuses on the visual and cinematic representation of the encounters between Indigenous and Italian migrants in Australia. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli then reflects on the complex methodologies that are required when studying personal relationships between Italian migrants and Indigenous people. The forum is concluded by Joseph Pugliese's personal reflections on his scholarly and activist involvement in decolonial practices within the Australian context.

### Résumé

Ce Forum explore quelques aspects cruciaux du rapport entre les immigrants italiens et les communautés indigènes en Australie, y compris leur complicité dans les processus de colonisation, ainsi que les pratiques de solidarité avec les luttes des populations indigènes. Le but de ce Forum est de lancer une discussion intellectuelle sur le besoin de «décoloniser» l'histoire de l'émigration italienne dans le monde. Une approche décoloniale exige non seulement l'acceptation du fait que des millions d'italiens sont émigrés vers des sociétés coloniales, mais aussi une réflexion théorique et méthodologique concernant l'espace que les épistémologies indigènes doivent trouver dans l'écriture de l'histoire migratoire. Le Forum se partage en six sections. Après l'introduction méthodologique par Francesco Ricatti, l'artiste Paola Balla, dont le père et la famille étaient venus en Australie de Calabrie, réfléchit sur sa vie en tant que femme et artiste Wemba-Wemba et Gunditamarra; son texte souligne la nécessité de ré-apprendre l'histoire des pays coloniaux à partir du point de vue des femmes indigènes. Federica Verdina et John Kinder, qui adoptent la perspective linguistique, se penchent sur le discours anthropologique en italien entre XIX et XX portant sur les Aborigènes. La section suivante, par Matteo Dutto, se concentre sur la représentation visuelle et cinématique des rencontres entre les immigrants italiens et les indigènes. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli réfléchit sur les méthodologies complexes qui sont nécessaires lorsqu'on veut considérer les relations entre les migrants italiens et les locaux. Le Forum s'achève par une réflexion personnelle par Joseph Pugliese sur sa propre participation à des pratiques décoloniales au sein du contexte australien, soit comme spécialiste soit comme militant.

Extracto

Este Foro explora algunos aspectos cruciales de la relación entre los migrantes italianos y las comunidades indígenas australianas, incluyendo su complicidad en los procesos de colonización y las formas de solidaridad con las luchas de los pueblos indígenas. Teniendo en cuenta el contexto australiano, el foro pretende estimular un debate intelectual sobre la necesidad de descolonizar la historia de la migración italiana en el mundo. Un enfoque decolonial requiere no sólo el reconocimiento del hecho de que millones de italianos han emigrado a las sociedades coloniales, sino también una reflexión teórica y metodológica sobre la forma en que la historia de la migración debería ser influenciada por las epistemologías indígenas. El foro está dividido en seis partes. Después de la introducción metodológica de Francesco Ricatti, la artista Paola Balla reflexiona sobre su vida y obra como mujer y artista Wemba-Wemba y Gunditjmara, cuyo padre y familia paterna emigraron de Calabria a Australia. Su contribución subraya la necesidad de volver a aprender la historia de los países coloniales desde la perspectiva de las mujeres indígenas. Federica Verdina y John Kinder exploran entonces desde una perspectiva lingüística el discurso antropológico en italiano sobre los aborígenes a finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX. La siguiente sección, de Matteo Dutto, se centra en la representación visual y cinematográfica de los encuentros entre indígenas y migrantes italianos en Australia. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli reflexiona de consecuencia sobre los complejos métodos de estudio que son necesarios al considerar las relaciones entre los migrantes italianos y los pueblos indígenas. El foro se cierra con una reflexión personal de Joseph Pugliese sobre su participación en las prácticas decoloniales en el contexto australiano, tanto como académico como activista.