

# The Chinese of Europe and Pioneer Legends: race, labour and Italians in White Australia, 1888 to 1940

**Author:**

Vitale, Luke

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**The Chinese of Europe and Pioneer Legends:  
Race, labour and Italians in White Australia, 1888 to 1940**

**Luke Vitale**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Humanities and Languages  
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University of New South Wales

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Thesis Title and Abstract	Declarations	Inclusion of Publications Statement	Corrected Thesis and Responses
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Thesis Title

The Chinese of Europe and Pioneer Legends: race, labour and Italians in White Australia, 1888 to 1940

Thesis Abstract

This thesis presents a new history of Italian immigration to Australia that roughly covers the period between the Intercolonial Conference on the Chinese Question held in 1888 and the beginning of World War II in 1940. It argues that the presence of Italian migrants in Australia, as workers and settlers, was tied to White Australia's three main agendas: creating a racially homogenous white population, securing British/Australian possession of the continent, and developing a modern industrial capitalist economy. While contributing positively towards the achievement of these goals, their presence also represented a contradiction for White Australia. As a result, despite being acceptable and sometimes even desirable within the co-ordinates of White Australia, their presence was contested and always needed to be re-affirmed by supporters of Italian immigration and by Italians themselves. From these contestations over Italians' desirability in White Australia, emerged a number of constructions such as pioneer, settler, citizen and defender that highlighted certain characteristics such as race, class, labour practices and respectability. Through an analysis of newspaper articles in both English and Italian, the parliamentary Hansard and a variety of government archives, this thesis examines how these constructions emerged out of the political and class conflicts of White Australia. It also examines the role Italians played in the creation and propagation of these constructions and how this was informed by their own ideas about race and labour that were influenced by a variety of political ideologies and class positions that divided the body of Italian migrants in Australia during this period.

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## Abstract

This thesis presents a new history of Italian immigration to Australia that roughly covers the period between the Intercolonial Conference on the Chinese Question held in 1888 and the beginning of World War II in 1940. It argues that the presence of Italian migrants in Australia, as workers and settlers, was tied to White Australia's three main agendas: creating a racially homogenous white population, securing British/Australian possession of the continent, and developing a modern industrial capitalist economy. While contributing positively towards the achievement of these goals, their presence also represented a contradiction for White Australia. As a result, despite being acceptable and sometimes even desirable within the co-ordinates of White Australia, their presence was contested and always needed to be re-affirmed by supporters of Italian immigration and by Italians themselves. From these contestations over Italians' desirability in White Australia, emerged a number of constructions such as pioneer, settler, citizen and defender that highlighted certain characteristics such as race, class, labour practices and respectability. Through an analysis of newspaper articles in both English and Italian, the parliamentary Hansard and a variety of government archives, this thesis examines how these constructions emerged out of the political and class conflicts of White Australia. It also examines the role Italians played in the creation and propagation of these constructions and how this was informed by their own ideas about race and labour that were influenced by a variety of political ideologies and class positions that divided the body of Italian migrants in Australia during this period.



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Introduction:

## **Race, labour and Italian migrants in White Australia**

This thesis covers the period from 1888 to 1940. During this time, Australia's Italian-born population increased from less than 4000 to over 30,000. While most migrants before and after this period went to the major cities, two significant concentrations of Italian migrants emerged in rural and regional areas. The first was in the goldfields of Western Australia where Italians began moving to work from the industry's beginnings in the 1890s. By 1911, thirty-five per cent of Australia's 6719 Italian-born migrants were living in Western Australia.<sup>1</sup> The second concentration of Italian migrants was found in the sugar growing districts of North Queensland where Italians had begun to migrate to from the early 1890s and increased significantly in the 1920s. By 1933, thirty-one per cent of Australia's 26,756 Italian-born migrants were living in Queensland, most of them in the districts between Townsville and Cairns.<sup>2</sup> This thesis mostly focuses on these two concentrations as well as the older centres of Italian migration such as Sydney and Melbourne.

The growth of the Italian-born community during this period saw it grow from a relatively small minority group into the largest non-British migrant group in the country. The dates chosen to begin and end this thesis emphasise this process and its connection to the White Australia Policy. This period of time can broadly be described as the White Australia period. I begin with 1888, not because it is a significant date within the history of Italian immigration to Australia, but because of its significance in the intersecting histories of Chinese immigration and the development of White Australia. It was in 1888 that the first White Australia Policy was adopted at an intercolonial conference held in June of that year. Officially titled the 'Intercolonial Conference on the Chinese Question', this meeting of leaders from each of the Australian colonies agreed to introduce uniform legislation that restricted immigration from China and stopped Chinese residents in Australia from becoming naturalised.<sup>3</sup> The White Australia Policy,

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<sup>1</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2-3 April 1911, Section II, Part II – Birthplaces (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1911), 109-118.

<sup>2</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, Volume I, Part X – Birthplace (Canberra: Government Printer, 1933), 752-763.

<sup>3</sup> Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1923), 90; Charles Price, *The Great White Walls Are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australasia 1836-1888* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), 197-98.

therefore, was originally an anti-Chinese policy and it is in this historical context that any study of Italian migrants in White Australia must be situated. As I will argue, it was in relation to the much larger group of Chinese migrants that Australians evaluated the presence of early Italian migrants in Australia and Italians understood themselves in Australia.

I end this study of Italian immigration with the entrance of Italy into World War II in June 1940, which led to the internment of up to 5000 Italians as ‘enemy aliens’.<sup>4</sup> The two historical moments that bookend this thesis bring this period into focus as primarily one of ambivalence and contradiction. Under the legislative and policy framework of White Australia, Italians were allowed to migrate to Australia which they did to a greater extent than any other group of non-British migrants. Similarly, there were few legislative or policy barriers which hindered them from working and settling in Australia. However, once they had become the largest non-British migrant group, Italians also became the new main threat to the White Australian agendas of creating a racially homogenous population, securing British/Australian possession of the continent and developing a modern industrial capitalist economy based on a system of free labour.<sup>5</sup> As I will discuss below, wartime internment symbolised a culmination of the racism that Italians themselves faced in this period of White Australia.

This thesis is concerned predominantly with the themes of race and labour. It examines how the racialisation of Italian migrants was linked to the labour conditions under which they were recruited and how Italians resisted this racialisation through various means. My analysis is focused primarily on the discourses that emerged out of key historical episodes in this early period of Italian migration and how they were linked to the development of White Australia more generally. This study offers a means through which to explore how Italian migrants thought about themselves in White Australia, not only through the category of whiteness, but through other identities such as class and nation that could either complicate or compliment their acceptance of white racial hierarchies.

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<sup>4</sup> Mia Spizzica, "Italian Civilian Internment in South Australia Revisited," *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia* 41 (2013): 69.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Griffiths, "The Making of White Australia: Ruling Class Agendas, 1876-1888" (Australian National University, 2006).

Race and labour are two themes that have been central to the historiography of Italian immigration in Australia and around the world. This thesis, therefore, rests on a substantial body of literature. From the earliest studies of Italian migration to Australia, there is much that has been written in relation to race and labour albeit with different preoccupations or emphases. Some of the earliest historians of Italian and other Southern European immigration, for instance, were focused on the movement of migrants, their settlement patterns and other factors related to demography.<sup>6</sup> Others, such as Michele Langfield, were instead concerned with legislative and policy frameworks.<sup>7</sup> The studies that emerged with the development of a separate field of immigration history were concerned with examining how Italian migrants successfully maintained aspects of their culture while adapting to the conditions of a new country. In these histories and those that followed, racism was often treated as one of the obstacles that Italian migrants overcame, a rite of passage for the community, on their way to acceptance.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes this was presented as a form of resistance – a view which can be found, for example, in Eric Richards's appraisal of Italians as 'the effective pioneers of the first diversification of British Australia' who, by their refusal to assimilate fully, 'eroded the narrow Anglocentric monoculture of Australia'.<sup>9</sup>

In these early overview histories, it was often the media and the labour movement who were identified as the major perpetrators of racism. This has meant that there are also important studies of Italian migrants that have emerged from the field of labour history. After all, the vast majority of Italian migrants arrived in Australia with nothing to sell but their labour power. These are studies that have broadly focused on how Italian immigration was opposed by organised labour and how Italians were excluded or scapegoated by trade unions and became a target of working-class violence.<sup>10</sup> These histories highlight how Italians were considered by

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> Michele Langfield, "Attitudes to European Immigration to Australia in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (1991): 1-15; "White Aliens": The Control of European Immigration to Australia 1920-30," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (1991): 1-14.

<sup>8</sup> Nino Randazzo and Michael J. Cigler, *The Italians in Australia* (Melbourne: AE Press, 1987); Robert Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage* (Richmond, Vic.: Greenhouse Publications, 1987); Gianfranco Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008), 249.

<sup>10</sup> Kay Saunders, "Masters and Servants: The Queensland Sugar Workers' Strike 1911," in *Who Are Our Enemies?: Racism and the Australian Working Class*, ed. Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (Neutral Bay, NSW: Hale and Iremonger, 1978), 20-34; Robert Pascoe and Patrick Bertola, "Italian Miners and the Second-Generation 'Britishers' at Kalgoorlie, Australia," *Social History* 10, no. 1 (1985): 9-35; Patrick Bertola, "Italian

Australian workers (and sometimes employers too) to be docile pawns in service of capital who used them as strike breakers, scabs and other disruptions to organised labour. Similar concerns animated studies by historians that made the category of whiteness central to their analysis and who focused on how the labour movement and the media constructed Italians as racially distinct and inferior during this period.<sup>11</sup>

Some more recent studies have attempted to move beyond the limitations of earlier scholarship which generally focused on the attitudes of Australian workers, their leaders and the media towards Italian migrants without much of an analysis of how Italians saw themselves. The work of Catherine Dewhirst and Francesco Ricatti has been most important here as they have advanced analysis of how Italians constructed their own racial identities within White Australia.<sup>12</sup> They have suggested that, in the face of racism, Italian migrants asserted their white identities by perpetuating racism towards others, collaborating with whiteness and being actively complicit in settler colonialism. In doing so, they have opened up a space for further research to complement and challenge their findings.

This thesis is situated within this broad field that has interpreted the history of Italian immigration to Australia in various ways through the study of a wide range of individuals, locations, industries and episodes. Historians have noted, for instance, that the Italian community in Australia was deeply divided according to class background, that Italians in Australia were called 'the Chinese of Europe' or the 'olive peril', that Italians played a pioneering role in particular regions and industries, and that anti-Italian sentiment was organised through

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Migration to Western Australia before World War One: Some Observations on Ethnicity and Conflict," *Italian Historical Society Journal* 1, no. 2 (1993): 5-10; Andrew Markus, *Australian Race Relations, 1788-1993* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994); Desmond O'Connor, "Declared Black: Italian Workers in South Australia 1928-1932," *Nuovo Paese* (1995): 4-7.

<sup>11</sup> Vanda Moraes-Gorecki, "'Black Italians' in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland: A Reflection on Labour Inclusion and Cultural Exclusion in Tropical Australia," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 5, no. 3 (1994): 306-19; Helen Andreoni, "Olive or White? The Colour of Italians in Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 77 (2003): 81-92; Georgia Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," in *Historicising Whiteness Conference (2006: Melbourne, Vic.)* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007), 305-18.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness: Representing Italians in Early White Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 33-49; Francesco Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); "Introduction to Forum: Towards a Decolonial History of Italian Migration to Australia," *Altreitalie* 59 (2019): 8-15.

trade unions and organisations such as the British Preference League.<sup>13</sup> These are ideas that have often been repeated in each phase of the historiography but have not yet been a central focus of any study. In this thesis, I add depth to these under-researched ideas and others that I have found throughout the historiography while also re-examining particular episodes or individuals that have been well-researched by others, through new lines of inquiry that have been opened up in more recent studies. The central themes of race and labour provides a framework to draw these separate lines of inquiry together into a coherent narrative about Italians in White Australia.

Finally, like much of the historiography, I am primarily concerned with discursive constructions and arguments. Throughout this thesis I examine labels such as ‘pioneer’, ‘defender’, ‘vagrant’, ‘loafer’, and a cast of other ‘good’ or ‘bad’ Italians of various types, paying particular attention to how they each invoke class and race. In my analysis of these constructions, I draw inspiration from the emerging current in Australian history that seeks a ‘new materialism’ which brings together ‘the economic and cultural’ and combines ‘the structural and the discursive’.<sup>14</sup> In the rest of this introductory chapter, I explore in greater depth the overlapping historiographies that this thesis is situated within, builds upon and aims to expand.

### **Italians in a ‘Multi-Ethnic’ White Australia**

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Italy and the nations to which Italians were migrating were relatively new nation-states with diverse populations. In her transnational studies of Italian immigration, Donna Gabaccia described these new nation-states as ‘multi-ethnic’.<sup>15</sup> She noted that they were each formed out of a particular set of historical circumstances and therefore experienced a set of shared challenges ‘to transform transient workers, along with racial minorities, indigenous peoples, and peasants, into citizens they could trust to fight for national interests as states defined them.’<sup>16</sup> In responding to these challenges, the countries that Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have labelled ‘white men’s

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<sup>13</sup> For example, see: Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*; Andreoni, "Olive or White?"; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*.

<sup>14</sup> Hannah Forsyth and Sophie Loy-Wilson, "Seeking a New Materialism in Australian History," *Australian Historical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2017): 169.

<sup>15</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: University College London Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

countries' such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, developed national identities based on whiteness which were then enforced through restrictive legislation against immigration.<sup>17</sup> In Australia, a number of pieces of contemporaneous legislation came to be known as the White Australia Policy.<sup>18</sup>

When 330 Italian men arrived in Queensland in December 1891 to work in the colony's sugar industry, they were entering a 'multi-ethnic' society. The 1891 census that had been collected eight months earlier recorded 3890 Italian-born residents in the Australian colonies and a number of other non-British groups, of which the most numerous included 45,008 Germans, 36,032 Chinese, 16,426 Scandinavians from Sweden, Norway or Denmark, and 10,673 'Polynesians' from various islands in the Pacific Ocean.<sup>19</sup> These groups were not spread out evenly over the continent so that some cities, towns or regions were more 'multi-ethnic' than others and some of these 'multi-ethnic' populations were more problematic than others, depending on which groups were present. It was to such areas that some Italians migrated, including the neighbourhoods of Sydney with notable populations from China and other parts of the Mediterranean; the sugar districts of North Queensland where there were significant populations of South Sea Islanders; and the goldfields of Western Australia where they entered alongside other European migrants such as Slavs from the Austro-Hungarian empire.

The Italians who arrived in December 1891 were recruited under a scheme organised by Chiaffredo Fraire to provide the North Queensland sugar industry with Italian labour and their numbers were supplemented by additional schemes in 1906 and 1907. Under these schemes, it was intended that Italians would replace the Melanesian and Asian workers that the sugar industry had previously relied on which would then facilitate the restructuring of the industry away from the plantation system to one based on small holdings and centralised mills. These schemes were also part of a broader movement for white settlement to secure and develop the 'empty north' - a notion based on anxieties of underpopulation and underdevelopment in the

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<sup>17</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Examples of such legislation include: *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth); *Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901* (Cth); *Post and Telegraph Act 1901* (Cth); *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902* (Cth); *Contract Immigrants Act 1905* (Cth). Other examples are discussed on pages 7, 8 and 27 of this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2-3 April 1911, Section II, Part II – Birthplaces (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1911), 127.

northern regions of the continent.<sup>20</sup> These regions have been a focus of significant research in recent decades and historians working on these regions have demonstrated that they were not empty but populated by people from a range of backgrounds.<sup>21</sup> This work has recognised the 'early multiculturalism' of Australia's north and also challenged national histories that focus on urban areas or southern regions and within clearly marked national boundaries.<sup>22</sup> It has also noted that these multiracial communities of the north were riven with interracial tensions that were held in check by a strict racial hierarchy in which a white minority were in power.<sup>23</sup> This racial hierarchy was re-affirmed after Federation with the introduction of laws that protected the sugar industry as a 'white man's industry'.<sup>24</sup> These were laws that Italians benefitted from – for example, Italians were included as white workers under the Excise Tariff Act of 1902 and the Sugar Bounty Act of 1903 which placed an excise on sugar grown with white labour.<sup>25</sup> When the Sugar Cultivation Act of 1913 made it unlawful to cultivate sugar without a certificate proving that one had passed a dictation test, Italians were exempted as it was only intended to apply to workers of non-European origin.<sup>26</sup>

On the other side of the continent, a wave of Italian migration to Western Australia began after the discovery of gold in the late-1880s and the early-1890s. The earliest of these arrivals arrived

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<sup>20</sup> David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1999), 113-26; Russell McGregor, *Environment, Race and Nationhood in Australia: Revisiting the Empty North* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> For example, see: Henry Reynolds, *North of Capricorn: The Untold Story of Australia's North* (Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2003); Regina Ganter, *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2006); Peta Stephenson, *The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia's Indigenous-Asian Story* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007); Julia Martinez, "Indigenous Australian-Indonesian Inter-marriage: Negotiating Citizenship Rights in Twentieth Century Australia," *Aboriginal History* 35 (2011): 179-97; Ruth Balint, "Aboriginal Women and Asian Men: A Maritime History of Colour in White Australia," *Signs* 37, no. 3 (2012): 544-54.

<sup>22</sup> See: Ruth Balint and Zora Simic, "Histories of Migrants and Refugees in Australia," *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018): 385.

<sup>23</sup> Russell McGregor, "Drawing the Local Colour Line: White Australia and the Tropical North," *The Journal of Pacific History* 47, no. 3 (2012): 331-32.

<sup>24</sup> Stefanie Affeldt, "The Burden of 'White' Sugar: Producing and Consuming Whiteness in Australia," *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 52, no. 4 (2017): 439-66.

<sup>25</sup> Markus, *Australian Race Relations, 1788-1993*, 120. This law was preceded by a piece of colonial legislation, the Sugar Works Guarantee Act Amendment Act of 1900, which according to Yarwood 'limited the grant of government financial aid to sugar mills that employed only European labour.' See: A.T. Yarwood, *Asian Migration to Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1964), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Stefanie Affeldt, "A Paroxysm of Whiteness: 'White' Labour, 'White' Nation and 'White' Sugar in Australia," in *Wages of Whiteness & Racist Symbolic Capital*, ed. Wulf D. Hund, Jeremy Krikler, and David Roediger (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2010), 119.



from the mining regions of the eastern colonies and took up prospecting.<sup>27</sup> Following these early migrants were a group of northern Italian peasants recruited to work in mines and other related projects controlled by a mining metallurgist and speculator named Eugenio Vanzetti.<sup>28</sup> Further Italians were encouraged after one of the largest mining companies in the region, Bewick Moreing & Company, employed Herbert Hoover in 1897 who sought to increase labour productivity by implementing a suite of management reforms – one of which was the introduction of Italian workers in order to disrupt labour unity.<sup>29</sup> These recruitment strategies were pursued at a time in which Western Australia's gold mining industry was passing from an initial period of expansion into a period of consolidation and rationalisation and larger mines such as Bewick Moreing were attempting to build a monopoly while many smaller, marginal mines were closing down.<sup>30</sup> As was the case in Queensland, the initial movement of Italians into Western Australia was not hindered by legislation that targeted other migrant groups. The Imported Registry Act of 1884 placed limits on the entry and employment of 'Asiatic' labour and confined Asian migrants to the tropical region in the north of the state.<sup>31</sup> Non-European migrants had also been prohibited from employment on mines by the state's Mining Act of 1904 which had replaced earlier colonial laws such as the Goldfields Act of 1886 and the Mineral Lands Act of 1892 which had been used for the same purpose.<sup>32</sup> However, in response to the growing numbers of Italian and Slavic workers after Federation, the Mines Regulation Act of 1906 made it necessary for foreign-born miners to pass a language test in order to be eligible to work underground in mines. A large number of miners (mostly Italians) were subsequently sacked as a result of failing the test.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Gentili, *Italian Migration to Western Australia, 1829-1946*, ed. C. Stransky and C. Iraci (Nedlands, W.A.: Dept. of Geography, University of Western Australia, 1982), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 12. Robert Pascoe, 'Vanzetti, Eugenio (1844–1908)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/vanzetti-eugenio-8905/text15643>, published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 14 March 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Hartley, "Bewick Moreing in Western Australian Gold Mining 1897-1904: Management Policies & Goldfields Responses," *Labour History*, no. 65 (1993): 1-18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Bertola, "Undesirable Persons: Race and Western Australian Mining Legislation," in *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, ed. Iain McCalman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 128. Also: Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, 93.

<sup>32</sup> Bertola, "Undesirable Persons: Race and Western Australian Mining Legislation," 129.

<sup>33</sup> Markus, *Australian Race Relations, 1788-1993*, 150.

The majority of Italian migrants during the period covered by this thesis did not arrive through planned schemes with clearly defined aims and purposes such as those described above. They came predominantly through a process of chain migration which accounted for 93 per cent of all migrations from Italy to Australia between 1890 and 1940.<sup>34</sup> These were migrations that were self-funded and relied on social networks through which prospective migrants learnt of opportunities for employment and settlement from relatives and friends who had already established themselves in Australia and would arrange accommodation and employment for new arrivals.<sup>35</sup> As a result, certain villages or towns in Italy were linked to particular towns or industries in Australia.<sup>36</sup> The success of Italian chain migration has been explained as a result of the successful reworking of traditional social structures in Italy into institutionalised migration chains.<sup>37</sup> However, in addition to this, it should not be overlooked that the racial identity of Italian migrants was a fundamental factor in the success of chain migration. Unlike migrants who were described in legislation as ‘aboriginal natives of Asia, Africa and the Pacific’, the entry of Italians in Australia was not restricted under the terms of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 on the grounds of race.<sup>38</sup> Nor were they subject to other restrictions related to citizenship. Under the Naturalisation Act of 1903, Italians were allowed to become naturalised after residing in Australia for a period of two years, which was later increased to five years under the Nationality Act of 1920.<sup>39</sup> Without formal restrictions on their immigration, Italian numbers increased steadily over the first two decades of the twentieth century, allowing for strong chains to be established, which became increasingly important in the interwar period.

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<sup>34</sup> Lyn Henderson, "Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939: Motives for Migration," in *Lectures on North Queensland History: Third Series*, ed. B. J. Dalton (Townsville: History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1979), 205-06. Pascoe argued that chain migration is also more accurately called ‘delayed family migration’ which he described as ‘the idea of sending out a few pioneers to the country first; their savings then finance fares for the remainder of their family.’ See: Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage*, 13, 22.

<sup>35</sup> John S. Macdonald and Leatrice D. Macdonald, "Italian Migration to Australia: Manifest Functions of Bureaucracy Versus Latent Functions of Informal Networks," *Journal of Social History* 3, no. 3 (1970): 249.

<sup>36</sup> Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, 163.

<sup>37</sup> Macdonald and Macdonald, "Italian Migration to Australia: Manifest Functions of Bureaucracy Versus Latent Functions of Informal Networks," 249-75.

<sup>38</sup> See: Langfield, "Attitudes to European Immigration to Australia in the Early Twentieth Century," 1-15. It is true, as Cresciani argues, that Italians were subject to some restrictions under the Immigration Restriction Act – that is, under the sections that prevented the arrival of people who were illiterate and those who had arrived with a contract to work for an Australian employer – these were not restrictions that were based on racial background; see: Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 55.

<sup>39</sup> *Naturalisation Act 1903* (Cth), section 5(a); *Nationality Act 1920* (Cth), section 7(1a).

In the years between the 1921 and 1933 censuses, the Italian-born population in Australia tripled in size, from 8135 in 1921 to 26,756 in 1933. In comparison, the groups that had been largest in 1891 had steadily decreased in size during the intervening decades. The number of German-born, for example, had decreased to 16,842 in 1933, after arrivals from Germany declined significantly between 1891 and 1901.<sup>40</sup> The Italians also outnumbered the combined Asian-born population which was recorded at 24,559 – of which, the Chinese component had dwindled to only 8579 as a result of restrictive legislation. Italians were also a significantly larger group compared to other Southern Europeans such as the 8337 Greeks, 3969 Yugoslavs, 2782 Maltese and 1141 Spaniards.<sup>41</sup> The category ‘Southern European’ is referred to throughout this thesis and requires some explanation. In his pioneering work, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, Charles Price defined the category as referring to ‘persons whose family origins lie in the Mediterranean islands, in the Italian, Iberian and Balkan peninsulas, and the continental zones connecting these peninsulas’.<sup>42</sup> It was both a geographic and an ethnic designation, which Price adopted ‘in the broad sense to mean a collection of persons who, for physical, geographical, political, religious, linguistic, or other reasons, feel themselves, or are felt by others, to constitute a separate people’.<sup>43</sup> However, although these various migrant groups were often grouped together under one broad category, they were treated differently in immigration policy.

The numerical dominance of Italians within the broader category of Southern Europeans can be explained in part by their preferred treatment under immigration policy. In the interwar period, as the number of non-European migrants decreased, immigration from Europe became increasingly regulated through a collection of administrative practices such as passports, visas, landing money requirements, quotas and landing permits.<sup>44</sup> Until 1927, Italians were not subject to any of these regulations. One reason for this was the diplomatic relations between Italy, Australia and Great Britain, in particular the Anglo-Italian Treaty of 1883, which had constrained

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<sup>40</sup> W. D. Borrie, *Italians and Germans in Australia* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1954), 173; Charles Meyer, *A History of Germans in Australia 1839-1945* (Caulfield East: Monash University, 1954), 20.

<sup>41</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, Volume I, Part X – Birthplace (Canberra: Government Printer, 1933), 752-763.

<sup>42</sup> Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Langfield, “‘White Aliens’: The Control of European Immigration to Australia 1920–30,” 1-14.

Australia's ability to subject Italians to these practices.<sup>45</sup> Another reason was their comparative whiteness in relation to other Southern Europeans. In the racial thinking of the interwar period, Europeans were often divided into racially distinct categories. The Ferry Report published in 1925 and Jens Lyng's *Non-Britishers in Australia* published in 1927 are exemplary of this thinking which not only separated Italians from Britishers but also separated northern Italians from southern Italians on racial lines.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, Italians existed between two categories and therefore migration from Italy could not so easily be regulated on racial grounds.

Restrictions on arrivals from Italy were imposed from 1927 onwards through the use of landing permits and money requirements. However, these restrictions were not the outcome of a unilateral decision made by Australian authorities but were based on an informal agreement between Australia and Italy.<sup>47</sup> The National Fascist Party which had come to power in Italy in 1922 had introduced anti-emigration legislation to harness the labour power of its migrants and direct it to the development of Italy and its new colonies in east Africa.<sup>48</sup> Italy's presence in east Africa eventually brought it into conflict with Britain and, throughout the 1930s, Italians were increasingly seen as a threat to national security in Australia.<sup>49</sup> When Italy entered World War II in June 1940, all Italians in Australia, regardless of citizenship, place of birth or political allegiance were reclassified as 'enemy aliens' under the War Precautions Act of 1916.<sup>50</sup> Up to 5000 Italians were interned, which accounted for over 10 per cent of the Italian population in Australia.<sup>51</sup>

Wartime internment was not an historical exception but the result of forces that were already present in White Australia over the preceding decades – in particular the Anglocentric racism on

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<sup>45</sup> See: Catherine Dewhurst, "The Anglo-Italian Treaty. Australia's Imperial Obligations to Italian Migrants, 1883-1940," in *Italy & Australia: An Asymmetrical Relationship*, ed. Gianfranco Cresciani and Bruno Mascitelli (Ballarat: Connor Court, 2014), 81-114.

<sup>46</sup> Jens Lyng, *Non-Britishers in Australia: Influence on Population and Progress* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1935), 9-11; Catherine Dewhurst, "The 'Southern Question' in Australia: The 1925 Royal Commission's Racialisation of Southern Italians," *Queensland History Journal* 22, no. 4 (2014): 316-32.

<sup>47</sup> Langfield, "'White Aliens': The Control of European Immigration to Australia 1920-30."; William A. Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1995), 156-57.

<sup>48</sup> Philip V. Cannistraro and Gianfausto Rosoli, "Fascist Emigration Policy in the 1920s: An Interpretive Framework," *The International Migration Review* 13, no. 4 (1979): 673-92.

<sup>49</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Spizzica, "Italian Civilian Internment in South Australia Revisited," 65.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 69; Claudio Alcorso and Caroline Alcorso, "Italians in Australia During World War II," in *Australia's Italians: Culture and Community in a Changing Society*, ed. Stephen Castles, et al. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 19.

which Australian national identity was constructed. As Ricatti put it plainly: ‘racism was ... central to the internment of Italians as “enemy aliens” during World War II.’<sup>52</sup> Ilma Martinuzzi O’Brien had identified this racism in the construction of Australian citizenship which led her to argue that the internment of Italians was predicated on the absence of a separate category of Australian citizenship which encouraged a racialised construction of British subjecthood which, in turn, encouraged the exclusion of subjects of non-British origin.<sup>53</sup> In her analysis of this episode, Lara Palombo saw the internment of Italians as a mutation of ‘the racial site of the camp’ that throughout Australian history has been ‘constituted as a national necessity to restrict, contain and eliminate populations’.<sup>54</sup> The populations subject to the camp have historically been those who were ‘perceived to be politically contesting the establishment and security of the white (sovereign) citizen’ and, in her study of the camp, Palombo focused on examples in which Indigenous peoples and Italians were constructed as the problematic population.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, the internment of Italians was connected to a longer history of White Australia controlling Indigenous and migrant populations. Therefore, rather than a moment of exception, internment revealed just how brutal White Australia could be towards those migrants who were white yet racialised.

### **The Racialisation of Italian migrants in White Australia**

Racial discrimination has been a common theme in the historiography of Italian immigration to Australia. Overall, this work has argued that while Italian migrants did not face the same legislative restrictions as non-Europeans, there were nevertheless other obstacles to their acceptance in Australian society. Andrew Markus, for example, has noted that although Southern Europeans had no formal barriers to citizenship and trade union membership like non-Europeans, informal barriers to occupational freedom and social inclusion meant that the differences in racism faced by the Chinese and the Italians, for example, may have been more

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<sup>52</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 59.

<sup>53</sup> Ilma Martinuzzi O’Brien, “Internments in Australia During World War Two: Life Histories of Citizenship and Inclusion,” in *Enemy Aliens: The Internment of Italian Migrants in Australia During the Second World War*, ed. Cate Elkner, et al. (Bacchus Marsh, Victoria: Connor Court, 2005), 17.

<sup>54</sup> Lara Palombo, “The Racial Camp and the Production of the Political Citizen: A Genealogy of Contestation from Indigenous Populations and Diasporic Women” (Macquarie University, 2015), 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

formal than real.<sup>56</sup> Verity Burgmann, on the other hand, has argued that, at least in the late-nineteenth century, there were substantial differences between anti-Chinese and anti-Italian sentiments; the most significant of which was that working-class opposition to Chinese immigration was more organised while opposition to Italian immigration was more likely to be disorganised and restricted to individual outbursts and attacks in the press.<sup>57</sup> However, as restrictive legislation led to a decrease in the number of migrants from Asia and the Pacific islands in the decades following Federation, Italians became the most prominent threat to white Australia and opposition to Italian immigration became more organised. Most historians have noted that this sentiment was most often expressed through the labour movement and the press.

The labour movement perceived migrants to be providing employers with a source of cheap and unregulated labour that endangered the rights, wages and conditions of Australian workers.<sup>58</sup> As Robert Pascoe has pointed out, this was 'an attitude inherited from their colonial struggles against cheap foreign labour.'<sup>59</sup> Once Italians began arriving in greater numbers this attitude was spread by the leadership of the trade unions and the Labor Party, through public speeches and newspapers published by these organisations. The perception that Italians threatened the conditions of Australian workers was given further fuel by the employment of Italians as strike breakers in certain industrial disputes and a general preference for Italians due to employer's perceiving them to be more docile and less antagonistic.<sup>60</sup> This supposed preference for Italians fed into British-Australian fears and anxieties that Italian workers were pushing Australian workers out of those industries.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Markus, *Australian Race Relations, 1788-1993*, 144.

<sup>57</sup> Verity Burgmann, "Capital and Labour: Responses to Immigration in the Nineteenth Century," in *Who Are Our Enemies?: Racism and the Australian Working Class*, ed. Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (Neutral Bay, NSW: Hale and Iremonger, 1978), 28.

<sup>58</sup> Ricatti 2018, 55.

<sup>59</sup> Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> For Italians as strike breakers, see: Saunders, "Masters and Servants: The Queensland Sugar Workers' Strike 1911," 20-34; O'Connor, "Declared Black: Italian Workers in South Australia 1928-1932," 4-7. For Italians as docile and less antagonistic, see: Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," 305-18.

<sup>61</sup> O'Connor, for example, argued that the history of Italian immigration to Australia during this period is 'above all a story of fear' – that is, the British-Australian fear that Italians would take their jobs, would never assimilate, and in the process transform White Australia into something inferior. See: Desmond O'Connor, *No Need to Be Afraid: Italian Settlers in South Australia between 1839 and the Second World War* (Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 1996), 4-5.

Some historians have also noted, in relation to these labour movement concerns, the existence of a basic envy towards Italians who had achieved economic success.<sup>62</sup> This was especially common in North Queensland where many Italians had entered the industry as cutters and field labourers and after some time became farmers, growers and employers of labour themselves.<sup>63</sup> Their system of co-operative farming and frugality also allowed them to withstand recessions better.<sup>64</sup> This pattern was not confined to North Queensland; in Western Australia, working in mines was often a means for Italians to purchase their own farm in the wheatbelt region of the state.<sup>65</sup> However, Price has argued that economic envy was an overrated factor and that a more general British-Australian cultural intolerance was the main problem.<sup>66</sup> While this envy is most often attributed to the working-class, it is also important to note that anti-Italian sentiment in the sugar industry became organised across class lines in the 1920s and 1930s as British-Australian farmers were increasingly brought into competition with Italians in their capacity as growers and employers of labour.<sup>67</sup> British-Australian growers therefore shared the same anxieties as their workers and believed that Italians would eventually take over the entire industry. Some historians have also argued that economic envy was a motivating force behind many of internments during World War II – especially those in Queensland.<sup>68</sup>

Historians such as Gianfranco Cresciani and Ricatti have argued that anti-Italian sentiment amongst workers intensified during times of economic depression and high unemployment.<sup>69</sup> However, the notion that there was a simple correlation between the state of the economy and

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<sup>62</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 60.

<sup>63</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 94-98.

<sup>64</sup> Diane Menghetti, *The Red North: The Popular Front in North Queensland* (Townsville: History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1981), 57.

<sup>65</sup> Randazzo and Cigler, *The Italians in Australia*, 123; Gentilli, *Italian Migration to Western Australia, 1829-1946*, 17-21.

<sup>66</sup> Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, 207-16. See also: Pascoe and Bertola, "Italian Miners and the Second-Generation 'Britishers' at Kalgoorlie, Australia," 23.

<sup>67</sup> In 1926, for example, growers joined striking workers in Mackay in an attempt to prevent a group of Italians purchasing land in the district, see: "The 'Italian Invasion': Trouble at Mackay Settled: The Premier's Comments and Riordan's Rejoinder: Italian Consul Elated," *Worker*, 11 August 1926, 12. Four years later in 1930, employers' and growers' organisations in the industry allied with the Australian Workers' Union to introduce state-wide quotas giving preference to British workers, see: "Employment of labour on Canefields," *The Evening News*, 24 June 1930, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, "The Internment of Australian Born and Naturalised British Subjects of Italian Origin," in *War, Internment and Mass Migration: The Italo-Australian Experience 1940-1990*, ed. Richard Bosworth and Romano Ugolini (Rome: Gruppo Editoriale Internazionale, 1992), 98.

<sup>69</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 71; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 55.

how hostile workers were towards Italians has been challenged by Markus who argued that, in North Queensland in the 1920s for example, hostility was a feature of life regardless of the economy.<sup>70</sup> There were underlying perceptions about Italian and other Southern European migrants that persisted throughout this period such as the notion that Italians were a distinct racial group who did not assimilate.<sup>71</sup> This was not simply a labour movement argument but was widespread beyond the labour movement and found an outlet in the press and the other publications.<sup>72</sup>

Anti-Italian sentiment in the media was found by historians to have been most often expressed through sensationalist publications such as *The Bulletin* and *Smith's Weekly*.<sup>73</sup> According to Nino Randazzo and Michael Cigler, these newspapers assumed that Italians would be difficult to 'absorb' into Australian society and would 'lower the social standard'.<sup>74</sup> In making this argument, the newspapers would draw on a range of characteristics and features such as the perceived backwardness and criminality of Italian migrants that established a stereotypical idea of Italians that Pascoe has argued was not shattered until at least the 1950s.<sup>75</sup>

The analysis of the racial discrimination that Italians faced in White Australia has become more refined over the past two decades as historians have begun to orient their works around the category of whiteness. This is a category that drew attention to 'white' as a specific racial category that could be named and studied and led to the emergence of 'whiteness studies' as a discrete field of academic inquiry.<sup>76</sup> Although whiteness studies emerged from the field of labour history

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<sup>70</sup> Markus, *Australian Race Relations, 1788-1993*, 145.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Randazzo and Cigler highlight a number of examples such as the work of Jens Lyng discussed above. See their section on 'Racism and Italians' in Randazzo and Cigler, *The Italians in Australia*, 121-26. Another important publication was the Ferry Report published in 1925; see: Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 132-42; Dewhirst, "The 'Southern Question' in Australia: The 1925 Royal Commission's Racialisation of Southern Italians," 316-32.

<sup>73</sup> These two publications are examples of the 'sensationalist' segment of the press identified by Douglass who also identified two others: the 'labour' segment which expressed the discriminatory views of the labour movement outlined above and the 'moderate-to-conservative' segment which was broadly perceived to be pro-management and hence pro-immigration. See: Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 125. On the coverage of Italian migrants in the labour press, see also: Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," 305-18.

<sup>74</sup> Randazzo and Cigler, *The Italians in Australia*, 122.

<sup>75</sup> Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage*, 86.

<sup>76</sup> Georgia Shiells, "Immigration History and Whiteness Studies: American and Australian Approaches Compared," *History Compass* 8, no. 8 (2010): 790.



and was utilised in studies of immigration history in North America, the earliest historical studies of Southern European immigration in Australia that utilised whiteness came not from within the discipline of history but from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and cultural studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>77</sup> These were studies that emerged from a preoccupation in those disciplines with formulating a critique of the policy of multiculturalism from a range of anti-racist and decolonial positions.<sup>78</sup> Despite a few historical studies being produced around this time, Georgia Shiells argued in 2010 that historians of southern European immigration to Australia had yet to adequately adopt whiteness as a category of analysis. According to Shiells, there were three reasons why whiteness studies and the history of Southern European immigration had, until that point, remained separate in Australia.<sup>79</sup> Firstly, histories of immigration were largely focused on policies rather than racial identities which reflected an assumption that there was very little that needed to be said about the racial identities of white European migrants. Secondly, due to Australia's geographic location, studies of race and immigration showed a preoccupation with the 'yellow peril' anxieties associated with immigration from Asia. Thirdly, there was a persistent disconnect between colonial history and immigration history which had already been identified a decade earlier by Ann Curthoys who called for histories of migration to be framed more explicitly as histories of colonisation.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Joseph Pugliese, "Race as Category Crisis: Whiteness and the Topical Assignment of Race," *Social Semiotics* 12, no. 2 (2002): 149-68; "Migrant Heritage in an Indigenous Context: For a Decolonising Migrant Historiography," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 23, no. 1 (2002): 5-18; Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos, "Asylum Seekers and the Concept of the Foreigner," *Social Alternatives* 21, no. 4 (2002): 45-49; "The Making of Greek-Australian Citizenship: From Heteronomous to Autonomous Political Communities," *Modern Greek Studies* 11 (2003): 165-76; "Racism, Foreigner Communities and the onto-Pathology of White Australian Subjectivity," in *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 32-47.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example: Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 1998); Jon Stratton, "Multiculturalism and the Whitening Machine, or How Australians Became White," in *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of Jean Martin's the Migrant Presence*, ed. Ghassan Hage and Rowanne Couch (Sydney: Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sydney, 1999), 163-88; Suvendrini Perera, "Whiteness and Its Discontents: Notes on Politics, Gender, Sex and Food in the Year of Hanson," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (1999): 183-98.

<sup>79</sup> Shiells, "Immigration History and Whiteness Studies: American and Australian Approaches Compared," 795.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.; Ann Curthoys, "Immigration and Colonisation: New Histories," *UTS Review* 7, no. 1 (2001): 170-79. See also, Hage's argument that there existed an academic division of labour that tended to treat 'White-Aboriginal' and 'Anglo-Ethnic' relations as mutually exclusive spheres: Hage, *White Nation*, 24.

In their 2018 review of the field of immigration history in Australia, Ruth Balint and Zora Simic noted that the critique made by Shiells remains viable, ‘though less so than it was.’<sup>81</sup> There has since emerged numerous studies that approach the history of Southern European immigration with whiteness as a primary focus. Of these studies, that cover a range of migrant groups such as Italians, Greeks, Spanish and Syrian/Lebanese, the most work has been done in relation to the Italians, which Balint and Simic suggest possibly reflects ‘a desire on the part of historians to challenge positive, teleological accounts of Italian migrants as vanguard figures in broader Australian immigration history.’<sup>82</sup> Historians have used the insights of whiteness studies in order to research how the racial identities of Italians were constructed by various sections of the Australian public and how they themselves constructed their racial identities in a variety of locations and moments in time. These studies have demonstrated how Italians’ racial identities were constructed in relation to other ideas of labour, assimilation and colonisation and traced the development of these constructions through a variety of sources such as print media, government reports, and oral history accounts.<sup>83</sup>

Although these recent works have contributed something new to writing the history of Italian immigration to Australia, there are some notable continuities between these studies and those that were produced before the emergence of whiteness studies. For example, a number of historians have retained a primary focus on the racism of the labour movement and newspapers

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<sup>81</sup> Balint and Simic, "Histories of Migrants and Refugees in Australia," 383-84.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 392. Key works on the migrant groups other than Italians mentioned above include: Anne Monsour, *Not Quite White: Lebanese and the White Australia Policy 1880 to 1947* (Teneriffe, Qld.: Post Pressed, 2010); Andonis Piperoglou, "Vagrant ‘Gypsies’ and Respectable Greeks: A Defining Moment in Early Greek-Melbourne, 1897–1900," in *Reading, Interpreting, Experiencing: An Inter-Cultural Journey into Greek Letters*, ed. M. Tsianikas, G. Couvalis, and M. Palakstoglou (Adelaide: Modern Greek Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand, 2015), 140-51; "Greeks or Turks, 'White' or 'Asiatic': Historicising Castellorizian Racial-Consciousness, 1916-1920," *Journal of Australian Studies* 40, no. 4 (2017): 387-402; Robert Mason and Marc Gibert, "Cane Farming and Cultural Difference: Catalan Migration and Land Practices in Early Twentieth-Century Queensland," *History Australia* 17, no. 3 (2020): 542-61.

<sup>83</sup> Moraes-Gorecki, "'Black Italians' in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland: A Reflection on Labour Inclusion and Cultural Exclusion in Tropical Australia," 306-19; Pugliese, "Race as Category Crisis: Whiteness and the Topical Assignment of Race," 149-68; Andreoni, "Olive or White?," 81-92; Gaia Giuliani, "Whose Whiteness?: Cultural Dis-Locations between Italy and Australia," in *Transmediterranean: Diasporas, Histories, Geopolitical Spaces*, ed. Joseph Pugliese (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010), 125-38; Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness," 33-49; "The 'Southern Question' in Australia: The 1925 Royal Commission's Racialisation of Southern Italians," 316-32; "Colonising Italians: Italian Imperialism and Agricultural 'Colonies' in Australia, 1881–1914," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no.1 (2015): 23-47.

that represented the labour and sensationalist modes of journalism.<sup>84</sup> Ricatti has somewhat challenged this assumption by noting that another reason behind anti-Italian sentiment was the assumption that they were not racially fit for Australia's progressive democracy.<sup>85</sup> In the same way that their working-class compatriots perceived Italian migrants to be a threat to the conditions of labour, Australian liberals sometimes perceived Italian migrants to be a threat to the strength of Australia's democracy.<sup>86</sup>

One of the most important observations to arise from the work that has utilised the category of whiteness has been the recognition that Italians occupied an intermediary racial position between white and black, or between 'superior' and 'inferior' races. As Ricatti notes, this intermediary position emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and was connected to the quasi-colonial nature of Italian re-unification that saw Italian peasants as too close or too similar to Africans which then appeared in migratory contexts such as the settler colonial states of the Americas and Oceania.<sup>87</sup> In Australia, this intermediary position was recognised by labour historians as early as 1978, when Saunders noted that during the 1911 sugar strike in North Queensland, Italians came under attack because they 'acted as a direct transitional group between black and white labour.'<sup>88</sup> As a result of this designation, Italians were not excluded from union membership but 'were regarded as racially inferior to Britons or northern Europeans.'<sup>89</sup>

One way to articulate this intermediary position has been through the category of 'inbetween'.<sup>90</sup> This was a term that David Roediger used in his study of southern and eastern European migrants in North America who were neither securely white nor non-white and, as a result, were

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<sup>84</sup> See, for example: Andreoni, "Olive or White?," 81-92; Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," 305-18; Dewhurst, "Collaborating on Whiteness," 33-49.

<sup>85</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 55. This observation has opened up possibilities for drawing links between Italian immigration and the insights of labour historians such as Burgmann and Griffiths who have focused on the ruling class agendas behind White Australia, see: Verity Burgmann, "Writing Racism out of History," *Arena*, no. 67 (1984): 78-92; Griffiths, "The Making of White Australia: Ruling Class Agendas, 1876-1888."

<sup>86</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 55. See also: Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage*, 87.

<sup>87</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 54.

<sup>88</sup> Saunders, "Masters and Servants: The Queensland Sugar Workers' Strike 1911," 105.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> See: James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (1997): 3-44.

treated somewhere between what he called 'hard racism' and 'full inclusion'.<sup>91</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Roediger argued, this inbetween category was encouraged due to the fact that no distinction was made between ethnicity and race. Instead, there existed two meanings of race – colour race and nation race – which were not regarded to be sufficiently distinct by experts or society.<sup>92</sup> In contrast to Roediger, Thomas Guglielmo made a distinction between colour and race in his work on Italians in Chicago and used this distinction to argue that although Italians were racialised and suffered from 'racial' discrimination and prejudices, this was not based on colour as their colour was still white. Despite its discursive messiness, Guglielmo argues that the distinction between race and colour is very clear when it comes to having access to the resources and rewards of the 'racialised social system'.<sup>93</sup> In Australia, some historians such as Julia Martinez and Shiells have borrowed Roediger's distinction between colour race and nation race while Jon Stratton, in his work on Jewish immigrants in Australia, has argued that Jewish migrants were racialised but not colourised, which meant that they were simultaneously white and non-white (rather than one over the other).<sup>94</sup>

Another set of categories to describe this intermediary position are 'white-non-white' and 'white-but-not-white-enough' which Toulia Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos identified in their study of the role played by Southern Europeans in Australian settler colonialism. These two categories were variants of a subjectivity that they called the 'foreigner-within' which was simultaneously positioned inside and outside the white Australian collective and had historically been occupied by Southern Europeans. According to Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos, White Australia and the 'foreigner-within' were locked into a relationship of mutual recognition

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<sup>91</sup> David R. Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 12.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 11, 13. For examples of Australian historians who have used Roediger's distinction between colour race and nation race, see: Julia Martinez, "Constructing the 'White' Worker in North Australia," in *Historicising Whiteness Conference (2006: Melbourne, Vic.)* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007), 115-23. Also: Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," 305-18.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7-9. The notion of the 'racialised social system' was first theorised by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, see: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (1997): 465-80.

<sup>94</sup> Jon Stratton, "The Colour of Jews: Jews, Race and the White Australia Policy," *Journal of Australian Studies* 20, no. 50-51 (1996): 60.

and dependence: white Australia needed the foreigner-within to recognise white sovereignty over the continent while the foreigner-within needed white Australia to grant permission to enter and stay on and share in the benefits of the dispossession of Aboriginal land.<sup>95</sup> In this sense, it was their racial difference that made Southern Europeans a necessary and desirable presence in Australia even though it was challenging for British-Australian homogeneity.

The role played by Italians in the continued dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has become a prominent concern of recent works on the history of Italian immigration to Australia as historians have begun to find ways to respond to the critique advanced by Curthoys and Ghassan Hage and also respond to Lorenzo Veracini's suggestion to think of settler colonialism in terms of a triangular relation between the settler coloniser, the indigenous colonised and a variety of 'Others'.<sup>96</sup> Leading on from this, some historians have also argued for a decolonial approach to the writing of Italian immigration history.<sup>97</sup> Ricatti, for instance, has also argued that many Italian migrants played an active role in the expropriation of Indigenous land and were both functional and complicit with settler colonialism 'not despite their subaltern position, but *because* of it'.<sup>98</sup> Complicity has also been a theme in histories of other Southern European migrant groups. In addition to the work of Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos discussed above, Andonis Piperoglou has sought to uncover anti-Greek racism and the ways that Greek migrants responded to it in order to 'reconceptualise Greek settlers as co-contributors to exclusionary operations of race in White Australia' as well as to understand 'how a minority group partook in the politics of race formations and in doing so place a pluralistic emphasis on the making of White Australia'.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos, *Indigenous Sovereignty and the Being of the Occupier: Manifesto for a White Australian Philosophy of Origins* (Melbourne: re.press, 2014), 84-89.

<sup>96</sup> Curthoys, "Immigration and Colonisation: New Histories," 170-79; Hage, *White Nation*, 24; Lorenzo Veracini, "On Settleness," *Borderlands* 10, no. 1 (2011): 1-17. For an examples of such works, see: Catherine Dewhirst, "Colonising Italians: Italian Imperialism and Agricultural 'Colonies' in Australia, 1881-1914," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no. 1 (2016): 23-47.

<sup>97</sup> Pugliese, "Migrant Heritage in an Indigenous Context: For a Decolonising Migrant Historiography."; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 66-70. Also, see the contributions to the special forum in *Altretalia* titled "Towards a decolonial history of Italian migration to Australia": Ricatti, "Introduction to Forum: Towards a Decolonial History of Italian Migration to Australia," 8-15.

<sup>98</sup> Ricatti, "Introduction to Forum: Towards a Decolonial History of Italian Migration to Australia," 11.

<sup>99</sup> Andonis Piperoglou, "Greek Settlers: Race, Labour, and the Making of White Australia, 1890s-1920s" (La Trobe University, 2016), 30-31.

This complicity argument has been challenged by Maria Giannacopoulos who argued against Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos's argument that Southern Europeans were 'fully complicit' in ongoing settler colonialism. According to Giannacopoulos, it was not possible for Southern Europeans to be fully complicit because 'the very coordinates of this complicity are aporetic and violent in structure' – meaning that it was a complicity that was demanded and enforced by law.<sup>100</sup> In the historiography of Italian migration, the work of Dewhirst also offers a counterargument to these arguments even though she introduced to this historiography the notion that migrants were 'collaborating on whiteness'.<sup>101</sup> In her study of the proposal to establish Italian agricultural colonies in Western Australia in the 1900s, Dewhirst argued that Italian migrants attempted to establish themselves as contributors to the history of colonisation. This was attempted, for example, by Giovanni Pulle, editor of *L'Italo-Australiano*, in the construction of a counter-ideology that was based on a notion that Italians shared with British-Australians a shared white heritage and 'an assumption that a collective Italian identity was not incompatible with the emerging national identity'.<sup>102</sup> However, as Dewhirst notes, this counter ideology 'failed to take hold in the manner they had envisioned' and the agricultural settler schemes that the counter-ideology supported had also failed as the government had refused to give them approval.<sup>103</sup> The outcome of this case study suggests that there was no real 'collaboration' just a failed attempt at it. Furthermore, despite attempts to be 'co-contributors' to white Australia and settler colonialism, Italians were not always allowed to define the role they were to play. This is not to say that Italians were not useful for settler colonialism or that they did not benefit from settler colonialism but they often had no choice in what their complicity looked like nor were they allowed to be 'co-contributors' on an even footing with British-Australians.

Returning to the intermediary racial position of Italians in Australia, a number of recent studies have observed the usage of certain discursive categories that capture this intermediary position and highlight the racial proximity of Italians to other non-white groups. For example, in North Queensland, Italians were referred to as 'black Italians' or 'black Mediterraneans' in order to

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<sup>100</sup> Maria Giannacopoulos, "Nomos Basileus: The Reign of Law in a 'World of Violence'," *ACRAWSA e-journal* 3, no. 1 (2007): 1.

<sup>101</sup> Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness," 33-49.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

emphasise their similarities with the South Sea Islanders who had worked in the sugar industry before them.<sup>104</sup> On the other side of the country in Western Australia, contemporary observers also noted that Italians were considered 'blackfellows'.<sup>105</sup> Comparisons were also made between Italian and Chinese migrants in terms such as 'The Chinese of Europe' and the 'olive peril' which also revealed a continuity in Australian racism that would be adapted and appropriated in a variety of contexts.<sup>106</sup> This particular comparison also had currency on an international level as a result of shifts in the global labour market.

Noting the similarities between Italian and Chinese migrants, Donna Gabaccia argued that Italian and Chinese migrants in the second half of the nineteenth century scattered wider and returned home more often than any other comparable migrant group such as the Indians or the Irish.<sup>107</sup> These two groups also shared a similar place in the global labour market that was marked by labour contractors, emigration agents and forms of indenture that characterised Asian migrations more than European ones. However, unlike migrants from India and the Pacific Islands, the Italians and Chinese generally avoided indenture but often fell into debt in order to migrate.<sup>108</sup> As a result, both Italians and Chinese often occupied an ambiguous, overlapping and intermediary position in the binaries of unfree and free labour, agricultural and industrial work, and racial categories of black and white.<sup>109</sup> These binaries often collapsed a variety of systems marked by varying degrees of unfree relations such as the *padrone* or credit-ticket systems into the racially charged category of slavery.<sup>110</sup> In Australia, the association between Italian and Chinese migrants and unfree labour relations was fundamental to both working-class and liberal bourgeois opposition to immigration from these countries. Therefore, in order to build on the strengths of the historiography of Italian immigration in Australia that has taken whiteness as a

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<sup>104</sup> Moraes-Gorecki, "'Black Italians' in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland: A Reflection on Labour Inclusion and Cultural Exclusion in Tropical Australia," 306-19; Maria Elena Indelicato, "Beyond Whiteness: Violence and Belonging in the Borderlands of North Queensland," *Postcolonial Studies* 23, no. 1 (2020): 99-115.

<sup>105</sup> Leopoldo Zunini, *Western Australia as It Is Today, 1906*, ed. R. J. B. Bosworth and Margot Melia (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 1997), 50.

<sup>106</sup> Andreoni, "Olive or White?," 86; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 58-59.

<sup>107</sup> Donna Gabaccia, "Gli Italiani Nel Mondo: Italy's Workers around the World," *OAH Magazine of History* 14, no. 1 (1999): 13.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>109</sup> Donna Gabaccia, "The 'Yellow Peril' and the 'Chinese of Europe': Global Perspectives on Race and Labor, 1815-1930," in *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, ed. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 177-96.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

central category of analysis, it is important to return to the field of labour history from where whiteness studies originally emerged and supposedly has its 'sturdiest roots'.<sup>111</sup>

### **Whiteness, class conflict and capitalist development in White Australia**

The collapse of various unfree labour systems into the category of slavery described by Gabaccia was fundamental to the establishment of the White Australia Policy. During the Intercolonial Conference of 1888, for instance, the push for anti-Chinese legislation was supported through the use of anti-slavery arguments.<sup>112</sup> After Federation, the conflation of contract labour with slavery was vital for the inclusion of migrants arriving under labour contract amongst those on the list of prohibited migrants under the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901.<sup>113</sup> Over the decades that followed, anti-Italian sentiment was often connected to the idea that Italians, like the Chinese and South Sea Islanders, were not just cheap and docile but working under conditions that were akin to slavery or other forms of indentured servitude and were, therefore, as racially questionable as those non-European workers who had come before them.

In *Wages of Whiteness*, Roediger's pioneering study in the field of whiteness studies, he analysed the choices of white workers to define themselves as 'not slaves' and 'not black' in the antebellum South.<sup>114</sup> The assertion of 'white' identities at this time, Roediger argued, cannot simply be understood as a response to the new interracial labour competition but as a way of 'processing the alienation and time discipline attendant on proletarianisation'.<sup>115</sup> Whiteness was therefore bound up with the system of free labour that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century

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<sup>111</sup> Judith Stein, "Whiteness and United States History: An Assessment," *International Labour and Working-Class History* 60 (2001): 1. See also: David R. Roediger, *Class, Race, and Marxism* (London: Verso, 2017).

<sup>112</sup> Phil Griffiths, "The 'Necessity' of a Socially Homogenous Population: The Ruling Class Embraces Racial Exclusion," *Labour History*, no. 108 (2015): 123-44.

<sup>113</sup> Lenore Layman, "'To Keep up the Australian Standard': Regulating Contract Labour Migration 1901-50," *Labour History*, no. 70 (1996): 26-27. For more on slavery and anti-slavery in Australia, see two recent special issues on the topic: Fiona Paisley and Jane Lydon, "Australia and Anti-Slavery," *Australian Historical Studies* 45, no. 1 (2014); Fiona Paisley, "Introduction: Special Issue on Anti-Slavery and Australia," *History Compass* 15, no. 5 (2017).

<sup>114</sup> See: David R. Roediger, "Accounting for the Wages of Whiteness: U.S. Marxism and the Critical History of Race," in *Wages of Whiteness & Racist Symbolic Capital*, ed. Wulf D. Hund, Jeremy Krikler, and David Roediger (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2010), 17.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*



when industrial capitalism had gained supremacy over trading capitalism.<sup>116</sup> This marked the conclusion of the colonial phase of the world market for labour power in which unfree labour systems were developed and dispersed and figures such as the slave or the ‘coolie’ were being replaced by the ‘doubly free wage worker’.<sup>117</sup> These same changes were taking place within Australia – albeit not uniformly across the continent. Tim Rowse, for example, has created an analytic division between northern and southern Australia which is also connected to arguments that the development of capitalism in Australia, like settler colonialism, is a heterogenous and ‘incomplete’ project.<sup>118</sup>

As a settler colonial society, in which capitalist development was uneven across the continent, Australia at the end of the nineteenth century contained a number of unfree labour systems that emerged after convict transportation ceased in the 1840s. These unfree labour systems have been researched under categories such as ‘throwaway’, ‘coolie’, ‘indentured’ and ‘contract’ labour in which the racial connotations of these systems have been highlighted.<sup>119</sup> Like the US, it was against these forms of unfree labour that whiteness in Australia was constructed and consolidated around notions such as the ‘white man’s standard’. This ‘standard’ implied free wage labour as well as other ideas such as the actual rates of wages, the hours for work, the conditions in which work was performed and the strength of trade unions and was defended, for example, in the struggle against contract labour in the early 1900s, the 1911 strike in the sugar industry against the Masters’ and Servants’ Act, and in 1925 the agitation against the influx of Southern European immigration.<sup>120</sup> In each of these examples, it was often Italians who were the racialised group that the ‘white man’s standard’ had to be protected against. These agitations

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<sup>116</sup> Lydia Potts, *The World Labour Market: A History of Migration* (London: Zed Books, 1990), 203.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 204. The ‘doubly free wage worker’ was the free labourer who Marx identified as being ‘free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for the realisation of his labour-power.’ See: Karl Marx, *Capital* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2013), 114.

<sup>118</sup> Tim Rowse, "Indigenous Heterogeneity," *Australian Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2014): 297-310. See also: Ben Huf and Glenda Sluga, "'New' Histories of (Australian) Capitalism," *Australian Historical Studies* 50, no. 4 (2019): 416.

<sup>119</sup> Gaia Giuliani, "Throwaway Labour: Blackbirding and a White Australia," *Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia* 2, no. 2 (2011): 98-112; Diane Kirkby and Sophie Loy-Wilson, "Introduction," *Labour History*, no. 113 (2017): iii-v; Phil Griffiths, "The Coolie Labour Crisis in Colonial Queensland," *ibid.* 113: 53-78.

<sup>120</sup> Layman, "'To Keep up the Australian Standard': Regulating Contract Labour Migration 1901-50," 25-52; Saunders, "Masters and Servants: The Queensland Sugar Workers' Strike 1911," 20-34; Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," 305-18.

often relied upon and perpetuated the image of Italians as another servile, non-white population who were willing to work for low wages, for long hours and to be used as strike-breakers during periods of industrial conflict. While this was the case in some disputes, historians have also noted that Italians were just as willing to organise and strike alongside British-Australian workers.<sup>121</sup>

The demand for the 'white man's standard' to be protected was often articulated in relation to particular industrial agreements or legislation but was also articulated in a general position against immigration. This included both the immigration of various racialised groups including Italians and sometimes the immigration of workers from Britain.<sup>122</sup> The restrictive immigration legislation at the centre of the White Australia Policy, therefore, must be understood as a policy for protecting free labour. This was not simply a position favoured by white workers but was also favoured by the new ruling class that emerged in Australia at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>123</sup> For much of the nineteenth century there was a struggle waged by the urban bourgeoisie who wanted laissez-faire capitalism instead of the plantation capitalism of squatters, landowners and sugar planters.<sup>124</sup> By the end of that century, the triumph of urban capital as the hegemonic section of the ruling class established a 'fully fledged market system' which increasingly transformed work into free wage labour.<sup>125</sup> However, in order to protect this market system, which included the free labour market, it was determined that it was necessary to restrict immigration to 'free immigration' in opposition to the recruitment of indentured labourers.<sup>126</sup> The white working class and the urban bourgeoisie therefore shared a common interest in

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<sup>121</sup> See, for example: O'Connor, "Declared Black: Italian Workers in South Australia 1928-1932," 4-7. Also, the Weils' disputes of 1933 and 1934, in which Italians led strikes, have a notable place in the historiography of this period; see: Menghetti, *The Red North: The Popular Front in North Queensland*, "The Weil's Disease Strike 1935," in *The Big Strikes*, ed. D. Murphy (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983); Gerardo Papalia, *Peasant Rebels in the Canefields: Italian Migrant Involvement in the 1934 and 1935 Weil's Disease Cane Cutters Strikes in Queensland* (Melbourne: Catholic Intercultural Resource Centre, 1985).

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, the case of the six hatters from the UK who were detained as prohibited migrants under contract in December 1902: Layman, "'To Keep up the Australian Standard': Regulating Contract Labour Migration 1901-50," 29.

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, the recent work of Philip Griffiths who argues that the White Australia Policy was primarily a ruling class agenda: Griffiths, "The Making of White Australia: Ruling Class Agendas, 1876-1888." This is work that has built on the arguments of earlier labour historians, especially Verity Burgmann, see: Burgmann, "Writing Racism out of History," 78-92.

<sup>124</sup> Griffiths, "The 'Necessity' of a Socially Homogenous Population: The Ruling Class Embraces Racial Exclusion," 123-44. See also: R. W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents, Narrative and Argument* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1980), 105-35.

<sup>125</sup> *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents, Narrative and Argument*, 105.

<sup>126</sup> Griffiths, "The 'Necessity' of a Socially Homogenous Population: The Ruling Class Embraces Racial Exclusion," 125.

protecting free labour from the racialised workers associated with forms of unfree labour. In this sense, whiteness in Australia can be described as being another example of a 'sweetheart agreement' between bosses and workers that Noel Ignatiev identified in the US context.<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, the immigration restriction policies behind White Australia constituted one component of a broader compromise between capital and labour called 'the Australian Settlement'.<sup>128</sup> This was a broad policy framework that was laid out between 1901 and 1914 and shaped Australia for decades that followed.<sup>129</sup> This framework, according to Alan Fenna, was 'the result of political compromise between an urban-protectionist middle class and set of business interests and a rising labour movement and nascent Labor party'.<sup>130</sup> While the exact components of this settlement have been up for debate, a number of policies have been identified, such as: white Australia, industry protection, wage arbitration, state paternalism, imperial benevolence or nationalism, terra nullius, state secularism, masculinism, Australian democracy, state developmentalism, arbitration, and welfare minimalism.<sup>131</sup> Of these components, Peter Beilharz and Fenna both identified arbitration and conciliation as the central concept or institution in the Australian settlement.<sup>132</sup> For Beilharz, these were 'the central symbols not only of Australia, but also of Australian foundation and modernity'.<sup>133</sup> For both Beilharz and Fenna, these institutions separated the settler colonies of the antipodes – Australia and New Zealand – from other comparable cases such as the United States and Canada.<sup>134</sup> Also relevant are important legislation such as the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation in 1904, the Excise Tariff Act in 1906, and the declaration of the living wage principle with the Harvester decision of 1907.<sup>135</sup> The arrival of Italians in Western Australia and North Queensland coincided with the development of these policies which provide the broader context of labour movement opposition to Italian migration in the 1900s.

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<sup>127</sup> Noel Ignatiev, "Black Workers, White Workers," *Radical America* 8, no. 4 (1974): 41-60.

<sup>128</sup> Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992).

<sup>129</sup> Alan Fenna, "Putting the 'Australian Settlement' in Perspective," *Labour History*, no. 102 (2012): 99.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>131</sup> See: Peter Beilharz, "Australian Settlements," *Thesis Eleven* 95, no. 1 (2008): 60; Geoffrey Stokes, "The 'Australian Settlement' and Australian Political Thought," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (2004): 5-22.

<sup>132</sup> Beilharz, "Australian Settlements," 58-67; Fenna, "Putting the 'Australian Settlement' in Perspective," 99-118.

<sup>133</sup> Beilharz, "Australian Settlements," 62.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*; Fenna, "Putting the 'Australian Settlement' in Perspective," 99-118.

<sup>135</sup> "Putting the 'Australian Settlement' in Perspective," 110.

Although the working class and the new ruling class had a shared interest in protecting free labour, this compact between the classes often broke down over issues related to the employment of Italian workers. In Western Australia, for example, the contract labour disputes were precipitated by the recruitment of Italian workers as a conscious attempt by managers of some mines to weaken the strength of organised labour at a time when management was finding ways to maximise labour productivity.<sup>136</sup> These Italians were sometimes recruited through labour agents that may have also used the markers of free labour relations, while also subverting them.<sup>137</sup> Another example was in the North Queensland sugar industry when Italian workers signed contracts under the Masters' and Servants' Act against the advice of the union.<sup>138</sup> Examples such as these gave strength to the labour movement's claims that their bosses were committed to a 'capitalist internationalism' that sought to remove any protections imposed on the labour market in order to reduce the power of organised labour.<sup>139</sup> In response, the majority of Australian unionists often dismissed internationalism as an outdated notion and embraced a 'proletarian nationalism'.<sup>140</sup> In turn, the unions further alienated Italian workers and pushed them further to the margins of the working class.

Italians themselves, however, did not always want to join unions. Kay Saunders observed in her study of the 1911 sugar industry strike that, '[i]t would seem that the Italians, intent upon eventually becoming modest proprietors, did not wish to jeopardise these ambitions by joining an active union'.<sup>141</sup> Similar ambitions were noted by Randazzo and Cigler who argued that Italians in Western Australia 'considered working in the mines only as a springboard to better

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<sup>136</sup> Hartley, "Bewick Moreing in Western Australian Gold Mining 1897-1904: Management Policies & Goldfields Responses," 1-18.

<sup>137</sup> Bertola, "Italian Migration to Western Australia before World War One: Some Observations on Ethnicity and Conflict," 7.

<sup>138</sup> Saunders, "Masters and Servants: The Queensland Sugar Workers' Strike 1911," 105.

<sup>139</sup> For example, see: 'Internationalism! How the Capitalists use it,' *The Australian Workman*, 14 March 1891, 21.

<sup>140</sup> Donna Gabaccia and Fraser Ottanelli, "Diaspora or International Proletariat?: Italian Labor, Labor Migration, and the Making of Multiethnic States, 1815-1939," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 1 (1997): 66; Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 112. For examples of when Australian workers dismissed internationalism in favour of nationalism, see: 'Italians v. Australians,' *Murchison Advocate*, 26 April 1902, 3; 'Beasley on Dagos,' *Sunday Times*, 27 April 1902, 4; 'Kalgoorlie Ketchup,' *Sunday Times*, 8 June 1902, 8; J B Holman, 'Italian Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 23 May 1902, 4.

<sup>141</sup> Saunders, "Masters and Servants: The Queensland Sugar Workers' Strike 1911," 105.

things'.<sup>142</sup> In this sense, Italian migrants were connected to another earlier migrant archetype: the 'small capitalist' that was deemed to be both a 'good capitalist' and the ideal type of colonist. According to Ben Huf, the 'small capitalist' was imbued with a sense of hard work or labour and the Australian colonies were imagined to be an engine for turning migrants into 'small capitalists'.<sup>143</sup> The Australian context, therefore, offers a challenge to transnational histories of Italian immigration that have treated the process of immigration as a process of proletarianisation that transformed Italian peasants into an international proletariat.<sup>144</sup> Instead, the process of proletarianisation was often intended to be a temporary or transitional period in Australia, during which the migrant saved enough money to then become a 'small capitalist'. In Queensland, for example, the cane cutter was always intended to become a grower and perhaps even an employer of more recent arrivals.<sup>145</sup>

This process of class mobility was sometimes used by the moderate-to-conservative press to counter the claims of the labour movement and discredit the aims and goals of the movement. In Queensland, for example, Italians were constructed as hardworking capitalists, pioneers and settlers that were held up as role models to British-Australian workers. These categories are amongst a number of discursive categories that were associated with Italians and are examined throughout this thesis. Despite being discursive constructions, these categories are examined in relation to the broader history of class formation and capitalist development and, as such, this thesis is connected to two recent developments in Australian historiography. The first of these is the 'new materialism' proposed by Hannah Forsyth and Sophie Loy-Wilson who argue for 'an increased attention to economic questions and data in combination with cultural history sources and analysis; for the greater historicization of capitalism as itself a specific and contingent phenomenon; and for the application of Marxist tools, without discarding the lessons of the cultural turn and their specific value to Australian history'.<sup>146</sup> In addition to this 'new materialism', there has been a call to write 'new' histories of capitalism in Australia.<sup>147</sup> According

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<sup>142</sup> Randazzo and Cigler, *The Italians in Australia*, 123.

<sup>143</sup> Ben Huf, "The Capitalist in Colonial History: Investment, Accumulation and Credit-Money in New South Wales," *Australian Historical Studies* 50, no. 4 (2019): 418-40.

<sup>144</sup> Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*; Gabaccia and Ottanelli, "Diaspora or International Proletariat?: Italian Labor, Labor Migration, and the Making of Multiethnic States, 1815-1939," 60.

<sup>145</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 51.

<sup>146</sup> Forsyth and Loy-Wilson, "Seeking a New Materialism in Australian History," 169.

<sup>147</sup> See: Huf and Sluga, "'New' Histories of (Australian) Capitalism," 405-17.

to Huf and Glenda Sluga, this is ‘an Australian historiography re-engaging capitalism as a mode of inquiry’ and, like the ‘new materialism’, these histories build on the insights of ‘social and cultural history’ while bringing the economy back into the historiography.<sup>148</sup>

This thesis draws on this work in its analysis of race and whiteness as well as its analysis of a variety of constructions that were applied to Italian migrants such as pioneer, colonist, worker and defender. These are examples of predominantly discursive creations that need to be understood within the economic structures and class relations of their emergence. By placing certain discursive constructions of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ Italian immigrants during this period into their broader economic contexts, this thesis also intends to reveal how these constructions reflect the class conflicts of the societies in which they emerged. This has influenced my choice of sources, as I have tried to avoid relying too heavily on labour sources or conservative/bourgeois sources. Where it is possible, I attempt to use both sources alongside each other to emphasise both class conflict and class collaboration in constructing figures of Italian desirability or undesirability. Where it is necessary, I attempt to counter certain preoccupations in the historiography that have emerged in the interpretation of certain events, locations or periods of time. This attention to the class conflicts within ethnic or racial groups is also applied to the Italian sources that I use to examine how Italians themselves responded to the structural and discursive obstacles they faced in White Australia.

### **Italian strategies for opposing discrimination**

Italians responded to the discrimination they faced in Australia through a variety of strategies – both individual and collective. Of the collective strategies, there are two that are most relevant to this study. The first is the development of ethnic solidarity which Ricatti notes was often the most immediate and efficient strategy. For Ricatti, this meant cultivating a sense of shared identity that went beyond the village, town or region from which an individual or group of migrants came from and included other migrants from Italy. This was expressed through everyday expressions of *italianità* such as the use of Italian language, food, shopping, cultural

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 406.

events, religious festivals, sports, and monuments.<sup>149</sup> More than just a response to racism, these expressions were also tied to the building of what Pascoe has called an Italian *ambiente* (environment) – or, in other words, the re-creation of an Italian sense of territory and space within a foreign city.<sup>150</sup> Pascoe referred to two senses of ‘building’ in his discussion of the Italian *ambiente* in Australia. The first referred simply to the built environment and could be observed, for instance, in the construction or modification of houses, shops, business premises, or other physical structures. The second referred to the social construction of ‘community’ – or, as Pascoe put it, ‘the building of a network of relationships among the residents or workers in a particular locality.’<sup>151</sup> These relationships would be sustained through the aforementioned practices of *italianita* identified by Ricatti. Furthermore, the building of an Italian *ambiente* in Australia was just one of three strategies identified by Pascoe that Italians adopted to establish themselves in Australia. The other two were the building of a network of knowledge about the wider world and the co-operation of one’s kin and *paesani* in the formation of mutual aid societies.<sup>152</sup>

One important way in which an Italian *ambiente* was built was in neighbourhoods that came to be known as ‘Little Italies’ that could be found all over Australia and in other countries that Italians migrated to. These were not simply re-creations of what Pascoe called the ‘distinctive, complex and enduring’ sense of territory and space that Italians possessed but concrete manifestations of their visibility as outsiders as well as a response to the exclusion that Italians faced.<sup>153</sup> As Gabaccia argues in her study of transnational Italian communities, the ‘Little Italy’ was unique to Anglophone countries where earlier European arrivals differentiated themselves from migrant southern European ‘races’ and were not found in the settler colonies of South America where there was no counterpart to Anglophone ‘Italo-phobia’ and anti-Catholicism.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, Cresciani has argued that Little Italies were a response not only to the migrants’ social and cultural isolation from mainstream Australian society, but also their isolation from the Italian Establishment. Italian migrants, Cresciani argued, were insufficiently protected by Italian

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<sup>149</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 63.

<sup>150</sup> Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage*, 39.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>154</sup> Donna Gabaccia, "Global Geography of 'Little Italy': Italian Neighbourhoods in Comparative Perspective," *Modern Italy* 11, no. 1 (2006): 9-24.

diplomatic authorities nor were their goals and aspirations sufficiently represented by the ethnic community infrastructure such as the mutual aid societies, the church, and Italian-language newspapers.<sup>155</sup> This was particularly an issue prior to World War I. In 1911, an Italian missionary, Giuseppe Capra, found that many Italians in Australia were not attending church. He also found that many Italians at the time were illiterate and could therefore not read the Italian-language newspapers that had taken on the role of being their defenders in Australia.<sup>156</sup> These newspapers were also engaged in other strategies to counter racism in White Australia, such as asserting the whiteness of Italians.

Histories of Italian immigration that take whiteness as a primary category of analysis often provide an examination of how Italians were themselves involved in the construction of their own racial identities and how this often led to them asserting their own whiteness. Historians such as Dewhirst and Ricatti, have demonstrated how Italians used a strategy of 'whitening' to differentiate themselves from peoples who were considered racially inferior or more racially ambiguous than them.<sup>157</sup> Italian migrants argued, for example, that white Australia needed Italians as a buffer against non-white peoples, that Italians had been involved in the pioneering work of nation-building, and they drew upon arguments that linked contemporary Italian migrants to the Italians of the Renaissance or other key periods in the history of European civilisation.<sup>158</sup>

The use of 'whitening' as a strategic response to one's racialisation was predicated on the migrant's ability to come to understand the importance of whiteness and its associated discourses in White Australia. This is a process that historians have often referred to as 'race learning' or 'colour learning'. In Guglielmo's work, for example, 'colour learning' involved the 'everyday colour experiences' of Italians in Chicago that reproduced the colour structure and taught Italians that they were white and thus benefitted from this.<sup>159</sup> Other historians such as Roediger have argued that this learning took place both in the migrant's country of origin and in the

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<sup>155</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 60.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ricatti explains 'whitening' here: Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 63.

<sup>158</sup> Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness."; "Colonising Italians: Italian Imperialism and Agricultural 'Colonies' in Australia, 1881-1914."; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 63-66.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas A. Guglielmo, "Encountering the Color Line in the Everyday: Italians in Interwar Chicago," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 23, no. 4 (2004): 45-77.



destination country – however, they may have had to adapt the colour and race learning of their old country to the new configurations of race and colour experienced in the new country.<sup>160</sup> In his research on Greeks in Australia, Piperoglou argues that Greeks were ‘race thinkers before coming’ which meant that they ‘came with their own patterns of race thinking which facilitated speedy learning of white racial schemes when they were questioned within the racialised operations of labour in Australia.’<sup>161</sup> Ricatti has made a similar argument for Italians, in which he asserts that the racialisation of Italians and their strategic response to it must be understood in a deeper history of anti-Italian sentiment in Europe and the ‘quasi-colonial nature of Italy’s unification’.<sup>162</sup>

While this thesis is also concerned with examining the various ways in which Italians identified with and asserted their own whiteness, I also demonstrate how processes of ‘race learning’ in Australia were often complicated by other ideological or ethical commitments to notions such as internationalism, fraternity and liberty. I do this by paying closer attention to the sources produced by Italian migrants who were identified with movements such as socialism and anti-fascism. Although, overall, I draw from a range of Italian-language sources that emerged from a range of political, class and ideological positions, I often pay closer attention to those sources that were broadly left-wing. This is an intentional choice to differentiate this work from much of the work on Southern European whiteness that has dealt almost exclusively with sources from journalists, merchants or businessmen with more conservative political leanings.<sup>163</sup> In addition to complicating the processes of ‘race learning’, these sources allow me to also examine more effectively ways that Italian socialists responded to the Australian labour movement’s antagonism towards their presence and also allows me to put concerns of race at the centre of an analysis of particular figures such as Francesco Sceusa who have been well-researched by historians but for other purposes.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*, 111, 16.

<sup>161</sup> Piperoglou, "Greek Settlers: Race, Labour, and the Making of White Australia, 1890s-1920s," 111.

<sup>162</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 53-54.

<sup>163</sup> See, for example: Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness," 33-49; Piperoglou, "Greek Settlers: Race, Labour, and the Making of White Australia, 1890s-1920s."

<sup>164</sup> Desmond O'Grady, "Nationalist into Socialist," *Quadrant* 27, no. 10 (1983): 62-65; Gianfranco Cresciani, "The Making of a New Society: Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Intellectual Reformers in Australia 1876-1906," in *Stories of Australian Migration*, ed. John Hardy (Kensington, N.S.W.: New South Wales University Press, 1988), 83-98; Flavia Fodale, *Il Socialismo in Due Continenti: Francesco Sceusa E L'emigrazione in Australia* (Palermo: La Zisa, 2016).

My analysis of the complicated process of ‘race learning’ also uncovers how Italians tried to make sense of what Australia represented. This was part of another strategy that Italians used to challenge their racialisation that historians have largely missed – that is, by asserting a sense of belonging to Australia based on citizenship and civic values. More than just a colonial nation founded on a commitment to white racial homogeneity, Italians also responded to and reproduced other ideas of Australia that emphasised progress and freedom. Italians found in Australia an example of ‘applied socialism’, a workingman’s paradise, an ‘all man’s country’ and a protector of individual liberty.<sup>165</sup> Sometimes these constructions of Australia were used by Italians to justify the racist treatment of non-European migrants while sometimes it also led them to criticise that treatment. Sometimes their criticisms sought to include Chinese people as fellow workers of the world but sometimes their critique of Australian racism amounted to little more than a critique of Anglocentrism and an assertion of a pan-European whiteness hidden under progressive discourse. Leading on from this, this thesis also examines how Italians reacted once their positive constructions of Australia were challenged by the reality of anti-Italian racism that they were confronted with in their everyday lives.

While trying to counter the tendency in the historiography for using conservative sources, this thesis also necessarily draws from some of these same sources that have been used by other historians. Just as I aim to be sensitive to the conflicts within the category of Britisher or Australian, I also pay significant attention to the political, social and economic conflicts amongst Italians. Unlike histories of Greek migrants where, according to Piperoglou, a ‘preoccupation with defending a culture under siege’ has led scholars to refrain from studying the group’s internal cleavages, this concern has not constrained scholars of the Italian experience.<sup>166</sup> Histories of Italian immigration have, perhaps inevitably, always dealt with conflict and struggle amongst Italian migrants. This is especially so in the case of interwar histories that highlight the divisions between fascists and anti-fascists as well as the conflicts that existed within the anti-

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<sup>165</sup> Francesco Sceusa, "Hail Australia! Morituri Te Salutant!", (Sydney: Jarrett & Co. Printers, 1888); Pietro Munari, *Un Italiano in Australia: Note E Impressioni* [*An Italian in Australia: Notes and Impressions*] (Milan: Tipografia degli Operai (Società cooperativa), 1897).

<sup>166</sup> Piperoglou, "Greek Settlers: Race, Labour, and the Making of White Australia, 1890s-1920s," 28.

fascist movement or, even more specifically, the anarchist current within that broader movement.<sup>167</sup>

As noted above, this thesis attempts to counteract some of the limitations of earlier studies by drawing from a wider range of sources and emphasising the heterogeneity of the Italian community during this period. However, despite the diversity of views contained within them, the majority of these sources were most often produced by a small minority who were socially and culturally alienated from the majority of Italian migrants. This has been noted by historians such as Cresciani who referred to the existence of 'Two Italies' and Gabaccia who wrote about the 'two races' of Italy. These distinctions differ from the distinction that has often been made by historians based on a geographical division between northern and southern Italy.<sup>168</sup> For Gabaccia, the 'two races' of Italy were 'the rural poor and the urban bourgeoisie'.<sup>169</sup> Likewise, Cresciani's 'two Italies' referred to class differences with the educated middle-class Italians such as consular representatives, traders, businessmen and company executives forming one Italy and the other was comprised of semi-literate peasants.<sup>170</sup>

My sources are drawn predominantly from three places: newspapers, parliamentary Hansard, and public archives such as police records and the correspondence files of government departments. The first two are relied upon much more than the third type of source and, as a result, I am limited to the worldview and observations of a particular class of both Italian migrants and British-Australian settlers. Although the voice of the 'other Italy' is often absent in my sources and in my work, I attempt wherever possible to uncover as much as I can about these Italians through what fragments are available to me. Additionally, the newspapers I use

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<sup>167</sup> The work of Cresciani is most important here. See, for example: Gianfranco Cresciani, "The Second Awakening: The Italia Libera Movement," *Labour History*, no. 30 (1976): 22-37; "The Proletarian Migrants: Fascism and Italian Anarchists in Australia," *The Australian Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1979): 4-19; *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980).

<sup>168</sup> Pugliese, "Race as Category Crisis: Whiteness and the Topical Assignment of Race," 149-68; "White Historicide and the Returns of the Souths of the South," *Australian Humanities Review* 42 (2007); Andreoni, "Olive or White?," 81-92; Giuliani, "Whose Whiteness?: Cultural Dis-Locations between Italy and Australia," 125-38; Dewhirst, "The 'Southern Question' in Australia: The 1925 Royal Commission's Racialisation of Southern Italians," 316-32; Lara Palombo, "'Long Live Anarchism' and Its Southern Discontent: South-Veriting the 'Trans-' of Radical Transnational Knowledge in *Il Risveglio*," *Muiraquitã* 5, no. 2 (2017): 60-90; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 53-74.

<sup>169</sup> Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 36.

<sup>170</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 54-55.

include those that were published in English as well as Italian. Italian-language newspapers often included pages aimed at an English-speaking audience and so I have noted throughout this thesis which of the sources I refer to were published in English and which were published in Italian. Where I cite articles published in the Italian language, I have also given an English title based on my own translation. Similarly, paraphrasing of such articles is based on my own translations unless I have stated otherwise.

This thesis is structured in two parts of three chapters each. The first three chapters deal with the period before World War I when the Italian migrant population in Australia was still relatively small and not yet established to the same extent that it was in the interwar period. These chapters share a common focus on the issue of unfree labour through intersecting notions of race, respectability, and contract labour legislation. Chapter 1 explores the notion that there were ‘two Italies’ in Australia through an examination of the Italian community of Sydney at the end of the nineteenth century. Through newspaper articles and the writings and activism of Francesco Sceusa, I create a profile of the ‘other Italians’ in Sydney and then analyse how this distinction was created through discourses of respectability. I argue that the ‘other Italians’ of Sydney were constructed in such a way that not only drew attention to their perceived moral and behavioural problems but also that these problems raised questions over their racial identities.

Chapter 2 examines Italian responses to schemes that recruited Italian migrants to replace South Sea Islanders as field workers in North Queensland’s sugar industry. In particular, I focus on the arguments put forward by Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Workmen’s Mutual Benefit Society who were opposed to such schemes on the basis that they were injurious to Australian workers and constituted a ‘Chinesisation’ of the Italian worker. I argue that Sceusa and the Society’s opposition to these schemes was informed by their understanding of race in Australia as something that was produced through legislation and labour practices. In their understanding, to be ‘Chinese’ was to be turned into an indentured labourer and then subject to immigration restrictions as a result.

In Chapter 3, I turn my attention to the gold fields of Western Australia to examine the perception that Italians were arriving under contract in the first decade of the twentieth century. I examine this perception first through debates that took place in Federal and State parliaments

and then through the internal conflicts within the Australian Workers Association (AWA). In doing so, I demonstrate that the AWA was split over whether or not Italian workers should be included or excluded from the union and touch on the way that Italians in Sydney responded to arguments for exclusion. Alongside these points, I also attempt to move beyond the issue of contract labour and suggest a return to the figure of the labour agent or *padrone* as a key to uncovering unfree labour practices that subverted the legal protections on free labour.

The final three chapters of this thesis deal with the period between World War I and World War II which saw Italians arrive in unprecedented numbers and became the largest non-British group in Australia. Italian communities became relatively larger and more established (or more ‘settled’) than their pre-World War I counterparts. While these three chapters are still concerned with labour, they are just as concerned – if not more – with issues surrounding settlement and belonging. Chapter 4 explores the construction of the Italian as a pioneer of the sugar industry through articles published in the moderate-to-conservative press. I examine how Italians, as a result of their work practices and aspirations for land ownership, were turned into model settlers in contrast to British-Australians who were constructed as itinerant and ungovernable workers who were prone to striking and preferred spending their money on alcohol and other pleasures rather than saving it. I compare this construction of the Italian pioneer to the pioneer legend identified by John Hirst, in particular its political and cultural implications to situate it within the class conflicts of the industry and various assumptions about the culture of Italian migrants.<sup>171</sup>

Chapter 5 examines the Italian response to the movement for British preference that set quotas restricting the employment of non-British workers in Queensland’s sugar industry. I argue against previous interpretations that emphasise *italianità* and internationalism by demonstrating that Italians of various political and class backgrounds opposed British preference predominantly in terms of citizenship and belonging. The right to work, I argue, was defended through highlighting Italians’ allegiances to the nation, empire and the local district. Regarding this last allegiance, I examine how some Italians championed the cause of ‘local preference’ as an alternative to British preference.

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<sup>171</sup> J. B. Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend," *Historical Studies* 18, no. 71 (1978): 316-37.

Chapter 6 presents a case study of a series of articles published in the pro-Fascist newspaper, *Il Giornale Italiano*, that examines how some Italians used yellow peril discourse in order to defend the right of Italians to migrate and settle in Australia. I break down how the author of these articles, Franco Battistessa, constructed the threat of a ‘reawakened’ Japan, critiqued the Anglocentrism of White Australia, and proposed Italian immigration as the only solution to an inevitable invasion from East Asia. In doing so, I also situate these articles not only within the context of Australian politics and racial thinking but also the broader transnational context of Italian and Japanese expansion into East Africa and East Asia. Battistessa’s writings also contain historical arguments that draw on his interpretation of the previous forty years of Italian migration to Australia – that is, roughly the same period of time that I cover in this thesis.

Collectively, my approach and case studies will provide a new history of Italians in White Australia. Placing ideas of race and labour at the centre of this history, I demonstrate that Italians were accepted within the boundaries of White Australia yet they also revealed its limits. On the one hand, I examine how the Italian presence complicated the settlement between classes, of which the White Australia Policy was a component, as new allegiances were formed from overlapping racial, national and class identities. On the other, I examine how Italians responded to processes of racialisation and attempts to include or exclude them from White Australia, drawing attention to strategies that have hitherto not been addressed in the historiography of Italian immigration to Australia.



## Chapter 1:

### The Two Italies of Colonial Sydney

In his overview history of Italian immigration to Australia, *Italians in Australia*, Gianfranco Cresciani wrote of ‘two Italies’ that existed in Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century which were comprised of two different cultures, societies, and ‘kinds of Italians’ that were divided not by region or race but by class.<sup>1</sup> One ‘Italy’ was made up of a small nucleus of educated middle-class Italians – often referred to as the *prominenti* (prominent figures) – which included the consular representatives, professionals, traders, businessmen, artists, political activists, intellectuals and visiting celebrities. Despite being in the numerical minority this ‘Italy’ has been the focus of the few histories that look at Italians in colonial history.<sup>2</sup> Amongst the ranks of these *prominenti*, certain individuals such as medical doctor Tommaso Fiaschi, socialist activist Francesco Sceusa and the merchant and journalist Giovanni Pulle have been at the centre of these histories.<sup>3</sup> The other ‘Italy’, which has remained overlooked in the historiography, was made up of the overwhelming majority of arrivals from Italy who, Cresciani writes, were illiterate or semi-literate peasants that migrated to escape destitution. This majority was estranged not only from the Australian community but the Italian establishment too, just as they had been in Italy, and this division remained until World War II.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 54-55. This description of ‘two Italies’ is similar to Gabaccia’s construction of the ‘two races’ of Italy, see: Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: University College London Press, 2000), 36.

<sup>2</sup> The colonial period has largely been overlooked in the history of Italian immigration to Australia as it has generally been considered less important than later periods in which arrivals were more numerous. See, for example, I. H. Burnley, "Italian Settlement in Sydney, 1920-78," *Australian Geographical Studies* 19, no. 2 (1981): 179; Francesco Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 25.

<sup>3</sup> In their overview history of Italian immigration, Randazzo and Cigler chose to look at Fiaschi as a major figure in colonial Sydney: Nino Randazzo and Michael J. Cigler, *The Italians in Australia* (Melbourne: AE Press, 1987), 49-53. While Cresciani’s work has predominantly focused on Sceusa, see: Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 47-48; "The Making of a New Society: Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Intellectual Reformers in Australia 1876-1906," in *Stories of Australian Migration*, ed. John Hardy (Kensington, N.S.W.: New South Wales University Press, 1988), 83-98; "'Socialismo Per La Generazione Presente'. Rifugiati Politici Italiani E Movimento Socialista Australiano," *Italian Historical Society Journal* 20 (2012): 25-49. More recently, Dewhirst’s studies of colonial Sydney have focused on the life and ideas of Pulle: Catherine Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness: Representing Italians in Early White Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 33-49; "Inventing 'Italians': Experiences and Responses in Australia's Colonial and Federation Societies," in *Social Change in the 21st Century* (Centre for Social Change Research, Queensland University of Technology 2002); "Giovanni Pullè: Pioneer and Founding Father of Italian Ethnicity," *Spunti e Ricerche*, no. 17 (2003): 26-49.

<sup>4</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 54-55.



In this chapter, I use two case studies to examine how this distinction between the ‘two Italies’ was constructed in colonial Sydney by educated middle-class Italians and their Australian counterparts around discourses of respectability. The first case study is based on an article published in *The Australian Star* in December 1887 in which Italians were referred to as ‘The Chinese of Europe’.<sup>5</sup> An analysis of the article itself and the responses it provoked from the Italian *prominenti* reveals how the Italians in Sydney were perceived to be split into two groups or classes on the basis of a number of factors related to their living conditions, work practices and leisure activities. Leading on from this, I focus in on the response from Francesco Sceusa, a socialist who fled his hometown of Trapani in Sicily in 1877 while he was under investigation by the Italian Government as a member of the Socialist International.<sup>6</sup> I demonstrate that Sceusa developed a set of categories to differentiate between the ‘two Italies’ – for example, the respectable Italians were often called ‘Italian colonists’ while the unrespectable Italians were often called ‘vagrant loafers’. In doing so, Sceusa made the claim that the unrespectable ‘other Italians’ were not Italians at all but rather members of a so-called transnational race of vagrants that posed a threat to emergent Italian and Australian nationalisms by resisting their categorisations. As I point out, this has larger implications for the historiography of Italian immigration history in Australia which – while it has paid close attention to the persistence of parochial identities associated with particular regions, provinces or villages in Italy – has hitherto overlooked the persistence of social and cultural identities or relations that transcended the borders of the relatively new Italian nation.

The other case study is of a specifically Italian-led campaign that focused on regulating the behaviour of a group of Italians who were deemed unrespectable. This was the campaign against the employment of child street musicians and street vendors that was led by Sceusa and his supporters in the Italian Workmen’s Mutual Benefit Society. Sceusa had alleged that Italian *padroni* were kidnapping or purchasing children from their parents in Italy and bringing them to Australia as a form of slave labour. The historiography on respectability and class has noted that

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Italians in Sydney: The Chinese of Europe,’ *The Australian Star*, 8 December 1887, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Desmond O’Grady, “Nationalist into Socialist,” *Quadrant* 27, no. 10 (1983): 62. See also: Cresciani, “The Making of a New Society: Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Intellectual Reformers in Australia 1876-1906,” 83-98; Flavia Fodale, *Il Socialismo in Due Continenti: Francesco Sceusa E L'emigrazione in Australia* (Palermo: La Zisa, 2016).

children – and their innocence – had a central position within the construction of respectability.<sup>7</sup> However, non-British migrants have not been included in such studies. Similarly, apart from a few studies, children have generally been left out of histories of Italian immigration, despite the fact that in colonial Sydney, the Italian-born population had a disproportionate number of children when compared to other migrant groups.<sup>8</sup>

Before I look at these two case studies, I first profile those ‘other Italians’ who lived in colonial Sydney with a focus on where they lived and worked and how their communities were threatened by the process of urban renewal. This provides some much-needed context for analysing how these same communities were constructed discursively by the *prominenti*.

### **The Other Italians of Sydney**

Between 1881 and 1891, the Italian-born population of New South Wales almost tripled in size. The majority of new arrivals came during the first half of the decade and when Italian immigration to New South Wales had practically ceased in the early 1900s, the Italian Consul-General, Dr Vincenzo Marano, looked back on the early 1880s as a period of influx.<sup>9</sup> The first notable intake during this period was in April 1881, when approximately 200 Italians, made up of families from Treviso in Italy’s northeast, arrived as refugees from the failed Marquis de Rays expedition to colonise an island in German New Guinea.<sup>10</sup> A second notable intake was three years later in 1884 when about 275 Italians arrived under contract for employment on railway extensions throughout the colony. This group of migrants also came from the northern regions of Italy, where the peasantry had built a reputation throughout Europe for being good labourers for tunnelling and railways.<sup>11</sup> After those projects were completed, many of these migrants moved on to California, New Zealand or back to Italy.<sup>12</sup> Some of these men eventually returned

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example: Lynette Finch, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 70.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Our Italian Neighbours,’ *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 16 September 1893, 593.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Interview with the Italian Consul, Dr. W. Marano,’ *L’Italo-Australiano*, 11 March 1905, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Metcalf, ‘Utopian Fraud: The Marquis De Rays and La Nouvelle-France,’ *Utopian Studies* 22, no. 1 (2011): 104-24; Randazzo and Cigler, *The Italians in Australia*, 38-49; Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 43-44.

<sup>11</sup> Theta, ‘Strangers Within Our Gates: III. The Italians,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1893, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Theta, ‘Strangers Within Our Gates: III. The Italians,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1893, 4.

to the Australian colonies and were among the earliest Italians to arrive on the Western Australian goldfields after the discovery of gold later in that decade.<sup>13</sup>

The families from the Marquis de Rays expedition were less mobile than the single labourers of the railways and remained in New South Wales. After initially being scattered throughout the colonies on work contracts, twenty of these families joined another ten families from Italy and established a settlement in the Richmond River area called 'New Italy' which became a positive model for Italian settlement in Australia.<sup>14</sup> However, New Italy was relatively small and atypical for communities of Italian migrants at the time. The 1891 census recorded 129 Italians in the Richmond county where the New Italy settlement was located – much smaller than the 402 within the City of Sydney area and a further 350 in the suburbs and semi-rural fringes of the city. The New Italy population was also atypical for Italian migrant communities of the period because it was not as numerically masculine. Although males in the New Italy settlement made up around sixty per cent of the population, this was proportionally much lower than the City of Sydney, for example, where males made up around 87 per cent of the population.<sup>15</sup>

In 1891, the majority of Italians in the greater Sydney region resided in the City of Sydney itself, although there were also small but substantial populations in adjoining suburbs such as Paddington, Redfern, Glebe and Balmain.<sup>16</sup> Their concentration in the city was, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'dependent on the means of livelihood chosen by Italian immigrants.' One of these means of livelihood was fishing. It is believed that the first of the fishermen arrived in the 1850s from the northeast of Sicily.<sup>17</sup> In the early 1890s, the Italian fishermen of Sydney had

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Gentili, *Italian Migration to Western Australia, 1829-1946*, ed. C. Stransky and C. Iraci (Nedlands, W.A.: Dept. of Geography, University of Western Australia, 1982), 11-12.

<sup>14</sup> In the nineteenth century it was held up as a positive to alternative to urban settlements, see: V Marano, 'The Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 13 December 1887, 2; 'The Italians in our Midst. A Good Word for Them,' *The Catholic Press*, 19 February 1898, 6. The importance of New Italy as a model Italian settlement has since been maintained by historians, see: Anne-Gabrielle Thompson, *Turmoil - Tragedy to Triumph: The Story of New Italy* (Stanthorpe, Qld.: International Colour Productions, 1980); Jim Briginshaw, *The Dream That Wouldn't Die : The Tragic Struggles of a Gallant People to Build a New Italy Far from Their Homeland* (Iluka, NSW: Jim Briginshaw, 2006); Randazzo and Cigler, *The Italians in Australia*, 38-49; Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, "Italian Pioneers," in *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins*, ed. James Jupp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 489-90.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics et al., "Historical and Colonial Census Data Archive (Hccda)," (ADA Dataverse, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage* (Richmond, Vic.: Greenhouse Publications, 1987), 69.

about 70 to 80 boats between them, which they shared with at least one other Italian. Taking these boats onto the harbour, they caught fish and prawns and sold them at the fish markets in Woolloomooloo, from where they supplied much of Sydney's fish.<sup>18</sup> These markets brought this group of Italians into contact with other migrants from Greece, China, India and elsewhere. The markets were also a point of contact between the fishermen and their more well off compatriots who sold to the public from their shops in the area of the city around King Street.<sup>19</sup> Despite the perceived differences in class, an author who went by the initials E.J. wrote that the retailer was 'no less swarthy' than the fisherman – implying a shared racial distinctiveness from British Australians.<sup>20</sup> The Italian fishermen lived in the nearby laneways of Woolloomooloo, at the wharf ends of Forbes, Dowling Tooth and Brougham streets, which they had shared with Greek migrants, and the area came to be colloquially known as 'Dago Alley'.<sup>21</sup> The community of approximately 80 Italian fishermen and their families who were still living there in 1905 had been in Australia for fifteen years and whilst their main occupation was prawn fishing, during winter they found other forms of waterside employment.<sup>22</sup>

The other most common means of livelihood chosen by Italians was fruit selling. The Italian fruiterers of Sydney were also from the southern regions of Italy, predominantly from the Aeolian Islands off the north coast of Sicily. In fact, for the entire period between 1880 and 1945, three quarters of men who migrated from these islands were fruiterers.<sup>23</sup> A report produced by the Department of Labor and Industry for the year 1899 surveyed a total of 528 fruit shops in the city and suburbs and found that in the city Italians were found to be in the majority with 81 shops compared to the 72 under English ownership, while in the suburbs the English far outnumbered with 331 compared to only 44 suburban fruit shops owned by

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<sup>18</sup> Along with the Greeks, the Italians by the early-1890s had supposedly held a monopoly in the industry, see: 'Costly Commodities,' *Evening News*, 10 November 1893, 2.

<sup>19</sup> 'A visit of inquiry,' *Truth*, 4 August 1901, 3; E.J. 'The Fish Markets. At Woolloomooloo. An Early Morning Visit.' *Evening News*, 20 September 1904, 7.

<sup>20</sup> E.J. 'The Fish Markets. At Woolloomooloo. An Early Morning Visit.' *Evening News*, 20 September 1904, 7.

<sup>21</sup> H.J., 'The Prawn Fishers. A Visit to "Little Italy."' *Evening News*, 4 August 1905, 7; 'A Night in Woolloomooloo. Flour Throwing Capers. Foreigner's Orgie.' *The Australian Star*, 1 January 1906

<sup>22</sup> H.J., 'The Prawn Fishers. A Visit to "Little Italy."' *Evening News*, 4 August 1905, 7. Newspaper reports of workplace injuries provide further evidence of the other occupations that the Italians in Woolloomooloo took up. For example, Steven Fevra worked at McKenzie's timber yard on Glebe Island where he injured himself in 1906 and Catello Depollo worked as a coal lumper on a collier at Cowper wharf where he was injured in 1907. Both of these men lived in Duke Street, Woolloomooloo. See: 'An Italian's Misfortune,' *The Australian Star*, 19 December 1906, 5 and 'Coal Lumper Injured,' *The Australian Star*, 2 October 1907, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage*, 139.

Italians.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the perception that fruit selling was an industry monopolised by Italians persisted throughout the 1890s. Their supporters praised them for thrift, perseverance, co-operation, patience, contentment and affability while their opponents accused them of craftiness, irresponsibility and a low standard of living.<sup>25</sup> The price of fruit itself was often at the centre of these debates, with supporters arguing that Italians had helped to make fruit 'less a luxury than as a food', and their opponents arguing that they created an artificial scarcity which made fruit unnecessarily expensive.<sup>26</sup> The selling of fruit was not confined to brick and mortar shops, with many Italian fruit sellers carrying their goods in carts which they would then set up in streets and markets throughout the city.

These itinerant fruit vendors were known to reside in the laneways of Brickfield Hill in the south of the city and neighbouring Surry Hills to the east where they lived alongside Italians engaged in other itinerant occupations such as playing music in the streets and hawking other cheap goods such as plaster figurines and iced confections. One of the primary laneways where these Italians were known to reside in was Swan Street, a no through road off George Street, in between Liverpool Street and Goulburn Street. Due to their presence here, this road was known colloquially as 'Maccaroni Road'.<sup>27</sup> In 1894, this small street was about one hundred yards in length, only fifteen feet wide with no room for two carts to pass each other and with a narrow footway on either side about four feet wide. It comprised a row on either side of the road of two-storeyed structures made of brick and stone.<sup>28</sup> In April 1894, an Italian resident of Swan Street named Niccolo Boffa was killed during a disagreement with his next door neighbour, a 17 year-old Australian named Samuel George, and this case gives some insight into the lives lived at the end of Maccaroni Road. Boffa, a 30-year-old musician, lived at number 15 with his younger brother Dominico who was in his late teens and also a musician. Next door at number 17, Antonio Boffoni, a fruit hawker lived with George and his mother Amelia, who was a widow and described by *The Australian Star* as 'a respectable looking woman'. Across the street at

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<sup>24</sup> 'The Factories and Shops Act.' *Sunday Times*, 12 August 1900, 9.

<sup>25</sup> 'The March of the Foreigner. A Sydney Trade Question. The Competition of Italians, Greeks and Asiatics.' *Sunday Times*, 23 February 1896, 5; 'Italians in Sydney. Fruit-Selling Industry. A Monopoly Being Obtained.' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 December 1896, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Theta, 'Strangers Within Our Gates: III. The Italians,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1893, 4; 'Costly Commodities,' *Evening News*, 10 November 1893, 2.

<sup>27</sup> 'A Fatal Assault.' *The Australian Star*, 16 April 1894, 5.

<sup>28</sup> 'A Fatal Assault.' *The Australian Star*, 16 April 1894, 5.

number 20, lived Charles Lotierzo, a boy musician, and in other buildings on the street lived at least two other boy musicians: Antonio Varrella who was 14 years old and Francesco Nigro who was still a small child younger than ten.<sup>29</sup> Although Boffa was identified in the press as a 'street musician', his brother had told the court that he had given up on playing music in the streets and instead had taken to 'going around with a cage of canaries which told people's fortunes' and that Boffa had also owned an ice-cream cart.<sup>30</sup> Like the residents of Woolloomooloo, some of these Italians did not always stay in the same occupations but moved between various itinerant and marginal occupations.

Another group of Italians, which also included many fruit sellers, resided a couple of streets over in Fowler's Place or Fowler's Square, a small lane or square adjoining the New Masonic Hall on Castlereagh Street. In December 1887, *The Australian Star* described this area as being comprised of 'a number of small box-like dwellings, forming three sides of a square, the rents of which were about ten shillings per week.'<sup>31</sup> Italians had been living in this area since the 1870s, where there was 'a cluster of 36 putrid and miserable houses in Castlereagh Street' inhabited by Sicilian fruit sellers, Neapolitan street musicians and Tuscan figurine makers, and there is evidence that Italians continued to live here until the mid-1890s and perhaps even the late-1900s.<sup>32</sup> Other streets where Italians were known or perceived to have concentrated include Robertson's Lane, in between Pitt Street and Goulburn Street, and Wexford Street in Surry Hills.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See: 'Fatal Assault by a Boy,' *Evening News*, 16 April 1894, 4; 'A Fatal Assault. Tragedy in Swan-Street,' *The Australian Star*, 16 April 1894, 5; 'The Fatal Assault by a Boy,' *Evening News*, 17 April 1894, 4-5; 'Swan-Street Tragedy: The Coroner's Inquest,' *The Australian Star*, 17 April 1894, 5; 'Swan-Street Tragedy: The Coroner's Inquest,' *The Australian Star*, 18 April 1894, 2; 'The Swan-Street Tragedy,' *The Australian Star*, 12 June 1894, 6.

<sup>30</sup> 'Swan-Street Tragedy: The Coroner's Inquest,' *The Australian Star*, 17 April 1894, 5.

<sup>31</sup> 'Italians in Sydney. The Chinese of Europe,' *The Australian Star*, 8 December 1887, 3.

<sup>32</sup> For Italians in this area in the 1870s, see: Cresciani, "The Making of a New Society: Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Intellectual Reformers in Australia 1876-1906," 87. Evidence for Italians living there in the mid-1890s include newspaper reports on the murder of Mary Piazzi whose step-father lived there in 1894, an advertisement of a reward for the return of two missing children who lived there also in 1894, as well as a report on the prevalence of typhoid in the area in 1895. See: 'The Belmore Park Tragedy,' *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 7 May 1894, 5; 'An Insanitary Neighbourhood,' *Sunday Times*, 3 February 1895, 4. As for the 1900s, in 1907 Giacomo Alberto was found dead as a result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound 'in a lane off Castlereagh Street', see: 'An Italian's Suicide,' *The Australian Star*, 3 May 1907, 7.

<sup>33</sup> For Robertson's Lane, see: 'A League of Italians,' *National Advocate*, 25 August 1891, 2; For Wexford Street, see: 'Savage Assault on a Woman,' *The Kiama Independent and Shoalhaven Advertiser*, 3 August 1888, 4; European, 'Alien Races,' *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, 21 September 1895, 7.

The areas that these Italians found themselves in were already known for their multiracial populations with a large presence of Chinese migrants who were the largest group of non-British origin in Sydney at the time. As a result, the settlement patterns of Italians in Sydney meant that they were more often compared to the Chinese, Syrian (or 'Assyrian') and Greek populations rather than other migrant groups such as those from northern and western Europe. For example, in 1891, the *National Advocate* wrote:

Like the optimised mongrels sent us by overburdened China, the scum of Italy is now choking up many by-ways of our capital city, and in such places as Goulburn lane and Durand's alley, in Sydney, the dark-skinned stiletto manipulators huddle together in hundreds, swarming in the confines of dirt, in disease and loathsome sinfulness, like rats in a main sewer.<sup>34</sup>

A similar observation was made in a letter published in the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* in September 1895 which declared:

Let anyone go, as I have done, down thro' the disgusting slums of Wexford, Goulburn, and Harrington streets in Sydney and again at Waterloo and let them see the Mongolian, the Assyrian and the Italian huddled together there in the filthy reeking dens that abound there, and if visions of pestilential fevers and impending degradation to the white population do not rise up before him, the sooner he becomes a naturalised subject of the Emperor of China, the better for Australians.<sup>35</sup>

These two example quotes do more than just draw similarities between Italians and other migrant groups based on racist attitudes. They do so in the language of respectability that Lynette Finch argues had emerged at the end of the nineteenth century as a discourse that produced and regulated lower class subjects. This discourse was adopted by a wide variety of people including journalists and social planners who would focus on markers of respectability or, as was more often the case, unrespectability, such as cleanliness, sobriety, diet, accommodation arrangements,

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<sup>34</sup> 'A League of Italians,' *National Advocate*, 25 August 1891, 2.

<sup>35</sup> 'Alien Races,' *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, 21 September 1895, 7.

and the behaviour of women and children.<sup>36</sup> Another sign of unrespectability was the presence of non-British migrants.

The association of these areas with non-British, multiracial populations and unrespectability made them subject to urban renewal projects that threatened the continued existence of the Italian communities in Brickfield Hill and Surry Hills. Some of the areas Italians were living in had in fact already undergone earlier stages of urban renewal and gentrification, perhaps prior to the Italians' arrival. In the early 1880s, for example, Robertson's Lane had been partially cleared out and rebuilt and also acquired its present name, after previously being known as Durand's Alley which 'possessed an unsavoury reputation'.<sup>37</sup> The re-branding of streets for the purpose of giving them some respectability was common practice in the 1880s and 1890s, sometimes at the request of residents. A letter sent to the *Sunday Times* in March 1897 from a resident of Wexford Street asked for its name to be changed because its current name brought injury to 'a large number of respectable, hard-working English, Irish, Scotch and Australian residents' due to its association with non-British migrants.<sup>38</sup> In the case of Durand's Alley, this name change did not seem to have had the desired effect as the name continued to be used into the early 1900s and, as is evident in the quote above, when Italians moved in their presence became a part of its bad reputation.<sup>39</sup> Wexford Street, on the other hand, retained its name and reputation until it was cleared in 1911 to make way for a thoroughfare connecting Oxford Street and Central Station. Eight years earlier, in 1903, the residential buildings of Swan Street had been cleared to make way for a department store owned by the Anthony Hordern and Sons which covered the entire block bounded by Swan Street to the north, Pitt Street to the east, Goulburn Street to the south and George Street to the east. Although newspapers reported that over a hundred or more buildings were to be pulled down no mention was made of the residents who

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<sup>36</sup> Finch, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> 'Fire in Pitt-street.' *Evening News*, 16 January 1886, 4; see also: 'Round the Slums With A Camera.' *Evening News*, 8 March 1902, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Constant Reader, 'Whats in a Name,' *Sunday Times*, 7 March 1897, 3.

<sup>39</sup> 'Fire in Pitt-street.' *Evening News*, 16 January 1886, 4.



had once lived there, regardless of whether they were Italian, Chinese, British or Australian.<sup>40</sup> The Italians of Fowler's Place similarly disappeared around this time with little notice taken.<sup>41</sup>

The process of urban renewal not only affected where Italians lived but also the ways in which they earned their money. In his study of Melbourne, Andrew Brown-May argued that itinerant vendors in Australian urban centres were once seen as petty entrepreneurs of an enterprising age but by the end of the nineteenth century were seen as a pathology of dirt, crime, disease, obstruction and undeservedness.<sup>42</sup> The effects of this transformation can be seen in parts of the Italian community in Sydney. For example, one of the common products sold by itinerant vendors were iced confections which media reports had associated with the spread of disease – a claim that was given greater weight in 1895 when a case of typhoid was reported in Fowler's Square where many of these ice cream vendors lived.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Brown-May also demonstrated that the Melbourne City Council became increasingly involved in regulating itinerant vendors, eventually channelling them into street standings at fixed locations that were only made available as a charity or concession to the infirm, crippled, or otherwise unable to perform manual labour.<sup>44</sup> As a result, itinerant occupations such as hawking and music playing were increasingly pushed out of the city centre and were allowed only as a form of charity. Then, as the elderly, disabled, destitute and migrants started to join this itinerant economy, its association with unrespectability was consolidated.<sup>45</sup> This transformation can also be seen in Sydney. For instance, in October 1897, a number of blind street musicians held a meeting in Strathfield after one of their number had been arrested under vagrancy laws. While this meeting was not explicitly called to address Italian musicians, the man who was arrested 'wanted to know why the police did not lock up the Italian musicians'.<sup>46</sup> As I will discuss later in this chapter,

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<sup>40</sup> 'Hordern's New Palace,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 September 1903, 5; 'Hordern's Mammoth Building,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 August 1904, 3; 'Phenomenal Sale of Building Material,' *The Newsletter: an Australian Paper for Australian People*, 3 October 1903, 17.

<sup>41</sup> The last references in the media to the area can be found in 1894, see: 'Shocking Tragedy at Surry Hills,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 May 1894, 9. However, in 1907, Giacomo Alberto was found dead as a result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in an unnamed lane of Castlereagh Street, see: 'An Italian's Suicide,' *The Australian Star*, 3 May 1907, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Brown-May, 'A Charitable Indulgence: Street Stalls and the Transformation of Public Space in Melbourne, C. 1850-1920,' *Urban History* 23, no. 1 (1996): 51.

<sup>43</sup> 'An Insanitary Neighbourhood,' *Sunday Times*, 3 February 1895, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Brown-May, 'A Charitable Indulgence: Street Stalls and the Transformation of Public Space in Melbourne, C. 1850-1920,' 54.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>46</sup> 'Street Musicians,' *Evening News*, 2 October 1897, 3.

respectable Italians such as Francesco Sceusa also lamented that ‘able-bodied’ men were working in such ‘lazy avocations’ as playing music and selling fruit in the streets.<sup>47</sup>

The changes to the city made it increasingly difficult for these communities of Italians to sustain themselves and the Italian-born population stagnated. According to Consul-General Dr Marano, Italian immigration to Sydney had practically ceased by the middle of the 1900s. He reported that the ‘Italian colony’ was decreasing and men were leaving for New Zealand and North America. Although the Australian press still reported on the Italian community of fishermen in Woolloomooloo, in Marano’s opinion the only group of Italians who were still doing well in Sydney and thus able to encourage further immigration were the fruit sellers. As such, he advised against further immigration to New South Wales at this time, unless a prospective migrant had friends or relatives who could find them employment.<sup>48</sup> It was not only workers and peasants who stopped coming to Sydney in significant numbers but professionals were similarly discouraged from coming at this time.<sup>49</sup> In the rest of this chapter, I look at how the same notions of respectability that were intrinsic to urban renewal were articulated by the Italian establishment to differentiate themselves from the ‘other’ Italians.

### **The Chinese of Europe**

On 8 December 1887, the Sydney-based pro-protectionist newspaper, *The Australian Star*, published an article under the title ‘Italians in Sydney: The Chinese of Europe.’ This article comprised the author’s observations made during a walk around a couple of blocks in Sydney on themes such as the area’s living conditions, overcrowding, filth and uncleanness, the behaviour of women and children, alcohol, gambling and criminality. These preoccupations can be seen, for example, when the author found in one Swan Street house a kitchen in which ‘[r]ags, filth, stale fruit, and miscellaneous rubbish are scattered about.’ In the rest of the house, at least four beds would fill a whole room, although it was noted that these would not be considered beds even by someone accustomed to sleeping rough in a park. In Fowler’s Place, the author

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<sup>47</sup> Francis Sceusa, ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with the Italian Consul, Dr. W. Marano, *L’Italo-Australiano*, 11 March 1905, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 49.

found dwellings ‘without the common conveniences of civilised life’ in which as many as six or eight couples were sharing less than four rooms. In one of the kitchens, the author gazed in on five Italians eating ‘their evening meal of indistinguishable ingredients, the bread and stale-looking fruit excepted’. In the courtyard was more stale fruit, left on fruit carts ‘carefully stowed away among the rags, squalor, and filth of the shanty bedrooms’. Addressing the issues of vice and crime, the author noted that ‘the Italian is seldom wanted at the Magistrate’s level’ but rather than suggesting that Italians were law-abiding, argued instead that Italians were in fact too ‘indolent’ to even do anything illegal. Despite this, ‘almost nightly rows’ occurred amongst the Italians in these areas. One such row was found in an Italian wine shop on Goulburn Street where ‘[b]etween twenty and thirty customers are seated at tables in the shop playing cards, they are all Italians and all ungente looking customers.’ In the corner of the wine shop, three young women sat with a group of men, ‘swearing and card-playing’, their rowdy behaviour shocking to the author but ‘too commonplace’ for others to take notice.<sup>50</sup>

The wine shop was also described as located on ‘the most Chinese-ridden thoroughfare in Sydney’. According to the article, the Italians and Chinese not only shared a similar geographic space but inhabited that space in similar ways. In Swan Street, for example, the Italians ‘swarm[ed] like Chinamen in Lower George-street.’<sup>51</sup> As was suggested in the second half of the article’s title – ‘The Chinese of Europe’ – these comparisons between the Italians and Chinese were not merely made in passing but were a framing device for the entire article. Noting that much had been said and written about what had been called ‘the Chinese plague’ the author argued that the Chinese were not ‘the only race which threatens Australian posterity with its vicious characteristics.’ ‘Of recent years,’ the author continued, ‘another race equally enervating to vigorous nation-hood, equally formidable to deal with as the law stands, and fully as non-contributing a factor to the wealth of the nation as the wall-eyed celestial, has forced itself on public attention.’<sup>52</sup> This other ‘race’ was the Italians.

With this article, *The Australian Star* brought Italians into the genre of slum journalism that had emerged in the 1880s and was instrumental in the anti-Chinese campaigns in the years between

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<sup>50</sup> ‘Italians in Sydney. The Chinese of Europe.’ *The Australian Star*, 8 December 1887, 3.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Italians in Sydney. The Chinese of Europe.’ *The Australian Star*, 8 December 1887, 3.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Italians in Sydney. The Chinese of Europe.’ *The Australian Star*, 8 December 1887, 3.

1886 and 1888 that led to the Intercolonial Conference on the Chinese Question in June 1888.<sup>53</sup> This was a genre that consisted mostly of reports of inspection tours accompanied by a journalist's impressionistic accounts. According to Alan Mayne, these reports were both inventions and representations of the Other that functioned in order to eliminate the Other. They simultaneously 'outline the spatial and moral boundaries of the slum' while they 'ritually enact and measure out its progressive sweeping away by the city authorities.'<sup>54</sup> Representations of the slum were dramatic, in that they all drew upon the same cast of characters to engage their readers. They also drew upon racial and gender constructs so that, as Mayne points out, it was the alleged racial traits of Chinese migrants, for example, 'more than the decaying buildings which ... attracted condemnation.'<sup>55</sup> As Italians became more noticeable in these parts of Sydney, they too attracted condemnation.

In the week that followed the publication of the article, *The Australian Star* received at least four letters in response. Letters from Italian Consul Vincenzo Marano, socialist leader Francesco Sceusa and someone writing under the pseudonym 'Verita' were published in the pages of the newspaper.<sup>56</sup> Sceusa's letter, however, was not published in full since it was three pages long and so about half of it was cut out and an abridged version printed with an explanation from the editors of *The Australian Star*.<sup>57</sup> Another letter was written by Pasquale Besomo who did not identify as an Italian himself but claimed to have lived amongst the Italians in the areas of Sydney that were the target of the article.<sup>58</sup> Although Besomo's letter did not make it into the newspaper, his concerns – as well as the concerns of the other letter writers – were addressed in the columns of the newspaper in two short follow-up articles.<sup>59</sup> The article also inspired Scuesa to write a 24-

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<sup>53</sup> Andrew Markus, *Australian Race Relations, 1788-1993* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 80-82.

<sup>54</sup> Alan Mayne, *Representing the Slum: Popular Journalism in a Late Nineteenth-Century City* (Parkville, Victoria: History Department, The University of Melbourne, 1990), 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> V Marano, 'The Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 13 December 1887, 2; Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3; Verita, 'The Italian Lazzaroni Again,' *The Australian Star*, 13 December 1887, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>58</sup> In 1900, Besomo said that he had 'a great admiration for Italy and the Italians' but identified himself as 'a Swiss': 'Not an Italian,' *The Australian Star*, 13 September 1900, 6.

<sup>59</sup> 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 14 December 1887, 5; 'The Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 20 December 1887, 4.

page pamphlet titled 'Hail Australia' which he published in 1888. This pamphlet built on some of the themes he wrote about in his letter to the editor of *The Australian Star*.<sup>60</sup>

These letters demonstrated that Italians were concerned with notions of respectability and had themselves conceived of there being 'Two Italies' living alongside each other in Sydney, distinguishable on the basis of respectability. This was clear, for example, in Verita's letter which began by declaring that: 'The thanks of every respectable Italian are due to the STAR for its able and well-deserved exposure of the shameless lives led by the Italian lazzaroni of this city.'<sup>61</sup> This distinction between respectable and unrespectable Italians also determined who the term 'The Chinese of Europe' could legitimately be applied to. Besomo's letter had supposedly demanded that *The Australian Star* apologise for the connection made between the Italians and the Chinese in the heading of the original article. In response, the newspaper refused to do this, however it conceded: 'Mr. Besomo is right to some extent. The heading he refers to was too general. The article, however, fully indicated the particular class for whom the reference was intended.'<sup>62</sup> The same defence was used in response to Sceusa's letter, when the editor wrote: 'Our comments were directed exclusively against the rabble who congregate in dirt and vice in the slums of Sydney. The respectable natives of Italy and other continental cities were in no way assailed.'<sup>63</sup>

The newspaper did not take care to be more discerning as to which class of Italian was being written about in other articles published in the month of December 1887. Only four days after the original article was published and before the letters and follow-up articles were published, *The Australian Star* published an article in which there was an inverted comparison between the Italians and the Chinese of Sydney. In this article, the Chinese merchant, Mei Quong Tart, was described in these terms: 'He is in every respect a worthy citizen, and if his countrymen generally could rise to his standard of civilisation there would probably be no more objection to them than there is to Italians, Frenchmen, or Germans.'<sup>64</sup> Although this was an article in favour of restrictive legislation against Chinese immigration, the author was proposing that no such

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<sup>60</sup> Francesco Sceusa, "Hail Australia! Morituri Te Salutant!," (Sydney: Jarrett & Co. Printers, 1888).

<sup>61</sup> Verita, 'The Italian Lazzaroni Again,' *The Australian Star*, 13 December 1887, 3.

<sup>62</sup> 'The Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 20 December 1887, 4.

<sup>63</sup> See: Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>64</sup> 'Quong Tart and the Chinese,' *The Australian Star*, 12 December 1887, 3. For a general biography of Tart, see: Robert Travers, *Australian Mandarin: The Life and Times of Quong Tart* (Kenthurst, NSW: Kangaroo Press, 1981).

legislation would be necessary if all of the Chinese in Sydney were as respectable as Mei Quong Tart, who was supposedly as respectable as certain Europeans, including Italians. Both of these comparisons between the Italians and the Chinese suggest that there was a racial hierarchy which generally placed Italians in a higher position to the Chinese in terms of desirability. However, specific individuals or groups could effectively cross over into the other category through comparisons which relied on intersecting notions of race and respectability.

Although *The Australian Star* pointed out that it was not the respectable Italians being referred to in the article, the responses from Consul-General Marano and Pasquale Besomo both attempted to assert the respectability of those same Italians who had been deemed to be unrespectable. Through three arguments, Marano defended the respectability of the Italian subjects of the article. Firstly, he argued that Italians were not just migrants but had a tendency to become permanent settlers in the colony. In his estimation, around ninety percent of Italian arrivals remained and became citizens of the colony. Secondly, Marano highlighted their capacity and enthusiasm for hard work by pointing out an example in which a contractor had once tried to bring out 200 Italian workers at wages higher than the ruling rate but was obstructed by the Italian government – an incident that, according to Marano, demonstrated the high value on Italian labour in the colony and in Italy. Thirdly, he highlighted their self-reliance and independence by arguing that the majority of itinerant fruit vendors were engaging in this work not by choice and had taken it up in order to pay for their passage back to Italy and preferred to do this sort of work rather than to accept any form of charity.<sup>65</sup> As Finch has pointed out, one of the divisions between the respectable and unrespectable lower classes was the element of choice: ‘One group, the argument went, chose to be dirty, lazy, etcetera, and the other would rather not be.’<sup>66</sup> Therefore, Marano’s argument about itinerant fruit vendors was an attempt to place them in the latter by attributing their behaviours and the conditions of their existence to environmental factors.<sup>67</sup> The question of choice also appears in a defence of street musicians mounted by Besomo. In his letter, he had supposedly argued that those Italians who made their livelihood from busking in the streets of colonial Sydney were engaging in an activity that they had loved but were forced to come to Sydney after their activities had been made illegal in Italy.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> V Marano, ‘The Italians in Sydney,’ *The Australian Star*, 13 December 1887, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Finch, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance*, 37.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *The Australian Star*, 14 December 1887, 5

<sup>68</sup> ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *The Australian Star*, 14 December 1887, 5

Marano also attempted to give some respectability to the street musicians by claiming that they were providing something akin to a public service. In his view, the music performed by these musicians was able to be enjoyed by members of the public who would never visit the music halls or theatres and thus never hear this music otherwise.<sup>69</sup>

The letters by Marano and Besomo demonstrate attempts by Italians to assert a right to belong in colonial Australia through highlighting a set of respectable traits. The work of John Fitzgerald and Andonis Piperoglou has demonstrated how Chinese and Greek migrants respectively did this for themselves by highlighting self-reliance, independence, self-discipline and hard work. As Fitzgerald explained, the origins of this understanding of and identification with respectability was not usually something that the migrants brought with them from their countries of origins but was predominately a response to incentives that were particularly strong in settler colonial societies such as Australia. It was through respectability that Chinese migrants in colonial Sydney 'sought recognition of the rightful place of a Chinese community organisation in a white settler colony, and sought some acknowledgement that members of the society were decent, law-abiding citizens.'<sup>70</sup> In his study of Greek migrants, Piperoglou also highlighted the importance of stressing the intention to settle as a permanent settler rather than as a migrant in fashioning a sense of respectability.<sup>71</sup>

In response to Marano's and Besomo's arguments that highlighted the environmental factors that limited the options of Italian migrants and forced them into certain occupations, the editors of *The Australian Star* agreed and argued this was a symptom of a much broader social problem:

It is, however, to say the least, unfortunate that in the race for wealth, under existing conditions able-bodied men should be driven to occupations which, in their native country are reserved for the halt, the lame, or the blind; but the fault is not theirs. It is part and parcel of the evil attendant on the great social problem, and until labour has

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<sup>69</sup> V Marano, 'The Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 13 December 1887, 2.

<sup>70</sup> John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007), 83.

<sup>71</sup> Andonis Piperoglou, "Vagrant "Gypsies" and Respectable Greeks: A Defining Moment in Early Greek-Melbourne, 1897–1900," in *Reading, Interpreting, Experiencing: An Inter-Cultural Journey into Greek Letters*, ed. M. Tsianikas, G. Couvalis, and M. Palakstoglou (Adelaide: Modern Greek Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand, 2015), 140-51.

shaken off its shoulders the weight of accumulated injustice, men will ever be compelled to resort to whatever means of livelihood is within their reach, no matter how unsuited it may be to their physical and mental attainments.<sup>72</sup>

However, the man who was most invested in the cause of labour – not just Italian labour in Australia but of labour worldwide – refused any such attempts to find a defence of Italians either by highlighting respectable traits such as self-sufficiency and independence or by drawing attention to systemic issues that constrained the choices of Italian migrants. Instead, the socialist Francesco Sceusa attributed their engagement in such occupations as hawking fruit and busking to the individual deficiencies of a particular type of Italian migrant. Rather than being hard-working, self-sufficient or independent, Sceusa saw them as examples of the bad migrant which he constructed through his own distinction between respectable and unrespectable articulated through his use of the terms ‘colonist’ or ‘worker’ for the former and ‘vagrant’ or ‘loafer’ for the latter. According to Marianna Piantavigna, the distinction between ‘colonist’ and ‘vagrant’ was based on a promotion of work as the most fulfilling aspect of life and a condemnation of attitudes that refused or showed disrespect towards an ‘Italian-Australian way of life’ that had hard work at its centre. As such, Piantavigna argues, ‘people presenting borderline behaviour or attitudes labelled as not socially acceptable are not recognised as belonging to the same “imagined community”, and are rejected, especially in their being Italian.’<sup>73</sup> This point is further elaborated below.

Sceusa’s unwillingness to see the hard work of the other Italians also meant that, like Besomo, he argued that the comparison between Italians and the Chinese was an unfair one. However, unlike Besomo who demanded an apology on behalf of the Italians, Sceusa argued that it was unfair on the Chinese:

Your paper states that there is another race of Chinese in Sydney, composed of organ-grinders, harp-players, fruit-sellers, which are no better than the almond-eyed Mongolians, and as enervating and demoralising as the latter. I agree, and add: more

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<sup>72</sup> ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *The Australian Star*, 14 December 1887, 5.

<sup>73</sup> Marianna Piantavigna, “‘Cement, Guide and Representative for the Exile and the Emigrant’: Ideological Discourse and Italianità in L’italo-Australiano,” in *The Transnational Voices of Australia’s Migrant and Minority Press*, ed. Catherine Dewhirst and Richard Scully (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 51.



degenerated, more corrupting and demoralising; for while the poor, despised Mongolians work hard to earn a livelihood, the former are lazy parasites, abhorring any material or mental strain; disguised beggars, contemptible enough to disgrace not only the countries where they were born, and the countries that tolerate their presence, but the human species also.<sup>74</sup>

Sceusa's response shows that he had no interest in claiming a sense of respectability for the Italian subjects of *The Australian Star's* article. However, regardless of how the Italian letter writers sought to define which Italians were respectable and which ones were not, they all recognised a distinction between two classes or types of Italians in Sydney and expressed a desire to see the unrespectable Italians punished, regulated or removed completely. They wanted this to be done through the application of municipal and police laws rather than 'the raising of race and class prejudices.'<sup>75</sup> In other words, they did not want Italians to be subject to specific race-based laws such as those that Chinese migrants were subject to, but rather wanted a stricter application of the laws that already existed. Marano's final point in his letter was that Italian workmen would welcome the disappearance of their compatriots who discredit the name of Italy.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, Sceusa reached out to all respectable residents of Sydney and asked them not to encourage the 'nuisances' by patronising vagrant musicians and fruit sellers. He also pointed out that 'Italian colonists', since they were most affected by this issue and felt most pain with regards to it, had been expressing these opinions and proposing these solutions for years.<sup>77</sup> The distinction between 'colonists' and 'vagrants' or 'loafers' is further examined in the next section with a closer reading of Sceusa's letter to *The Australian Star* and other texts that he wrote at this time.

### **Vagrants, loafers and real Italians**

In 'Hail Australia! Morituri te salutant!', the pamphlet he published in response to *The Australian Star*, Sceusa told a story which revealed that his opposition to the unrespectable Italians he had

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<sup>74</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>76</sup> 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 14 December 1887, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

labelled ‘loafers’ or ‘vagrants’ was not just political but also personal. In this story, Sceusa recounts a time when he was unemployed and looking for work. After unsuccessfully interviewing for a job, the Australian employer asked him, ‘why don’t you try and *do what other foreigners do* for a living?’ This was interpreted by Sceusa as a suggestion that he ‘go in the streets to sell fruit, or play fiddles or grind organs.’ Undeterred by this first rejection, Sceusa applied for another job but was once again unsuccessful and was offered similar advice when the employer gave him a note with the details of an organ-hirer and the suggestion that he go to him on the employer’s referral.<sup>78</sup>

This story can be read as an example of what Ghassan Hage has called ‘mis-interpellation’. Adapting the theories of Louis Althusser, Hage has defined racism as a racial process of interpellation – or, in other words, a process by which racialised subjects are produced. In doing so, Hage is able to differentiate between three forms of racialisation. The first is non-interpellation, which is the experience of invisibility where the racialised feel ignored and non-existent, they exist physically in the social realm but are not recognised in the symbolic order. The second is negative interpellation, where the racialised is made visible but they are placed in the symbolic structure of society in a space defined by negative characteristics. The third is mis-interpellation, which is a two-step process. Firstly, one is interpellated as a subject belonging to the collective body, which means they perceive themselves as being hailed by the collective body, and they answer this call as if it were addressing them. In the second step, they are ‘brutally reminded’ that they are not a part of this collective body. With this return of their particularity comes also the negative interpellation.<sup>79</sup>

Sceusa, having believed himself to be the subject hailed by the job advertisements, applied for them only to find out he was not the subject being hailed at all. In the process, he was forced to confront his particularity as a ‘foreigner’ which was the label that Sceusa had identified elsewhere in the pamphlet as the one that hurt the most: ‘Foreigner they have been calling me for ten long years, and with that name they have bestowed upon me the usual epithets of reproach and contempt – reproaching me with the very faults they encourage, support, patronise.’ After being

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<sup>78</sup> Sceusa, "Hail Australia! Morituri Te Salutant!," 11.

<sup>79</sup> Ghassan Hage, *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2015), 132-33.

called a foreigner, Sceusa was forced back to being an 'Italian' and was thus identified with the negative set of characteristics that were attributed to Italians. In Hage's terms, after being reminded that he was a 'foreigner', Sceusa was also identified with the negative interpellation of Italians of which the article in *The Australian Star* is one example. As Hage argues, the form of activism associated with negative interpellation is 'valorisation' as the negative image of the group is countered by stressing its positive attributes. Sceusa does this in this pamphlet through the use of civilisational arguments that identified Italy as the generative culture of nineteenth century English civilisation.<sup>80</sup> However, he also responded by distinguishing himself from the particular Italians that he held responsible for the negative image of the Italian that Australians had identified him with. The negative image of the group was therefore to be countered through splitting it into two: with one group to be valorised and the other to be denigrated. These groups were differentiated from each other through discourses of respectability and reduced to a distinction between 'Italian colonists' (or 'Italian workers') and 'vagrant loafers'.<sup>81</sup> It was this latter group that Sceusa held responsible for limiting his own personal opportunities in Australia and he channelled this contempt into his political writings and campaigns.<sup>82</sup>

It is significant that in Sceusa's language the respectable workers or colonists were marked as 'Italian' while the loafers were 'vagrant' as this was another strategy Sceusa used to counter the negative image of Italians. In addition to distinguishing between two types of Italians, Sceusa also argued that many of the unrespectable residents of Sydney that were identified as Italian were, in fact, not actually Italian. In his letter to *The Australian Star*, Sceusa criticised the newspaper for inveighing against Italians as a whole, rather than discriminating between them and 'a certain class of vagrants of various nationalities, amongst which, however, the Italian-

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<sup>80</sup> Sceusa, "Hail Australia! Morituri Te Salutant!," 4-5.

<sup>81</sup> This distinction between 'settled' and 'vagrant' was at the centre of discourses of vagrancy that colonial Australia had inherited from the British, see: Julie Kimber, "Poor Laws: A Historiography of Vagrancy in Australia," *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (2013): 537.

<sup>82</sup> Sceusa also channels this contempt into a violent fantasy situated within the story of his failed job applications in which he attacks an Italian organ-grinder after leaving the office of the second employer. Playing the anti-hero in this story, Sceusa also imagines facing a court room in which he finds himself up against representatives of an Australian colonial bourgeoisie that not only protects the Italian 'loafers' but also encourages them. In this sense, his story of the job hunt can also be read as an example of Australian employers excluding Italians from the formal labour market and encouraging them to engage in the informal economy. See: Sceusa, "Hail Australia! Morituri Te Salutant!," 11-12.

speaking element predominates' or between real Italians and 'the *migratory* race of cosmopolitan gypsies, which you dignify with the name of Italians.'<sup>83</sup> As Sceusa explained:

[T]he writer of the said article makes an egregious mistake when he asserts that these *white* Chinese are all Italians, and that all Italians are so. These "Chinese of Europe" are not all recruited from "King Humbert's Dominions." They come from every part of the Mediterranean shores – from Istria, Dalmatia, the Ionian Islands, Corsica, Malta, the North of Africa, &c, as well as from Italy; thus they are a cosmopolitan rabble of Austrians, Frenchmen, Greeks, *Franks*, besides Italians, and if the majority of them speak Italian, that is due to the Italian idiom, or something resembling it, is generally spoken in those countries since the days when Venice, Genoa and Pisa ruled supreme in the Mediterranean and minor seas.<sup>84</sup>

Sceusa was not alone in questioning the origins and identities of the so-called Italians in Sydney. For example, although the 1891 census recorded 1477 Italians in the colony of New South Wales, the Italian Consul, Vincenzo Marano claimed that there were only about 700 to 800 Italians in the colony.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, in the early-1890s, some Australian journalists attempted to correct their previous assumptions as to who was Italian, explaining that who was designated or professed to be Italian, were often actually Greek, Maltese, Cyprians, Austrians, 'or the product of that mixed race which speaks the lingua Franca, and has no definite nationality.'<sup>86</sup> The 'vagrant loafers' therefore resisted the neat categorisations of nation that were increasingly more important globally.

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<sup>83</sup> This quote is taken from the long form of the letter that was not published in *The Australian Star* but can be found in a collection of Sceusa's writings held at Biblioteca Fardelliana in Trapani, Italy. On so-called 'gypsies' from southern Europe during this period, see also: Piperoglou, "Vagrant "Gypsies" and Respectable Greeks: A Defining Moment in Early Greek-Melbourne, 1897–1900," 140–51.

<sup>84</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>85</sup> Theta, 'Strangers Within Our Gates: III. The Italians,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1893, 4.

<sup>86</sup> 'Marketing Fruit in Sydney,' *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 15 December 1894, 1203. See also: Theta, 'Strangers Within Our Gates: III. The Italians,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1893, 4; Special Reporter, 'Sydney's Fish Supply. The Woolloomooloo Market,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 May 1895, 4.

However, Sceusa did not deny that some of these ‘vagrant loafers’ were real Italians. Even if they were deemed to be ‘real Italian’ their links to the Italian nation were made problematic by their migration and settlement patterns. As Sceusa wrote:

I admit that a good many of these “Chinese of Europe” are real Italians, but between these vagrant Italians and the Italian *colonists* there is no link, no sympathy. The former are never represented in the national festivals, patriotic commemorations, and social gatherings of the latter; they have no thought or feeling for the country they were born in, as they have no consideration for that which shelters them; they have no name or too many assumed ones; no fixed residence; and, as you say, they are a set of ever erratic nomads, out of consular control or reach, and nobody knows whence exactly they came, where and how they live and where they go when they disappear.<sup>87</sup>

The events listed by Sceusa were the kind of occasions that Catherine Dewhirst has argued that community leaders created to ‘display and enact their identities which could be presented as a national peoplehood in a developing society.’<sup>88</sup> Such occasions during the colonial years included meetings to discuss matters important to the Italian community in Sydney and abroad and celebrations to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Garibaldi or the overthrow of the temporal power of the Pope.<sup>89</sup> The Italians who did engage in these occasions to enact their Italian identities did not always do so with the same intentions or purposes. For example, in March 1896 rival meetings were held on the issue of the war in Abyssinia with one meeting attended by Italians such as Marano and Fiaschi to raise funds for the Red Cross Society in Rome for the Italians wounded in the war and another meeting attended by socialists such as Sceusa and Munari to condemn the war.<sup>90</sup> For or against the war, they were still Italians.

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<sup>87</sup> Francis Sceusa, ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>88</sup> Dewhirst, “Inventing ‘Italians’: Experiences and Responses in Australia’s Colonial and Federation Societies,” 8.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example: ‘Meeting of Italians,’ *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 16 April 1881, 621; ‘Garibaldi,’ *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 2 June 1883, 6; ‘Anniversary of Garibaldi’s Death,’ *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 4 June 1883, 3; ‘The Overthrow of the Papal Temporal Power: Banquet of Italians,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 September 1885.

<sup>90</sup> For the pro-war faction, see: ‘Meetings of Italians in Sydney,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1896, 7. For the anti-war faction, see: ‘The Italians in Sydney,’ *National Advocate*, 17 March 1896, 2.

Another element in the display and enactment of identities and a public sense of unity for Italians was the establishment of communal infrastructure in the form of societies and newspapers. Italian societies such as the Italian Mutual Benefit Society associated with the right-wing of the Italian establishment and the Italian Workmen's Mutual Benefit Society associated with the left, as well as regional societies such as the *Circolo Eolie Isole* had a difficult time attracting community support.<sup>91</sup> The Italian school established by the Italian Mutual Benefit Society also faced similar troubles.<sup>92</sup> Italian-language newspapers which became more established in the 1900s, also failed to capture a wide readership amongst the Italians in Sydney. One of the reasons that has been given for this is the low rates of literacy amongst Italians of working class and peasant background.<sup>93</sup> In 1911, Giuseppe Capra, an Italian missionary in Australia, published a report in which he claimed that illiteracy was widespread amongst the Italians in Australia.<sup>94</sup> High rates of illiteracy meant that the newspapers were not able to be read by the majority of Italians nor were they necessarily representative of their interests anyway. For example, Cresciani has argued that newspapers such as *L'Italo-Australiano* and *Oceania* 'were owned by, and advocated the interests of, the Italian Establishment in Australia and of the business elite, and therefore were largely unrepresentative of the interests and the opinions of the majority of the illiterate, working class and peasant migrants.'<sup>95</sup> Even those newspapers which sought to represent the working class and peasant migrants, such as Giuseppe Prampolini's *Uniamoci*, were ignored by the majority of Italians. This was understood by contemporary Italians and historians since to be symbolic of the majority of Italians' interest in personal matters rather than political ones. In the final issue of *Uniamoci*, Prampolini wrote that 'our mission was not completely successful, not for fault of ours, but because of the social environment, in the main refractory to everything that is not in the personal interest.'<sup>96</sup>

There was also a lack of interaction between the Consulate and the majority of Italians. In 1911, Capra noted that 'there is almost no direct contact between the consul and Italian migrants, with the exception of infrequent, unavoidable business dealings.'<sup>97</sup> One of the reasons for this lack of

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<sup>91</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 60-61.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>93</sup> Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage*, 77.

<sup>94</sup> See: Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 60.

<sup>95</sup> "Italian Immigrants in Australia, 1900-22," *Labour History*, no. 43 (1982): 42.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in ibid., 42-43.

<sup>97</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, 60-61.

interaction was because the ‘other Italians’ were subject to unwanted surveillance by the consular authorities. For example, Sceusa told *The Australian Star* that Italian consular authorities sent information to the Italian Government on those who ‘discredited themselves and their countrymen by following avocations of an objectionable character.’<sup>98</sup> As was noted above, certain practices such as earning a livelihood through playing music in the streets had already been outlawed in Italy. Following on from this, Sceusa challenged the idea that was propagated by Australian journalists and commentators that Italians were making a lot of money before going back to Italy. Instead of going back to Italy, Sceusa argued that they ‘may shift from this to any other place where vagabonds without trade are allowed to fatten in peace.’ Italy would be the last place Sceusa expected the ‘vagrant Italians’ would choose to migrate to because they were not tolerated legally or socially there, even more than in cities such as Sydney. To return to Italy would mean being shamed for the vocations they engaged in abroad – or, even worse, they would be wanted by the police.<sup>99</sup>

The ‘vagrant loafers’ were constructed as a threat to respectable society in relation to their chosen vocations, mobility, questionable origins, ability to evade consular surveillance and estrangement from the sense of Italian nationhood that was constructed by the Italian Establishment in Sydney. By resisting the categorisations and apparatus of the emergent nation-states of both Australia and Italy, the ‘vagrant loafers’ constituted an ungovernable presence. Ungovernability, according to Hage, ‘is a quality that emerges when something escapes the relation between a government apparatus and what it is aiming to govern.’<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, ungovernability is ‘both a reflection of certain qualities and features that the process or the group possess and that makes it hard to govern, and a reflection of the capacity of the government apparatus to deploy itself on it, capture it both conceptually and institutionally, and govern it.’<sup>101</sup> In this sense, the ‘vagrant loafers’ were ‘the ungovernable’ of the emerging nation-states in both Australia and Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. These were states concerned with regulating and managing populations within its borders while controlling who entered and who left.

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<sup>98</sup> Francis Sceusa, ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Francis Sceusa, ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Ghassan Hage, “Multiculturalism and the Ungovernable Muslim,” in *Essays on Muslims & Multiculturalism*, ed. Raimond Gaita (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2011), 159-60.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

The 'vagrant loafers', or the 'other Italians' as I call them, have also become 'the ungovernable' of Italian immigration history. Their relative absence in the historiography is perhaps a reflection of the capacity and limitations of the historiography to capture this population conceptually and then to research it. The same characteristics that made this population a problem for Australian and Italian conceptions of nationhood have made this population a problem for a historiography that presupposes a relatively fixed idea of the Italian nation and therefore takes as its main focus those obvious markers of being Italian such as newspapers, political or community organisations, ethnic leaders and Italian citizenship or birth. This has remained a problem even for studies that historicise the Italian nation. For example, one preoccupation in the historiography has been the development of nationalism and patriotism outside Italy, with a particular focus on how Italian migrants came to identify with the Italian nation above other forms of identification such as with the family, hometown, region, occupation or religion. One common theme in these studies is the persistence of regional, provincial and village-based identities - that is, the sub-national attachments.<sup>102</sup> Rarely, has there been attention to attachments that predated and existed beyond the borders of the relatively new nation-state of Italy. Therefore, by focusing on the Establishment Italians, who firmly believed in themselves as Italians - regardless of whether they were conservative, liberal or socialist - historians of Italians in colonial New South Wales have missed an opportunity to study transnational challenges to the development of nationalism abroad.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, transnational in this sense would not simply denote the links between the country of origin and that of migration but would also need to incorporate the 'cosmopolitan rabble' who supposedly had 'no definite nationality'.<sup>104</sup> In colonial Australia, this rabble included the street musicians that Sceusa and his socialist comrades in the Italian Workmen's Mutual Benefit Society campaigned against in the early 1890s.

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<sup>102</sup> Dewhirst, for example, looks at 'regionalism versus nationalism': Dewhirst, "Inventing 'Italians': Experiences and Responses in Australia's Colonial and Federation Societies," 4. Similarly, Bosworth argued that 'there are many Italies': Richard Bosworth, "Immigration History and National History," *Altretalia* 4 (1990): 2. Furthermore, according to Baldassar, those 'many Italies' refer to village and regional identities: Loretta Baldassar, *Visits Home: Migration Experiences between Italy and Australia* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 77. See also: Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*.

<sup>103</sup> See, for example: Dewhirst, "Inventing 'Italians': Experiences and Responses in Australia's Colonial and Federation Societies," 4.

<sup>104</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3. On transnationalism, see: Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 2-3.



## Juvenile street musicians and flower sellers

The 'real Italians' or 'respectable Italians' wanted to work towards the disappearance of the unrespectable Italians who supposedly discredited the Italian name from the streets of Sydney. To achieve this goal, they attempted to aid police and legislators in punishing and criminalising the unrespectable practices and behaviours that some Italians were engaging in. One such practice was itinerant child labour which was allegedly founded on a system of kidnapping, trafficking and abuse that respectable Italians likened to a form of slavery.

In his letter to *The Australian Star* in December 1887, Sceusa wrote that in 1885 he had founded a newspaper called *L'Italo-Australiano*, the purpose of which was 'to put down the nuisances of organ-playing, fruit-selling, &c., as far as exercised by Italian-speaking folks.'<sup>105</sup> He also quoted from an article published in this newspaper in which outlined the background to the 'new slave trade' of Italian child labour:

The public are warned against encouraging in any possible way those juvenile harp and violin players who infest our streets. These children are, as a rule, hired or taken away under false pretences from their parents by unscrupulous persons, in reality slave traders, upon which we beg to direct the attention of the police. The children are compelled to give their masters ("fathers" or "uncles," as they call themselves) the last penny they earn, and receive in return beating, insufficiency of food, and are horribly neglected, nothing to say of the career of vagabondage and vice in which they are brought up. The Italian Government have adopted very stringent measures for preventing the emigration of these children, and the practice of such an infamous speculation abroad, and through the co-operation of the United States Government, have succeeded in stamping out this disgraceful trade in America by bringing the inhuman dealers to justice.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3. For more on Sceusa's *L'Italo-Australiano* newspaper, see: Amedeo Tosco, "Feature of Early Ethnic Italo-Australian Newspapers: A Case Study of *L'italo-Australiano* (1885)," *Italian Historical Society Journal* 13 (2005): 9-25; Piantavigna, "'Cement, Guide and Representative for the Exile and the Emigrant': Ideological Discourse and Italianità in *L'italo-Australiano*," 37-59. Piantavigna's study, in particular, focuses on this newspaper's opposition to begging, vagrancy and child labour.

<sup>106</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

This was a practice that Australian society had been aware of for decades. Stories of Italian child musicians and vendors employed and maltreated by a master or *padrone* had appeared in Australian media as early as the 1860s. However, it was something that had only existed elsewhere – in London, Paris or New York, for example. It was not until October 1887, less than two months before *The Australian Star* published its ‘Chinese of Europe’ article, that its possible existence in Australia was raised by someone outside of the Italian community. During a sitting of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, Louis Smith, the member for Mornington, brought the issue of child street musicians in Melbourne to the attention of the parliament and asked if the presence of these children could be the result of a new establishment in Victoria of ‘the abominable *padrone* system’ that had recently been crushed in the US by the New York Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children.<sup>107</sup> Such concerns were dismissed when the matter was investigated by the Victorian police who counted ‘only about seven foreign children employed as street musicians’, most of whom had lived with parents or guardians and there was no reason to believe that any of them had been mistreated.<sup>108</sup>

Respectable Italians in Sydney, however, continued to endeavour to bring the issue before the wider public and demanded actions be taken to bring the alleged practice to an end. This movement found an outlet after Sceusa founded the Italian Workmen’s Mutual Benefit Society in February 1891 whose first campaign took up the issue of Italian child labour. In August 1891, a deputation of Italians made up of members of the society met with NSW Premier Henry Parkes and presented to him a petition which described the practice in terms of slavery, abuse, and a burden on the wider community.<sup>109</sup> They were accompanied by two members of the Legislative Assembly: John Fitzgerald and Thomas Houghton.<sup>110</sup> Sceusa was the leader of this delegation and in the following month took the campaign to Melbourne where he addressed a meeting of Italians.<sup>111</sup> Within a few weeks, a deputation of Italians in Victoria, led by Joseph

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<sup>107</sup> ‘Legislative Assembly,’ *The Ballarat Star*, 26 October 1887, 2.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Parliament,’ *The Argus*, 26 October 1887, 4.

<sup>109</sup> F. Sceusa, ‘Juvenile Vagrancy,’ *Evening News*, 10 August 1891, 3.

<sup>110</sup> ‘Kidnapped Italian Children. Juvenile Musicians and Flower Sellers.’ *The Australian Star*, 6 August 1891, 6.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Some Startling Statements. Italian Children in Australia. Asserted to be Practically Enslaved. Alleged Sweating by Unscrupulous Speculators. What the Secretary of the Italian Workmen’s Society Says.’ *The Herald*, 5 September 1891, 2.

Fabbri, met with the Victorian Chief Secretary to discuss the problem and find strategies to stop it.<sup>112</sup>

Before examining the arguments put forward by these deputations in Sydney and Melbourne, it is necessary to note that it is difficult to know how many child street musicians or vendors there were in the Australian colonies in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. As noted above, Victoria police counted only seven child street musicians in October 1887. On his visit to Melbourne in September 1891, Francesco Sceusa told his audience that although ‘the evil’ was not as great in Melbourne as it was in Sydney, there were still about fifteen juvenile flower sellers under fourteen years of age and about three times as many musicians.<sup>113</sup> Researchers of Italian musicians in colonial Victoria have also argued that there is reason to believe that there were more than just the ‘seven foreign children’ counted by the Victorian police playing music on the streets of Melbourne.<sup>114</sup> However, no attempt has been made to make an accurate estimate of the number of child street musicians and itinerant vendors in any of the cities of Australia.

It is even more difficult to know how many of these children were employed by a *padrone* under the conditions described by Sceusa, Fabbri and their supporters or if such a system of immigration and employment existed in any significant form, if at all. In fact, some of Sceusa’s contemporaries had disputed his claims and denied the existence of any such practice in the Australian colonies. Oscar Meyer, an Italian businessman of Sydney, wrote in 1891 that, ‘[t]he vivid imagination of that gentleman [Sceusa] had discovered hundreds of little slaves who, as musicians and flower vendors, haunted our streets, working under stern compulsion for cruel masters, starved, ill-clad, and beaten to death.’ Furthermore, Meyer argued that ‘it was proved that of flower-vendors there were exactly 11, and they were decently clad, well fed, and well paid; while of young musicians (seven in number) none were working for masters, but all were assisting their fathers or otherwise helping to support their families.’<sup>115</sup> Researchers of Italian

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<sup>112</sup> ‘Italian Children and their Mode of Living,’ *The Age*, 25 September 1891, 6.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Some Startling Statements. Italian Children in Australia. Asserted to be Practically Enslaved. Alleged Sweating by Unscrupulous Speculators. What the Secretary of the Italian Workmen’s Society Says.’ *The Herald*, 5 September 1891, 2.

<sup>114</sup> See: Alison Rabinovici, “Migrant Musicians: Pictures and Stories from the Lucanian Community in Melbourne. Curatorial Essay,” *Italian Historical Society Journal (Special Issue on the occasion of the exhibition Musical Migrants: Pictures and stories from the Lucanian Community in Melbourne)* (2013): 12.

<sup>115</sup> Oscar Meyer, ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 December 1891, 6.

street musicians in Australia have also tended to downplay the phenomenon. Alison Rabinovici, for example, has argued that '[t]here is little evidence ... to suggest that such abuses occurred in any widespread way in Australia.'<sup>116</sup> Similar issues have been noted in studies of Italians in cities of other countries. In his research on the Italian child street musicians of London, Lucio Sponza has argued that the quantitative assessment of the phenomena by Italian benevolent societies, the Italian Government and the British media was much exaggerated and most evidence 'was too vague to be weighed too seriously.'<sup>117</sup> However, as Sponza argues, what the phenomena did show was a reflection of the society in which it existed. On the side of the British Establishment, reactions to the presence of child street musicians in London reflected 'that mixture of self-righteousness, guilt, fear and genuine philanthropy which made up the Victorian social conscience', while on the side of the Italian Establishment, which did not share the same liberal traditions as its British analogue, it was 'regarded as a matter of national shame, ignorance and barbarism.'<sup>118</sup> A similar tension between a British liberal tradition and Italian authoritarian tradition existed in Australia. For example, the petition that was presented to Henry Parkes in August 1891 by the Italian Workmen's Mutual Benefit Society blamed the inaction that resulted from their campaigns against Italian child labour on a 'morbid, false sentimentalism' and 'exaggerated notions of individual freedom.'<sup>119</sup>

The public discourse on Italian child workers in Australia focused on two particular vocations: street musicians and flower sellers. According to the petition given to Parkes by the Italian Workmen's Mutual Benefit Society, the majority of juvenile musicians were slaves in the power of masters who took them from their parents and used them to make money.<sup>120</sup> Their arrival in Australia was not described as a process of immigration but in terms of 'trafficking' or a 'slave trade'.<sup>121</sup> This was how Smith perceived the issue as well, claiming in Victorian parliament that children were being 'farmed' for the purpose of playing music to make money for 'hard and lazy

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<sup>116</sup> Rabinovici, "Migrant Musicians: Pictures and Stories from the Lucanian Community in Melbourne. Curatorial Essay," 12.

<sup>117</sup> Lucio Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Realities and Images* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), 159-60.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 160-61.

<sup>119</sup> See: F. Sceusa, 'Juvenile Vagrancy,' *Evening News*, 10 August 1891, 3.

<sup>120</sup> F. Sceusa, 'Juvenile Vagrancy,' *Evening News*, 10 August 1891, 3.

<sup>121</sup> 'Some Startling Statements. Italian Children in Australia. Asserted to be Practically Enslaved. Alleged Sweating by Unscrupulous Speculators. What the Secretary of the Italian Workmen's Society Says.' *The Herald*, 5 September 1891, 2.

taskmasters'.<sup>122</sup> As for the flower sellers, they were believed to be the children of parents struggling to make ends meet in Italy, forced to sell their children to a *padrone*.<sup>123</sup> Once in Australia, these children were supposedly put to work by their *padrone*, to whom they were forced to surrender their earnings. Failure to earn enough was punished by neglect or violence.<sup>124</sup>

It was also predicted that the Italian children engaged as street musicians or flower sellers would constitute a larger problem in the future. As they were not looked after adequately by their *padrone* nor given the opportunities to study or earn a trade, it was imagined that the children could not grow up to have a career in anything other than 'vice and vagabondage' and would become a burden on the wider community.<sup>125</sup> Their life chances were further inhibited by the morally perilous work they were engaged in, as flower sellers especially spent a large amount of time trying to sell their wares in bar rooms, 'surrounded by a vitiating atmosphere'.<sup>126</sup> The morally questionable future that Italian children were supposedly being set up for also became racially questionable when *The Australian Star* argued that instead of going to school, the boys were 'graduating thusly in an idle, good-for-nothing existence, which teaches them to despise honest toil, with a contempt similar to that of the Aboriginal'.<sup>127</sup> For girls specifically, questions of morality were also bound up in anxieties of both race and sexuality. An editorial published in *The Commonweal* asked:

What is the future before these girls? We know that as a matter of fact the majority must sink into prostitution, and live by alternate begging and immorality. With that, in the course of time, a half-caste race of degraded beings will grow up in the midst of us with all the vices of the Englishman and the Italian combines, and minus their virtues, a class

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<sup>122</sup> Quotes taken from: 'Street Musicians,' *The Australasian*, 21 January 1888; see also: 'Street Musicians in Melbourne,' *The Express and Telegraph*, 18 January 1888, 4.

<sup>123</sup> F. Sceusa, 'Juvenile Vagrancy,' *Evening News*, 10 August 1891, 3.

<sup>124</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3; F. Sceusa, 'Juvenile Vagrancy,' *Evening News*, 10 August 1891, 3.

<sup>125</sup> 'Some Startling Statements. Italian Children in Australia. Asserted to be Practically Enslaved. Alleged Sweating by Unscrupulous Speculators. What the Secretary of the Italian Workmen's Society Says,' *The Herald*, 5 September 1891, 2.

<sup>126</sup> F. Sceusa, 'Juvenile Vagrancy,' *Evening News*, 10 August 1891, 3.

<sup>127</sup> 'Italians in Sydney. The Chinese of Europe,' *The Australian Star*, 8 December 1887, 3.

which will live by itself, to itself, and as a constant prey upon and menace to Australian society!<sup>128</sup>

These Italian children, therefore, were not just considered a problem for the respectable Italians but had been generalised into a problem for all Australians. As Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel have argued, by the end of the nineteenth century ‘the state of childhood increasingly [served] as a barometer for the moral standings of the nation.’<sup>129</sup> Therefore, concerns about the respectability and morality of Italian children turned them into a potential problem for the emerging Australian nation which projected an image of itself as racially and sexually pure.<sup>130</sup>

A number of solutions were proposed to deal with this problem. The petition put before Parkes in 1891 asked that the practice be stamped out by either strict enforcement of existing laws or the adoption of fresh and effective legislation.<sup>131</sup> The Melbourne delegation also inquired about the possibility of special legislation being introduced, noting that special legislation had been made in relation to Chinese migrants to which the Chief Secretary replied that surely the Italians did not wish to be treated in the same way as the Chinese.<sup>132</sup> In both Sydney and Melbourne, the colonial governments possessed an aversion to race or nationality specific legislation in the case of Italians that they had not possessed in the legislation made in relation to the Chinese. Solutions, therefore, were to be found in the existing legislation. After it was deemed that the Neglected Children’s Act could not be applied in Victoria because it was only applicable to actually begging children, nor could the vagrant acts be applied in either colony because they weren’t technically vagrants either, the Industrial Schools Act of 1866 in New South Wales and the Education Act of 1872 in Victoria were considered the main legal solutions to the problem.

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<sup>128</sup> ‘Italian Flower Girls in Melbourne,’ *The Commonwealth and Workers’ Advocate*, 26 September 1891. Although Raelene Frances’s history of prostitution in Australia does not cover these Italian girls and women, she does tell the story of two Italian men, Antonio Carvelli and Alessandro Di Nicotera, who were described as ‘traffickers in women’ and ‘white slavers’, see: Raelene Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 178-86.

<sup>129</sup> Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire: Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>130</sup> See: Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 120-21.

<sup>131</sup> F. Sceusa, ‘Juvenile Vagrancy,’ *Evening News*, 10 August 1891, 3.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Italian Children and their Mode of Living,’ *The Age*, 25 September 1891, 6. A couple of days after this was reported on in the Melbourne press, Joseph Fabbri wrote to *The Age* to clarify to the newspaper and – more importantly – to his fellow Italians that he did not consider or wish for Italians to be on an equal footing with the Chinese, see: Joseph Fabbri, ‘Italian Children and their Mode of Living,’ *The Age*, 28 September 1891, 6.

Allen McLean, the Chief Secretary of Victoria, told the delegation that met with him in September 1891 that the only solution he saw was to enforce the provisions of the Act which required children to attend school a certain number of days per quarter.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, it was not necessary for new laws, just the stricter enforcement of them for Italian children – however, there were perceived impediments to this. In the ‘Chinese of Europe’ article, *The Australian Star* argued that these laws were not being enforced for Italians because the authorities did not value the lives of Italians as they looked upon the Italians as outside the sphere of citizenship.<sup>134</sup> Another problem in the enforcement of these laws was raised by the Under-Secretary for Education, who noted that most Italians attended Catholic schools, if they attended school at all, and these schools were subject to different conditions under law.<sup>135</sup> He also reported that a school attendance officer had informed the Minister for Education that Italian children were generally difficult to deal with ‘because of their unsettled and wandering life.’<sup>136</sup>

Two letters sent to the *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed attitudes to the enforcement of the Education Act in cases related to Italian children. In April 1888, John Haynes, a member of the NSW Legislative Assembly, wrote to suggest that a program be set up by which the young street musicians could be sent to a school for arts and music so that they could one day become great contributors to the arts in Australia.<sup>137</sup> Haynes also named two Italian artists – Augusto Lorenzini and Giovanni Fontana – who he felt would ‘gladly help to develop their little countrymen’s talent’.<sup>138</sup> Lorenzini replied with a letter that was published in the following day’s issue in which he expressed his support for Haynes’s proposal and stated that he was happy to help. Lorenzini also reiterated the arguments of other Italians such as Sceusa when he suggested:

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<sup>133</sup> ‘Italian Children and their Mode of Living,’ *The Age*, 25 September 1891, 6.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Italians in Sydney. The Chinese of Europe,’ *The Australian Star*, 8 December 1887, 3.

<sup>135</sup> ‘News of the Day,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 June 1888, 9. This was then responded to in a letter written by a Catholic. The purpose of this letter was essentially to defend Catholic education from public secular education. Against the insinuation that the compulsory clauses of the Public Instruction Act are not complied with in Catholic schools, it was argued that public schools would be worse than Catholic schools because Catholics pay for the education of their children and the children of others. See: ‘Neglected Italian (Catholic) Children,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 June 1888, 7.

<sup>136</sup> ‘News of the Day,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 June 1888, 9.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Neglected Italian Children,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1888, 5.

<sup>138</sup> ‘Neglected Italian Children,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1888, 5. For a biography of Lorenzini and his work, see: Scott Carlin and Megan Martin, *Augusto Lorenzini: Italian Artist Decorator in Victorian Sydney* (Glebe: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 2001).

That the public generally desist from encouraging these little waifs in their business as professional beggars by refusing to give them solicited pennies, for it is the consequence of the begging by these children proving remunerative that induces their parents to neglect their talents and so employ them; and I say, most decisively, that the school attendance officers are remiss in their duty if they neglect to put the compulsory clauses of the Education Act in force against their mercenary guardians.<sup>139</sup>

The other letter was from a writer who went by the initials 'WG' who was not so positive in his appraisal of the young musicians who he referred to as 'parapatetic boy violin torturers' who were 'invariably Italian, dirty of aspect, insolent of manner, adepts in the production of discordant sounds, and all apparently under 12 years of age'. While he did not suggest they be sent to a school to refine their chosen medium, WG did agree with Haynes that a formal education was the solution and pleaded 'to the authorities to have them arrested as vagrants, and sent on board the *Vernon*, where they might be taught some useful occupations.'<sup>140</sup> The *Vernon* was a nautical school ship moored in Sydney Harbour that had been established in 1867 and replaced in 1892 by its successor the *Sobraon*. According to John Ramsland, these ships were examples of a 'total institution' as they completely removed children from their family and surrounding environment in order to eradicate any environmental influence. On board, every moment of waking life was meaningfully employed toward the goal of producing excellent workers and 'ex-*Vernon* boys' became a popular source of labour in the colonies in unskilled and semi-skilled fields. The school also offered musical training to its students and it became a distinctive feature of its curriculum.<sup>141</sup>

According to the entrance books of these institutions, at minimum ten Italian boys were sent to either of these nautical school ships before the *Sobraon* was closed in 1911. At least three of these boys had been street musicians and one had been employed as an itinerant fruit vendor. In September 1894, Carlo Alberto De Luca was the first of the boy street musicians to be put on the *Sobraon* after he was found sleeping in an open closet at two o'clock in the morning. It was the third time that he had tried to run away from home and his father told the authorities that

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<sup>139</sup> A Lorenzini, 'Neglected Italian Children,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April 1888, 14.

<sup>140</sup> WG, 'The Public Schools Act and Street Musicians,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 June 1889, 5.

<sup>141</sup> John Ramsland, *Children of the Back Lanes: Destitute and Neglected Children in Colonial New South Wales* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1986), 206-07, 30-33.



he could no longer control him. The entrance book for the *Sobraon* includes a statement from Carlo in which he said that he would play music in streets and shops around Sydney, himself on the violin and his younger brother Eugenio on the harp, and that if he did not make enough money then he would be beaten by his father. He also stated that he knew about twenty other boys who had been sent on the *Sobraon*.<sup>142</sup> Within three years, Carlo was reunited with his younger brother when Eugenio was committed to the *Sobraon* in May 1897. He had been arrested on a warrant issued by his father after running away from home for a third time, the first of which was the occasion on which Carlo was sent to the *Sobraon*. Like his older brother, Eugenio explained that he had run away because he had been beaten by his father.<sup>143</sup> Eugenio was also an unfortunate victim of violence while playing music out in the streets when in December 1892, at only eight or nine years old, he was assaulted by an Australian woman who also broke his harp.<sup>144</sup> During their time spent onboard the *Sobraon*, there is evidence that at least Carlo was involved in the ship's music program as a 'band boy'.<sup>145</sup>

The De Luca brothers offer an interesting case study into how the 'other Italians' may have lived in Sydney. Their lives both affirm and contradict some of the assumptions that both the Italian and Australian establishments held regarding these Italians. They are examples of the highly mobile migrants of which Sceusa was suspicious. According to the records, older brother Carlo was born in Buenos Aires in Argentina, while Eugenio was born three years later at Saponara di Grumento in the province of Potenza in Italy where the boys' mother continued to live with their three other siblings. While this would suggest a highly mobile family that moved back and forth between Italy and other cities around the world, they were not the type of vagrants that, according to Sceusa, supposedly had 'no thought or feeling for the country they were born in'.<sup>146</sup> Both Carlo and Eugenio were educated at the Italian School in Druitt Street that was operated by The Italian Mutual Benefit Society of New South Wales. Nor were they the type of vagrant

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<sup>142</sup> Carlo De Luca in the Entrance Books for the Vernon and the *Sobraon*, 1867-1911, State Archives NSW; Series: NRS 3906; Item: 8/1745; Roll: 2886.

<sup>143</sup> Eugenio De Luca in Entrance Books for the Vernon and the *Sobraon*, 1867-1911, State Archives NSW; Series: NRS 3906; Item: 8/1746; Roll: 2887.

<sup>144</sup> The woman was Kate Brown, aged 33, and was known for being of the 'non-respectable' class, see: 'Brevities,' *Evening News*, 8 December 1892, 5.

<sup>145</sup> New South Wales Government. *Police Gazettes*. Series 10958, Reels 3129-3143, 3594-3606. State Records Authority of New South Wales. Kingswood, New South Wales, Australia.

<sup>146</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney,' *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

described by Sceusa as having ‘no consideration for [the country] that shelters them.’<sup>147</sup> Eugenio remained in Australia and when he became a naturalised British subject in 1926, an officer had described him as being of good character and able to be ‘regarded as more Australian than Italian’. At the time, his father Giuseppe had already been naturalised.<sup>148</sup> Eugenio De Luca’s application for naturalisation also demonstrates that although he had stayed in Australia since he arrived as a child in 1891, Eugenio continued to live a mobile life that saw him moving to Brisbane after he was released from the *Sobraon* before eventually settling in Melbourne.<sup>149</sup> In Melbourne he was employed as a musician at Paramount Theatre and had previously spent time working as an electrician.<sup>150</sup> De Luca, therefore, is an example of a child street musician that fits the narrative articulated by historians such as Rabinovici and Enzo Alliegro of musical migrants from the region of Lucania progressing from street bands to professional string bands or orchestras.<sup>151</sup> In this narrative, performing as itinerant buskers gave children a musical apprenticeship which they could eventually transform, through entrepreneurship and discipline, into a respectable trade working in theatres.<sup>152</sup>

Life histories such as the case of the De Luca brothers offer another glimpse into the complex lives of the other Italians, that cannot be easily placed within the binary of respectability and unrespectability that the Australian media and Italian *prominenti* used to divide the Italian community. Such discourses of respectability intersected with ideas of race and labour in colonial Sydney, expressed in epithets such as ‘the Chinese of Europe’, and prompted Italians such as Francesco Sceusa to differentiate between ‘real Italians’ and ‘vagrant loafers’ whose claims to Italian nationality were suspect. Through his writing and activism, Sceusa turned the lives of the other Italians into a problem that needed solving with state intervention. However, when the De Luca brothers were arrested and sent to the *Sobraon*, their cases received no comment in the media, suggesting that the issue of child street musicians had ceased to inspire the same urgency

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<sup>147</sup> Francis Sceusa, ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *The Australian Star*, 16 December 1887, 3.

<sup>148</sup> NAA: A1, 1926/11736, De Luca, E – Naturalisation certificate.

<sup>149</sup> NAA: A1, 1926/11736, De Luca, E – Naturalisation certificate.

<sup>150</sup> See: ‘Italian Divorce Suit,’ *Weekly Times*, 22 November 1924, 10.

<sup>151</sup> Enzo V. Alliegro, “Street Musicians, Vagrants and Migrants: The Construction of Cultural Diversity,” *Italian Historical Society Journal (Special Issue on the occasion of the exhibition Musical Migrants: Pictures and stories from the Lucanian Community in Melbourne)* (2013): 38; Rabinovici, “Migrant Musicians: Pictures and Stories from the Lucanian Community in Melbourne. Curatorial Essay,” 8-9.

<sup>152</sup> “Migrant Musicians: Pictures and Stories from the Lucanian Community in Melbourne. Curatorial Essay,” 13-15.

and concern that it had in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Sceusa and his Italian Workmen's Mutual Benefit Society, who campaigned on the issue in 1891, had already dropped it after a few months to focus its attention on the recruitment of Italian workers under contract for the North Queensland sugar industry. This was a campaign that drew on similar discourses of slavery and the figure of the 'vagrant loafer' and is examined in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2:

### North Queensland and the 'Chinesisation' of Italian Labour

The first group of Italian sugar industry workers arrived in North Queensland in December 1891 after Chiaffredo Fraire, an Italian businessman resident in the colony of Queensland, recruited 331 workers from the regions of Lombardy and Piedmont in northern Italy. The men were contracted to work as manual labourers on plantations for a couple of years before they would move on to buy their own farms. Their individual trajectories were supposed to mirror the trajectory of the sugar industry itself which was in the middle of industry-wide restructuring from a plantation to a centralised mill system. This transition was also a racial restructuring, from a reliance on 'black' or Asian 'throwaway labour' to white labour as the foundation of white settlement.<sup>1</sup> However, their recruitment under contract cast doubts over their suitability to participate in this new white settlement as contract labour was equated with slavery and indentured labour by a nascent labour movement determined to protect the status of free waged labour.

The most vocal opposition to Fraire's scheme came from a group of Italian socialists in Sydney called the Italian Workmen's Mutual Benefit Society. Led by Francesco Sceusa, this group organised across national borders to frustrate the scheme on the basis that they believed it to be a new form of slavery that would undercut the power of organised labour and would thus be detrimental for Italians residing in Australia by aggravating a public that was already against them. As a new form of slavery or indentured servitude, it was also argued that these Italians would be turned into 'white Kanakas' or 'white Chinese' and, as a consequence, would be made subject to restrictions on their right to arrive in Australia as free migrants. Although they were ultimately unsuccessful in frustrating Fraire's scheme, they mobilised in opposition to a subsequent attempt over fifteen years later to recruit a further 1050 Italian workers under contract in 1907.

In this chapter, I will begin by establishing the context in which Italians were recruited in 1891 and 1907. This was a period of economic and racial restructuring in the sugar industry as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Gaia Giuliani, "Throwaway Labour: Blackbirding and a White Australia," *Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia* 2, no. 2 (2011): 98-112.

in the colony of Queensland. After 1901, this restructure was given further importance by the new Commonwealth of Australia which formally inaugurated the White Australia Policy. This involved the introduction of legislation such as the Pacific Island Labourers Act which outlined the phasing out of South Sea Islander labour in Queensland's sugar industry.<sup>2</sup> I will demonstrate that schemes for the recruitment of Italian migrants to perform field work in the sugar industry were treated as experiments that could decide the fate of North Queensland as either an homogenously white society or a racially segregated society with white masters overseeing indentured black and Asian labour.

Secondly, I will look at how these schemes polarised an already ideologically divided Italian community – especially in Sydney which had a concentration of educated migrants. With the socialists on one side and an alliance of consular authorities, businessmen, merchants and professionals on the other, these two sides debated not only the specifics of the schemes but what it meant to be a patriotic Italian in Australia. With a focus on Sceusa and his fellow socialists, I argue that this specific group of Italians articulated a dual allegiance to their home country in Italy and their adopted country in Australia and reconciled any tension between these allegiances with an overarching allegiance to the working class.

Thirdly, I continue with my focus on the Italian socialists and locate their arguments against such schemes within a broader labour movement agitation against contract labour which involved the conflation of a number of labour systems between slavery and free waged labour. Starting with an examination of how Sceusa articulated the opposition to contract labour within an anti-slavery discourse, I then draw out the racial implications of this argument. I argue that the opposition to recruitment under contract was an attempt to resist processes of racialisation that made Italians 'black' or 'Chinese'. Sceusa himself used the term 'Chinesisation' to describe this process of racialisation.

In the final section of this chapter, I focus more closely on Sceusa's idea of 'Chinesisation'. After offering an analysis of what Sceusa means by his use of this term, I draw out its implications for

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<sup>2</sup> The 'two pillars' of the White Australia Policy were the Immigration Restriction Act and the Pacific Island Labourers Act, see: Stefanie Affeldt, "The Burden of 'White' Sugar: Producing and Consuming Whiteness in Australia," *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 52, no. 4 (2017): 446; Marilyn Lake, "White Man's Country: The Trans-National History of a National Project," *Australian Historical Studies* 34, no. 122 (2003): 354.

understanding how Italians encountered and learnt about race and racism in Australia. I argue that, for Italian socialists, their ideological commitment to internationalism was an obstacle that mitigated their acceptance and endorsement of whiteness and White Australia. This argument adds a new dimension to historical work on the development of a migrant racial consciousness in the Australian context which has hitherto focused only on the factors that facilitated a speedy identification with whiteness and White Australia.

### **Economic and Racial Restructuring in North Queensland**

Following a period of ‘spectacular growth’ between 1879 and 1884, the sugar industry in North Queensland experienced a period of depression between 1885 and 1889.<sup>3</sup> The depression began when the global price of sugar plummeted in the early 1880s after a drastic oversupply of sugar entered the market as a result of the expansion of the beet sugar industry in Western Europe.<sup>4</sup> Depression in the sugar industry had importance far beyond the industry itself; it was seen as a threat to the British possession and settlement of North Queensland. At the end of the 1880s, cane acreage still accounted for over 25 per cent of the cultivated land in Queensland. Along with the high amounts of capital and labour attached to the industry, this ‘meant that the industry’s plight had ramifications for the Queensland economy at large.’<sup>5</sup> The downturn in sugar production affected other industries such as iron foundries, engineering works, the timber industry, ironmongery, local agriculture, and the shipping trade.<sup>6</sup>

In 1889, a Royal Commission into the causes of depression in the sugar industry recommended the construction of central mills combined with the subdivision of large estates and that Melanesian labour be made available to all white people involved in the sugar industry, regardless of whether they were owners of large plantations or small scale farms. This second recommendation was ignored by the Queensland colonial government led by Samuel Griffith

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<sup>4</sup> Kay Saunders, *Workers in Bondage : The Origins and Bases of Unfree Labour in Queensland, 1824-1916* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1982), 144.

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Graves, *Cane and Labour: The Political Economy of the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1862-1906* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

when it passed two bills to promote the restructuring of the state's sugar industry and white settlement of the coastal regions in the north of the colony. The first decreed that no more Melanesians could enter the colony after 31 December 1890, and the second outlined provisions for the first experimental central mills at Mackay.<sup>7</sup> These central mills were to replace plantations that had been developed and consolidated in the districts north of Bundaberg during an earlier period of growth stimulated by the entry of large scale capital from Victoria and Britain.<sup>8</sup> The plantation model was considered by Griffith's government to be responsible for the poor state of the industry and they wanted to replace it with a system based on smaller properties owned and worked by white farmers. To encourage this it was necessary to restrict access to the Melanesian and Asian labour that the plantation system relied upon and create co-operative central mills to break the reliance of small farmers on the large plantations and construct the economic infrastructure that would allow a class of white, independent farmers to prosper.<sup>9</sup>

The colonial government's position on Melanesian labour is what differentiated it from the opposition led by Thomas McIlwraith, who apart from his involvement in politics was heavily invested in Queensland's primary industries, including ownership of substantial sugar lands in the Burdekin and Burnett districts. For McIlwraith, the issue of Melanesian labour was purely a business issue and he was sympathetic to the argument from plantation owners that Melanesian labour was necessary to maintain sugar production. Despite his support for the prolonged use of Melanesian labour, McIlwraith was, like Griffith, a supporter of a 'White Queensland'. However, unlike Griffith who believed that a 'White Queensland' needed white labour, McIlwraith's notion of a 'White Queensland' was one that was 'a white man's colony, influenced by white men and owned by white men' with a Melanesian labour force to do the tasks that white workers would not.<sup>10</sup> These perspectives, Julia Martinez argues, are two competing constructions of whiteness that she has labelled 'colonial' and 'nationalist'.<sup>11</sup> The 'colonial' framework took the Dutch in Indonesia and the British in Malaya as its inspiration and

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<sup>7</sup> Saunders, *Workers in Bondage: The Origins and Bases of Unfree Labour in Queensland, 1824-1916*, 144-47.

<sup>8</sup> Graves, *Cane and Labour: The Political Economy of the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1862-1906*.

<sup>9</sup> Saunders, 144.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Lyndon Megarrity, "'White Queensland': The Queensland Government's Ideological Position on the Use of Pacific Island Labourers in the Sugar Sector 1880-1901," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 52, no. 1 (2006): 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Julia Martinez, "Constructing the 'White' Worker in North Australia," in *Historicising Whiteness Conference (2006: Melbourne, Vic.)* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007), 115-23.

envisioned a white minority dominating indigenous and imported Asian and Melanesian labour, while preserving the status of whiteness by never engaging in manual labour. The 'nationalist' framework on the other hand had a white nation with a white working class as its ideal. In the context of northern Australia, this required the segregation of indigenous Australians and the deportation of Asian and Melanesian workers so that a white working class could form without the parallel development of an economic underclass of 'coloured labour' that would constantly serve to undercut the conditions and wages of white workers.<sup>12</sup> These differing conceptualisations of 'White Queensland' and later 'White Australia' would remain a common feature of racial thinking in Queensland and other parts of Tropical Australia until the early 1910s when sugar was cultivated almost exclusively by white workers.<sup>13</sup>

Fraire's scheme, commissioned by the Queensland Government, to recruit Italians to do the field work usually done by Melanesian and Asian labour, was treated as an experiment to solve this 'White Queensland' debate once and for all. The success or failure of the Italians was to prove definitively whether or not a multiracial society reliant on the manual labour of South Sea Islanders was the pragmatic reality of life and industry in the tropics. As one writer for the *Gympie Times* articulated the importance of the scheme when reporting on the arrival of Fraire's recruits in December 1891:

Candidly speaking, the Italians seem to be an honest looking lot of fellows, and evidently *bona-fide* agricultural laborers, who ought to prove highly suitable for plantation work, if it can be done by a European. The sugar question is now about to be solved, for if the rough, able fellows just arrived from Italy prove unfit for the work it will be established beyond a doubt that the sugar industry must either perish or be worked as heretofore by the kanaka.<sup>14</sup>

They had their answer only a few months later, when in February 1892, some of the Italians under contract absconded and had made their way to Cairns, while those who remained were

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Megarrity, "'White Queensland': The Queensland Government's Ideological Position on the Use of Pacific Island Labourers in the Sugar Sector 1880–1901," 12.

<sup>14</sup> 'The Italians at Bundaberg,' *Gympie Times*, 10 December 1891, 1.



reported to be dissatisfied with their situation.<sup>15</sup> On a visit to the Macknade plantation where the Italians were employed in field work alongside 'Englishmen, Javanese, Malays, kanakas and Chinamen', William Hodgkinson, Secretary for Mines and for Public Instruction of Queensland, reported: 'Of the cosmopolitan collection of labourers, the South Sea boys were fat, strong, healthy and contented; the Javanese were slighter and seemed less robust; the Chinese, as usual, were stolid; but the Italians were unsettled and discontented.'<sup>16</sup>

The failure of the scheme vindicated the 'colonialist' opponents of the scheme and it was believed to be proof that Melanesian labour was necessary for the sugar industry to survive. Opponents of Melanesian labour prior to the failure of the Fraire scheme such as Griffith and Hodgkinson, conceded that South Sea Islanders were the most reliable workers for the sugar industry, especially after attempts at introducing Malay and Javanese labour were also deemed failures.<sup>17</sup> In February 1892, barely two months after the arrival of the Italians, Griffith released another manifesto in which he pointed out that in the vast majority of places where the preliminary work had not been done, there was a shortage of labour and farmers had found farming hard enough without taking on the manual labour that this preliminary work demanded. While claiming to still recognise his prior reasons for opposing Melanesian labour 'as fully as ever', Griffith now believed that to struggle on with the current labour shortage for doing the preliminary work for dividing the large plantations and developing small farms would mean putting the industry in danger of extinction and the only available labour that was proven to be reliable was Melanesian labour. In its concluding paragraphs, the manifesto declared that to reach 'the great end of setting up a European population upon the lands of the colony, and the maintenance of our free political institutions' there was no other alternative than to permit, at least temporarily, the continued employment of Melanesian labour.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> 'Hon. W. O. Hodgkinson. Interviewed by the Telegraph. Italian and Black Labour.' *Darling Downs Gazette*, 27 February 1892, 3.

<sup>16</sup> 'Hon. W. O. Hodgkinson. Interviewed by the Telegraph. Italian and Black Labour.' *Darling Downs Gazette*, 27 February 1892, 3.

<sup>17</sup> 'The Javanese Strike at Geraldton,' *Cairns Post*, 10 February 1892, 2; 'The Sugar Industry,' *Cairns Post*, 13 February 1892, 2; 'Kanaka Immigration Revived,' *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 15 February 1892, 4.

<sup>18</sup> 'Polynesian Labor,' *Western Star and Roma Advertiser*, 17 February 1892, 4.

A few years later in January 1897, the Brisbane *Telegraph* reported on an Italian community at Millbank near Bundaberg and found that the Italians there were also employers of Melanesian labour.<sup>19</sup> This is a reflection of statistical change in the sugar industry following Griffith's manifesto allowing for the continued use of Melanesian labour: in 1892 there were 450 sugar farmers compared to 1450 in 1897 and in 1892 the number of employers of Melanesian labour was 195 compared to 1264 in 1899.<sup>20</sup> The number of South Sea Islanders employed remained relatively stable during the 1890s, however the ratio of employers to South Sea Islanders rose from 1:44 in 1892 to 1:7 in 1899. The rise in the number of cane farmers was accompanied by a rise in the number of employers of Melanesian labour.<sup>21</sup> As the industry was restructured around the small farm and the central mill, the modest farmer became the dominant employer of South Sea Islanders rather than the plantation.<sup>22</sup> It was therefore accepted that Melanesian labour could be used in conjunction with rather than against the reconstruction of the industry along the central mill model.

The majority of South Sea Islanders going to smaller farms were time-expired workers rather than the first-contract workers, of whom there was a decrease in number and their labour was completely monopolised by the remaining large plantations. They received higher wages, meaning they were only engaged for the peak period of the season; during the slack season they sought work in other industries. The transformation of South Sea Islanders from indentured plantation workers to higher-paid seasonal farm workers caught the attention of unionised white workers who had previously not regarded them as a threat – hereafter, they were no longer generators of employment but competitors. As a result, racial ideas surrounding Melanesian workers and field work shifted – it was no longer strategic to argue that they were peaceable or law-abiding and new racial stereotypes based on markers of unrespectability emerged. Additionally, calls for restrictive legislation against Melanesian labour also re-emerged.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 'Italians Employ Kanakas,' *The Telegraph*, 22 January 1897, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Saunders, *Workers in Bondage: The Origins and Bases of Unfree Labour in Queensland, 1824-1916*, 153.

<sup>21</sup> Graves, *Cane and Labour: The Political Economy of the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1862-1906*, 60.

<sup>22</sup> Saunders, *Workers in Bondage: The Origins and Bases of Unfree Labour in Queensland, 1824-1916*, 153.

<sup>23</sup> Graves, *Cane and Labour: The Political Economy of the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1862-1906*, 66. For more on the recruitment of South Sea Islanders in the sugar industry and the indentured labour trade of colonial Queensland, see: Clive Moore, *Kanaka: A History of Melanesian Mackay* (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and University of Papua New Guinea Press, 1985); Tracey Banivanua-Mar, *Violence and Colonial Dialogue: The Australian-Pacific Indentured Labor Trade* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); Laurence Brown, "'A Most Irregular Traffic': The Oceanic Passages of the Melanesian Labor Trade," in *Many Middle*

New restrictive legislation came soon after Federation when the new Commonwealth Government passed the Pacific Island Labourers Act in 1901. This Act outlined the process by which Melanesian labour in Queensland would be phased out by the end of 1906. Although this piece of restrictive legislation was accompanied by the Excise Tariff Act of 1902 and the Sugar Bounty Act of 1905 which provided economic protection to the industry while it transitioned to white labour, the same anxieties of the 1880s and 1890s arose as the date of deportation loomed closer. It was once again feared that the end of Melanesian labour would create a labour shortage that would spell the end for the sugar industry and white settlement in the north. Sugar planters, for example, believed that only half of the necessary labour required to replace the South Sea Islanders could be found in Australia with the rest needing to be recruited from overseas.<sup>24</sup> An Italian solution was once again sought in November 1906, when Prime Minister Alfred Deakin approved a scheme for the Mossman Central Mill Company to recruit under contract 50 agricultural labourers from Italy. According to Deakin, this was just one of several approved contracts of ‘reputable white labourers’ for the sugar plantations.<sup>25</sup> A few months later in February 1907, permission was given for the recruitment of a total of 1050 Italians in three batches.<sup>26</sup> Recruitment efforts were initially delayed by Italian authorities who refused to allow their citizens to emigrate without seeing the conditions of the contract first.<sup>27</sup> However, these issues were sorted out as enough Italians were successfully recruited and, joining the earlier arrivals, laid the foundations for chain migration flows that would become important in the interwar period.

In 1908, *L'Italo-Australiano* reported on a settlement of about 300 Italians in the Herbert River area who had all arrived as a result of chain migration beginning with four Italians. One of them was Mario Brigando, originally from Turin, who first worked on a contract at the Macknade plantation before buying his own sugar farm. Brigando told *L'Italo-Australiano* that the Italians

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*Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*, ed. Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, and Marcus Rediker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 184-203.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Advance Australia: Peopling the North. Replacing the Kanakas. 1000 Italians to be Imported.’ *Daily Telegraph*, 19 February 1907, 6.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Mossman Sugar Mills. Italian Labourers.’ *The Telegraph*, 9 November 1906, 2.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Advance Australia,’ *Daily Telegraph*, 19 February 1907, 6.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Peopling the North. Italians for Queensland.’ *The Argus*, 21 February 1907, 7; ‘Latest Cables,’ *Border Watch*, 23 February 1907, 3.

in the district were able to earn well with the assistance of the sugar bounty.<sup>28</sup> While stories like Brigando's were held up as proof that Fraire's and subsequent schemes to recruit Italians under contract were beneficial, not all Italians shared this view. In fact, from the very beginning, the Italian community in Australia was deeply divided on the issue of recruiting Italians under contract for field work in the sugar industry.

### **A divided Italian community**

Plans to recruit Italians under contract to work in the cane fields of North Queensland polarised Italians already living in Australia. This was especially the case in Sydney where the Italian community was already ideologically divided between the consular authorities, merchants and businessmen who were supportive of the schemes on the one side and a group of socialists who were strongly opposed to such schemes on the other. These competing factions debated each other, challenged each other on their sense of patriotism or lack thereof, and aligned themselves with their ideological allies in the broader Australian public. This section will examine the polarisation of Italian Australia, with a particular focus on the socialist opposition to the schemes, its alliances with the Australian labour movement, and the criticism it faced from the more moderate and conservative sections of the Italian community and broader Australian society.

In 1891, the socialist opposition to Fraire's scheme was led by Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Workmen's Mutual Benefit Society (IWMBS) which had been founded in February of that year and was dedicated to providing material support and assistance for Italian workers in the Australian colonies as well as protecting their political and economic interests.<sup>29</sup> The IWMBS was made up of two generations of exiles. The first generation of exiles left Italy in the 1870s, in the aftermath of peasant and anarchist insurrections in the regions of Campania and Sicily in 1874. In Australia, this generation came in contact with exiles from all over Europe, including the British bootmakers and printers who established a chapter of the International

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<sup>28</sup> 'Italians on the Sugar Plantations of North Queensland: An Interview with Mario Brigando,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 18 January 1908, 6.

<sup>29</sup> 'Italian Workmen's Society,' *Evening News*, 9 February 1891, 2; *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 February 1891, 6.

Workingmen's Association in 1872 and French communards who arrived in those urban centres in the 1870s as escaped convicts sent to New Caledonia in the aftermath of the failed Paris Commune in 1871.<sup>30</sup> It was with the assistance of members of this latter group that Sceusa founded the International Socialist Club in Sydney in 1879.<sup>31</sup> Sceusa's generation of exiles was joined two decades later by another generation of exiles who left Italy in the 1890s after authorities cracked down on radicals in the aftermath of a peasant uprising in Sicily in 1894 and the Milan riots of 1898. This generation of exiles included men such as Pietro Munari, Quinto Ercole, Giuseppe Giovanardi, Carlo Bentivoglio, Divo De Marco, Adalgiso Fiocchi, and Giuseppe Prampolini – all of whom emigrated from Italy's northern regions.<sup>32</sup> There were also Italian exiles in other cities of Australia, such as Enrico Versi, who as a member of the Australian Socialist Party's executive committee and the Garibaldi Club in Melbourne, wrote a number of letters and articles in support of Sceusa and his causes.<sup>33</sup>

Sceusa oversaw the campaign against Fraire's plan through the IWMB's 'Labour Protection Branch' and he was entrusted with the task of communicating the campaign to the broader public – a task which he performed through public speeches and written correspondence with the press and labour movement organisations in both Australia and Italy. It can be assumed that Sceusa conducted this correspondence with some degree of autonomy until he was censured by other members of the IWMB in response to a letter he wrote to the NSW Trades and Labour Council on the society's behalf in December 1891 after Fraire's recruits arrived in Queensland and the society's council thereafter reserved the right to revise all important communications in the future.<sup>34</sup> In 1906 and 1907, Sceusa once again led the campaign against schemes to recruit Italians under contract for the sugar industry, however since the IWMB had already disbanded his efforts were tied to his role as Australian correspondent for *Avanti!*, the official newspaper

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<sup>30</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, "The Making of a New Society: Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Intellectual Reformers in Australia 1876-1906," in *Stories of Australian Migration*, ed. John Hardy (Kensington, N.S.W.: New South Wales University Press, 1988), 85.

<sup>31</sup> 'An Italian Socialist,' *The Socialist*, 22 June 1907, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Cresciani, "The Making of a New Society: Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Intellectual Reformers in Australia 1876-1906," 85-87, 92-93.

<sup>33</sup> 'The Socialist Party,' *The Socialist*, 28 September 1907, 3; 'Comrade F. Sceusa: Entertained by the Socialist Party,' *The Socialist*, 18 January 1908, 4.

<sup>34</sup> *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1.

of the Italian Socialist Party.<sup>35</sup> This time around, he was also supported by other Italian socialists who were aligned with the Australian Socialist Party in Victoria.<sup>36</sup>

Sceusa believed that campaigns against undesirable immigration could only be successful if they were led by migrants themselves who organised amongst their fellow countrymen in both their lands of adoption and origin. As such, his major tactic to disrupt the efforts of Fraire and other agents was to write to Italy and convince prospective migrants to refuse to be recruited into their schemes. In the 1891 campaign, the first of his letters arrived in June and was promptly circulated in the local newspapers of Piedmont and Lombardy to warn of Fraire's upcoming visit to those regions.<sup>37</sup> A series of cables sent from London during that month show that early on in the month, Fraire had successfully found enough recruits who would leave from Genoa in July and they had all been granted permission to emigrate by the Italian government.<sup>38</sup> However, by late June, another cable from London reported that Fraire was experiencing some difficulty in recruiting his target of 350 peasants and the date of embarkation was delayed until August.<sup>39</sup> Writing to *The Australian Workman*, Sceusa claimed the credit for frustrating Fraire's plan on behalf of the IWMBS.<sup>40</sup> By December, after Fraire's recruits arrived in Brisbane, Sceusa's tone was less celebratory when he conceded that the efforts of the IWMBS had ultimately failed to stop the scheme.<sup>41</sup> In the 1907 campaign, Sceusa tried similar tactics, writing to the direction of the Italian Socialist Party and writing articles for their newspaper. While being ultimately unsuccessful once again in 1907, Sceusa had also found some cause for celebration early in that campaign when in May the Italian Socialist Party brought the issue before the Italian Parliament, after he had been in correspondence with the party since the previous December, and the Italian Government consequently refused to sanction the scheme for some time – during which, the CSR agent considered trying to recruit workers from Austria instead.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Queensland and European Immigration,' *The Socialist*, 23 March 1907, 6.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example: Enrico, 'The Immigration to Queensland: The Italian Case,' *The Socialist*, 4 May 1907, 3.

<sup>37</sup> 'Italian Immigrants for Queensland,' *The Australian Workman*, 27 June 1891, 2.

<sup>38</sup> 'Italian Immigration,' *The Northern Mining Register*, 13 June 1891, 6; 'Permitted to Emigrate,' *The Northern Mining Register*, 20 June 1891, 16.

<sup>39</sup> "'Signor' Fraire,' *The Northern Mining Register*, 27 June 1891, 7.

<sup>40</sup> 'Italian Immigrants for Queensland,' *The Australian Workman*, 27 June 1891, 2.

<sup>41</sup> 'Italian Labor,' *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1.

<sup>42</sup> 'An Appeal to the Labor Organizations: Italian Immigration,' *The Worker*, 7 March 1907, 2; Francis Sceusa, 'Queensland and European Immigration,' *The Socialist*, 23 March 1907, 6; 'Slaves for the Sugar Fields,' *The Queanbeyan Leader*, 7 May 1907, 2; Francis Sceusa, 'Can't Catch 'Em,' *The Worker*, 16 May 1907, 7.

In a letter to the NSW Trades and Labour Council, Sceusa attributed the failure of 1891 mainly to the fact that other members of the Italian community in Sydney, who he identified as ‘a party of Italian employers, ex-special constables, musicians, and others of our natural enemies in this city’, had been in correspondence with the conservative press of major Italian cities such as Rome, Naples and Milan. According to Sceusa, this group ‘warned the public against us, asserting that we are unpatriotic anarchists at the service of Australian labour unions, working for the cause of disorder and rebellion; that we are liars in saying that our compatriots are not wanted here, Australians loving the Italian race above all foreigners, etc., etc.’<sup>43</sup> One of his opponents in Sydney was Oscar Meyer who responded to this letter through a letter of his own sent to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in which he sought to discredit Sceusa through a mixture of argument and personal attacks.<sup>44</sup> Meyer, who had been described by *Truth* editor John Norton as a ‘foreign-trade understrapper’ and ‘an Italian gentleman with a German-Jew name’<sup>45</sup> was, in May 1892, a founding member, alongside Vice-Consul Vincenzo Marano and Doctor Tommaso Fiaschi, of another society to assist new arrivals from Italy by offering them advice such as the best places to find employment and the best land to be occupied.<sup>46</sup> Sceusa and Meyer were also involved in a public feud in September 1900 related to the assassination of King Umberto.<sup>47</sup> Despite being prominent figures on two sides of the ideological divide in Sydney’s Italian community, Meyer and Sceusa attended the same social events attended by prominent Italians and Sceusa had previously been involved in political and mutual aid organisations with some of Meyer’s allies.<sup>48</sup> Sceusa’s letter also received a critical response from Luigi Cervetto of the Italian Democratic Club in Brisbane who wrote a letter to the IWMBBS in January 1892 expressing his disapproval with Sceusa’s actions and disagreement with his ideas.<sup>49</sup> By 1907, Sceusa and other Italian

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Italian Labor,’ *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Oscar Meyer, ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 December 1891, 6.

<sup>45</sup> John Norton, ‘An Open Letter to Commendatore Pasquale Corte, Italian Consul-General in Australia,’ *Truth*, 19 September 1897, 1.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Italian Residents,’ *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 7 May 1892, 1074.

<sup>47</sup> In this feud, Sceusa accused Meyer of destroying letters in which he had criticised the late King. See: Oscar Meyer, ‘Letter Stealing: Signor Sceusa “Oscarmeyered”,’ *Truth*, 23 September 1900, 2; Francis Sceusa, ‘Stolen Letters: Sceusa Skewers Oscar Meyer,’ *Truth*, 30 September 1900, 7.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Sceusa and Meyer both attended a banquet held for Commendatore Pasquale Corte, the Italian Consul-General for Australia, when he visited Sydney in September 1897: ‘Welcome to the Italian Consul-General,’ *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 September 1897, 5. Before founding the IWMBBS, Sceusa had previously been involved in a benevolent society that he had founded in 1881 with Consul Marano: *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 13 April 1881, 2. Also, in 1890, Sceusa and Fiaschi collaborated to organise meetings of protest against *Worker* editor Oswald Keating: ‘An Italian Meeting,’ *The Australian Star*, 30 September 1890, 7.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Italian Immigration,’ *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 January 1892, 2.

socialists in Australia had found a new enemy in *L'Italo-Australiano*, a newspaper edited by merchant Giovanni Pulle that he founded in 1905, which was encouraging Italians to migrate to North Queensland.<sup>50</sup>

The debates in 1891 and 1907 involved a contest over the proper performance of patriotism, with each side of the ideological divide accusing the other of failing to be sufficiently patriotic to Italy. On both occasions, Sceusa and his fellow socialists were attacked by their fellow Italians as being unpatriotic. Cervetto, for example, advised the IWMBS that it was neither wise nor prudent nor patriotic for an Italian organization 'to hold out before the eyes of excited parties the faults, real or imaginary, which justly or unjustly, are attributed to Italians in these colonies.'<sup>51</sup> In less restrained terms, Oscar Meyer wrote that Sceusa possessed 'that kind of patriotism that consists in besmirching the fair name of one's native country.'<sup>52</sup> Some commentators in the Australian press joined in these attacks on Sceusa's patriotism – for example, an editorial in the *Darling Downs Gazette* argued that Sceusa and the IWMBS had successfully defamed their countrymen and that they were 'birds that delight in fouling their own nests'.<sup>53</sup> There was an implied accusation of selfishness in this editorial that also featured in an editorial in *The Brisbane Courier* that accused Sceusa and the IWMBS of possessing 'the most repellant' form of selfishness which, 'having itself tasted the sweets of the "land of the free," sees in compatriots who look wistfully in the same direction for escape from old world poverty only competing enemies to be repelled at the point of a slanderous tongue.'<sup>54</sup>

The Italian socialists countered these attacks by asserting their own sense of patriotism while also attacking the patriotism of others. In March 1908, Enrico Versi took the occasion of Italian novelist Edmondo de Amicis's death as an opportunity to attack the supposed patriotism of the consular authorities and the *L'Italo-Australiano*, arguing that instead of paying tribute to de Amicis, they were 'too busy on importing men to Queensland or Western Australia and calling

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<sup>50</sup> Enrico, 'The Immigration to Queensland: The Italian Case,' *The Socialist*, 4 May 1907, 3. For more on Pulle, see: Catherine Dewhurst, "Giovanni Pullè: Pioneer and Founding Father of Italian Ethnicity," *Spunti e Ricerche*, no. 17 (2003): 26-49.

<sup>51</sup> 'Italian Immigration,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 January 1892, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Oscar Meyer, 'Italians in Sydney,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 December 1891, 6.

<sup>53</sup> 'Ill Birds,' *Darling Downs Gazette*, 8 February 1892, 2.

<sup>54</sup> *The Brisbane Courier*, 28 December 1891, 4



that “patriotism”.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, when a group of socialists in Melbourne held a celebration to commemorate the centenary of Garibaldi’s birth in 1907, Enrico Versi pointed out that although Italy would be nothing if not for Garibaldi and Mazzini, the anniversary of his birth was ignored in Australia by ‘the representative of Savoy and other magnates’.<sup>56</sup> Figures such as Garibaldi and Mazzini were revered by socialist exiles such as Sceusa, Munari and Versi. On the occasion of Garibaldi’s death in June 1882, Sceusa organized a memorial service at the Garden Palace in Sydney which was reportedly attended by over ten thousand people.<sup>57</sup> On the tenth anniversary of his death in 1892, the Italian Democratic Club held an event at which Pietro Munari was one of the speakers.<sup>58</sup> Garibaldi and Mazzini represented an earlier period of exile and by invoking their memory, the exiles themselves linked the experience of exile to freedom and patriotism which then became bound up with notions of martyrdom and sacrifice.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, as Marianna Piantavigna argues, Garibaldi represented the ideals of freedom, equality and republicanism that Sceusa and his followers had used to define *italianità*.<sup>60</sup> As such, Italian socialist exiles in Australia were able to make a strong claim that while Italy was being destroyed and ravaged by capitalist forces that betrayed the initial vision of Italy, they were the ones that were keeping it alive – perhaps waiting until the right time to bring it home once again.

While their opponents like Cervetto were advising them ‘to abstain from taking part in the struggles between capital and unionism’ in Australia, the Italian socialists countered by arguing that intervening in these struggles was the properly patriotic thing to do.<sup>61</sup> As Sceusa maintained over the years, his main goal in opposing Italian immigration under contract was to protect the name of Italians in Australia and preserve their right to continue to migrate without restriction and the way to do this was to ensure that Italians were not used as ‘instruments of competition’

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<sup>55</sup> Enrico, ‘A Great Man Gone,’ *The Socialist*, 5 June 1908, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Enrico, ‘Italians in Melbourne: The Garibaldi Centenary,’ *The Socialist*, 20 July 1907, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, “Giuseppe Garibaldi between Myth and Reality,” *Italian Historical Society Journal* 16, no. 1 (2008): 15.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Garibaldi’s Commemoration,’ *Evening News*, 3 June 1892, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 1-2. For another perspective on the ways in which the memory of Mazzini and Garibaldi have been used, see: Michele Finelli, “Mazzini in Italian Historical Memory,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 13, no. 4 (2008). See also, the special issue of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* in which this article was published.

<sup>60</sup> Marianna Piantavigna, “‘Cement, Guide and Representative for the Exile and the Emigrant’: Ideological Discourse and Italianità in L’italo-Australiano,” in *The Transnational Voices of Australia’s Migrant and Minority Press*, ed. Catherine Dewhirst and Richard Scully (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 52.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Italian Immigration,’ *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 January 1892, 2.

against Australian workers.<sup>62</sup> Regarding Fraire's scheme, Sceusa argued in December 1891 that '[t]he Italian immigrants just arrived in North Queensland must be looked upon in their real character – that of helpless victims of deep scheming international capitalism.'<sup>63</sup> As such, Cervetto's advice to his fellow Italians to abstain from the class struggle in Australia did not make sense to the socialists who saw that Italians had already been drawn into that struggle by capital when they were recruited as a cheap replacement for Melanesian labour. Furthermore, the Italian socialists understood Italian emigration as a phenomenon that was intrinsically connected to the struggle between capital and labour. In the words of Sceusa, Italian workers and peasants were 'compelled to emigrate, not through the poverty of their native toil, but because the lands and means of production were monopolized by a minority' and, besides emigration, they had 'no other alternative but to rebel or starve, on account of the social injustices and unbearable fiscalism existing at home'.<sup>64</sup>

The conditions under which Italians were forced to either emigrate, rebel or starve, Sceusa believed, had meant that Italians instinctively understood the class struggle and could sympathise with their fellow workers. As he put it during his speech on the occasion of the IWMB's 1891 May Day celebrations, 'the Italian labourer on arrival in Australia became one in soul and body with his Australian confrere'.<sup>65</sup> Although this speech was initially greeted with some skepticism from the editors of *The Australian Workmen*, on account of the recent recruitment of Italians in the mines of the Illawarra region where they had remained separate from the union, Sceusa and the IWMB enjoyed the support of the trade union movement in New South Wales and Queensland.<sup>66</sup> In 1891 and 1892, both the NSW Trades and Labour Council and the Australian Labour Federation (previously the Queensland Trades and Labour Council) passed resolutions that declared the support of these bodies for Sceusa's actions – the TLC wished him 'every success in his generous endeavour' and the ALF gave its 'hearty support'.<sup>67</sup> In the words of the NSW Trades and Labour Council, Sceusa had 'done more to ventilate this question, both here

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<sup>62</sup> 'Multum in Parvo,' *The Australian Workman*, 16 May 1891, 2.

<sup>63</sup> 'Alien Labor,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 January 1892, 9.

<sup>64</sup> 'Italian Labour Day Celebration,' *Daily Telegraph*, 5 May 1891, 3; 'Italian Labour Day Celebration,' *Daily Telegraph*, 5 May 1891, 3.

<sup>65</sup> 'Italian Labour Day Celebration,' *Daily Telegraph*, 5 May 1891, 3.

<sup>66</sup> 'Multum in Parvo,' *The Australian Workman*, 16 May 1891, 2.

<sup>67</sup> 'Italian Labor,' *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1; 'General Council, A.L.F.,' *Worker*, 6 February 1892, 3.

and in his own country, than any man in either countries'.<sup>68</sup> When the next campaign started fifteen years later, Sceusa could once again rely on the support of the broader trade union movement. The editors of *The Worker*, for example, reflected on his commitment to the cause of labour in 1891 and in the years that followed.<sup>69</sup> Like their moderate and conservative counterparts, the representatives of Australian labour also thought it necessary to write about Sceusa's patriotism. *The Australian Workman* praised Sceusa's patriotism by pointing out that although '[h]e has suffered for his opinions at the hands of an unjust Government, ... he still retains his native patriotism and his broad-minded sympathies for the people.'<sup>70</sup> It appears that one of the demands on migrants assimilating into Australian society was the preservation of a patriotic love for the country that they left. This was a situation that Sceusa himself had articulated in 1888:

What would'st thou think of me, thou, O noble matron, if I would take no notice of the insults launched against my absent mother? Thou wouldst say to me: You unnatural coward, if you allow strangers to insult your natural mother, how can I expect, I, an adopted parent, any filial affection, or regard, or helping word and hand from you, forgetful, ungrateful worm!<sup>71</sup>

Critics of Sceusa's patriotism also saw a problem in his allegiance to the Australian trade union movement and argued that in his campaigns against the recruitment of Italians he was showing more concern for the well-being of the British worker than the Italian worker.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, voices in the Australian press also accused him and the IWMBS of attempting to 'defame their countrymen in order to curry favour with certain classes by catering to their prejudices.'<sup>73</sup> Interpreting such criticisms to be an accusation that he was responsible for the prejudices of the Australian trade union movement – or, at least, responsible for validating them – Sceusa wrote to the *Sydney Telegraph* in January 1892 to deny having assisted in any offensive discussion. Rather,

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<sup>68</sup> 'Italian Labor,' *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1.

<sup>69</sup> *The Worker*, 20 June 1907, 3. This campaign coincided with a period of illness for Sceusa which confined him to his room in St Peters and *The Worker* encouraged its readers to send expressions of solidarity and sympathy to him.

<sup>70</sup> 'Italian Workmen's Society,' *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Francesco Sceusa, "Hail Australia! Morituri Te Salutant!," (Sydney: Jarrett & Co. Printers, 1888), 12.

<sup>72</sup> *The Brisbane Courier*, 28 December 1891, 4.

<sup>73</sup> 'Ill Birds,' *Darling Downs Gazette*, 8 February 1892, 2.

he argued, he had always steered such discussion away from matters of race and nationality toward matters of class and the contract labour system.<sup>74</sup> Sceusa himself may have been somewhat ambivalent about having to defend his patriotism as he saw national allegiances and prejudices as secondary to the cause of labour:

It may seem strange that a body of Italians (the Italian Workmen's Society) should adopt a policy apparently hostile to their compatriots, but if you consider that we have two countries to serve and that we look at the cause of labor as one above petty prejudices of race or nationality; if you consider that we are striving to clear the Italian name here of some ugly accusations rightly or wrongly cast upon it, you will find the key to our policy.<sup>75</sup>

In Sceusa's argument, the only policy that was truly supportive and protective of the Italian worker and his dignity, was the one that restricted their immigration under such schemes. To fully understand Sceusa's opposition to these schemes to recruit Italians to work under contract in the sugar industry, it is necessary to view it within the context of the broader struggle against slavery and indentured servitude which used the tactic of immigration restriction as one of its main defences.

### **Blackness and the abolition of slavery**

In the campaigns against the recruitment of Italians to work under contract in the sugar industry, Sceusa maintained that these schemes represented a version of slavery and were therefore turning Italian workers into slaves. After the arrival of Fraire's recruits, Sceusa lamented the fact that they were 'bound to slave for years' and feared that many more would come if the Italian Government continued 'to oblige the Australian speculator and slave-owner'.<sup>76</sup> With anti-slavery

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<sup>74</sup> 'Alien Labor,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 January 1892, 9.

<sup>75</sup> 'Alien Labor,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 January 1892, 9. In a letter to a friend, Sceusa also reflected on the awkward position he found himself in in Australia which meant that he, as a socialist, had to betray his internationalist and cosmopolitan sympathies and take on the role of defending Italy as a patriot, see: Desmond O'Grady, "Nationalist into Socialist," *Quadrant* 27, no. 10 (1983): 65.

<sup>76</sup> 'Italian Labor,' *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1

at the centre of the campaign against Fraire's scheme, it shared similarities with the society's campaign against child street musicians and flower sellers discussed in the previous chapter. In addition to these two main campaigns, the IWMB was also supportive of Job Sheldon's Labour Protection Bill which was designed 'to restrain the importation of immigration of Aliens and certain other persons under contract or agreement to perform labour or service in New South Wales; and for other purposes connected therewith.'<sup>77</sup> In a letter to Sheldon, Sceusa praised the bill on behalf of the IWMB and, connecting it to what was happening in Queensland, expressed his hope that 'through its speedily becoming law, the Italian name will be spared in this colony at least the discredit which undoubtedly awaits it should our colonial speculator in human toil follow the dastardly example of their Queensland confreres.'<sup>78</sup> In the same letter he articulated the position of the IWMB on the desirable conditions for Italian immigration:

We should like to see many of our industrious countrymen of the agricultural classes ... coming to these shores, where they could prove very valuable colonists; but let them come of their own free will, unbound by blind contracts, detrimental to themselves and pernicious to our local workman and to the well-being of the community generally.<sup>79</sup>

In response to Sceusa's stubborn opposition to contract labour, his opponents argued that these contracts could not be considered a form of slavery. Italians such as Oscar Meyer argued that although he did not like contracts and would prefer Italians to come as free migrants, he was satisfied that there was nothing injurious to Italian workers in these particular contracts.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Luigi Cervetto argued that although he too did not approve of Italians coming under contract, he found it absurd that the IWMB could call it slavery.<sup>81</sup> Supporters of Fraire's scheme in the Australian press were much less reserved in their support for these contracts, going as far to argue that these contracts were in fact beneficial for the workers. For example, an editorial in *The Brisbane Courier* also argued that it was necessary to weigh up the benefits of the contracts and after doing so determined that the contracts under which Italians were working in

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<sup>77</sup> 'Mr. Job Sheldon's Labor Protection Bill,' *Justice*, 5 December 1891, 2.

<sup>78</sup> 'Italian Immigrants: The Italian Workers Support M.L.A. Job Sheldon's Labor Protection Bill,' *The Australian Workman*, 5 December 1891, 2.

<sup>79</sup> 'Italian Immigrants: The Italian Workers Support M.L.A. Job Sheldon's Labor Protection Bill,' *The Australian Workman*, 5 December 1891, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Oscar Meyer, 'Italians in Sydney,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 December 1891, 6.

<sup>81</sup> 'Italian Immigration,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 January 1892, 2.

Queensland were always better than the conditions that they were leaving in Italy. Furthermore, it was argued that the contract was more beneficial for migrants on arrival because work and accommodation were guaranteed, while the free migrant had to face a period of potential unemployment and precarity. This was an argument that the freedom associated with being a free migrant was potentially worthless and that migrants should be free to enter contracts that were beneficial to them. As such, this debate about contracts existed within the much larger struggle between capital and labour over definitions of freedom, the essence of which was captured in a short piece published in an issue of *The Australian Workman* alongside articles about Sceusa. This piece was a satirical 'Capitalistic Dictionary' that translated a handful of terms. For example, 'Freedom of contract' was translated as 'Freedom to starve'. Similarly, 'Free labor' was translated as 'Blackleg' – another name for a strike-breaker.<sup>82</sup>

By using the position of anti-slavery to oppose such schemes and support the introduction of legislation to restrict immigration under contract, the campaigns of Sceusa and his fellow socialists are examples of a tendency for labour movements to conflate various labour systems. Lenore Layman, for example, identified this tendency in her research on the political struggle over contract labour in Australia immediately after Federation when the labour movement spoke of indentured and contract labour interchangeably. This, according to Layman, ensured that: 'Contract and indentured labour were not easily distinguished at this historical juncture when the political struggle to end the system of overseas indenture was newly won and 'indenture' carried a highly emotive and negative racial meaning (in a way it had not in the early nineteenth century).'<sup>83</sup> This tendency has also been identified on a transnational level by Gabaccia who argued, as a result of her research comparing immigration from Italy and China at the end of the nineteenth century, that during these decades there was a 'confluence of understanding of race and labour systems'.<sup>84</sup> In order to ward off a return to slavery, Gabaccia argued, 'nascent labor movements in the developing world pioneered in developing racialised terminology as weapons for their own defense.'<sup>85</sup> This led to the emergence of terms such as 'European coolies' and

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<sup>82</sup> 'Capitalistic Dictionary,' *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Lenore Layman, "'To Keep up the Australian Standard': Regulating Contract Labour Migration 1901-50," *Labour History*, no. 70 (1996): 27.

<sup>84</sup> Donna Gabaccia, "The 'Yellow Peril' and the 'Chinese of Europe': Global Perspectives on Race and Labor, 1815-1930," in *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, ed. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 179.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

‘padrone coolies’ which indicated the collapse of a number of labour systems that fell in between slave and free labour into a singular racialised system.<sup>86</sup>

In Sceusa’s writing, more terms that reflect this confluence of race and labour systems can be identified such as ‘white Kanakas’ and ‘white Chinese’.<sup>87</sup> Elaborating on his argument that Italians were being made into ‘white Kanakas’, Sceusa portrayed the Queensland government as an organization of ‘ex-convicts, ex-pirates and slavers’, in reference to the colony’s history of ‘blackbirding’.<sup>88</sup> This refers to the system of labour recruitment and exploitation under which workers from the Melanesian islands were employed in the North Queensland sugar industry between 1863 and 1904 and implied an element of coercion and indentured servitude.<sup>89</sup> Writing about this history of labour recruitment in an Italian newspaper named *Isola*, Sceusa argued that while England was actively suppressing the slave trade in Africa and the Caribbean, Queensland was reviving it in Oceania.<sup>90</sup> Such analogies were also made by another Italian named Federico Gagliardi who recounted: ‘Speculators or agents of these, came to Italy, as they would in a Pacific island hunting for people who wanted to emigrate to work in Queensland’s tropical lands. Soon they realised that Italy was not the country of the kanaka.’<sup>91</sup>

Comparisons between Italians and the South Sea Islanders have been the focus of research for some historians. Vanda Moraes-Gorecki, for example, took as her object of study another term produced at the confluence of race and labour systems: ‘black Mediterranean’. This was a ‘metaphorical expression’ she found invoked by her informants during fieldwork conducted in North Queensland in the early 1990s. Although this expression was applied to all Southern Europeans, Moraes-Gorecki chose to focus on Italians. According to her analysis, ‘black’ in this expression had the double meaning of ‘low-status labour’ and ‘an inferior social type’ – a meaning that was reinforced by the earlier recruitment of ‘black’ labour on the cane fields which created the image that only ‘black’ men could ‘slave under extremely strenuous physical and

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 178; David R. Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 82.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Lettere Dall’Australia [Letters from Australia],’ *Avanti!*, December 1906.

<sup>88</sup> Kookooburra, ‘Dagli Antipodi [From the Antipodes],’ *Isola*, 17 July 1892.

<sup>89</sup> Giuliani, “Throwaway Labour: Blackbirding and a White Australia,” 99.

<sup>90</sup> Kookooburra, ‘Dagli Antipodi [From the Antipodes],’ *Isola*, 17 July 1892.

<sup>91</sup> F. Gagliardi, ‘Voce del Pubblico [Voice of the Public],’ *L’Italo-Australiano*, 6 April 1907, 2.

economic conditions' that were a necessary part of field work in the sugar industry.<sup>92</sup> Catherine Dewhirst has also made the argument that blackness was acquired through work as Italians were 'ascribed non-white status, given the racial stigma associated with sugar-plantation work in the tropics, where, it was believed, white people were susceptible to "degeneration and disease"'.<sup>93</sup> Sceusa called on Italians to resist having this non-white status ascribed to them in his 1907 articles in *Avanti!* and in his correspondence with the Italian Socialist Party, telling them that on account of being 'painful, ill-paid, unhealthy', the work was 'unsuited to Europeans' and considered 'degrading on account of its Asiatic and Polynesian associations.' He also predicted that recruited Italians would leave the plantations because they would be 'unable to stand the climate and the excessive work.'<sup>94</sup> When he explained these arguments in a letter to *The Socialist* newspaper published in Melbourne, the editor responded to Sceusa's claim that the work was unsuitable for Europeans, arguing that white Queenslanders believed that they could do any type of work required of them, including field work.<sup>95</sup> This was the argument that Sceusa had aligned himself and the IWMBS with in the first campaign in 1891. For example, at a meeting of the IWMBS in September 1891, it was resolved:

That this association being aware that there are many unemployed in Queensland willing to work in the sugar-cane plantations if the proper wages were offered them, views the contemplated importation of cheap peasants from Italy as a competition most injurious to the colonial worker, and a transaction most degrading to the Italian name; and in consequence it trusts that, for the common protection of the Australian and Italian toiler, a law will be speedily passed forbidding the introduction of labour under contract in the colonies.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Vanda Moraes-Gorecki, "'Black Italians' in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland: A Reflection on Labour Inclusion and Cultural Exclusion in Tropical Australia," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 5, no. 3 (1994): 306-19.

<sup>93</sup> Catherine Dewhirst, "Colonising Italians: Italian Imperialism and Agricultural 'Colonies' in Australia, 1881-1914," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no. 1 (2016): 32. The environmental conditions were also mentioned in: Moraes-Gorecki, "'Black Italians' in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland: A Reflection on Labour Inclusion and Cultural Exclusion in Tropical Australia," 36; Francesco Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 57.

<sup>94</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Queensland and European Immigration,' *The Socialist*, 23 March 1907, 6.

<sup>95</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Queensland and European Immigration,' *The Socialist*, 23 March 1907, 6.

<sup>96</sup> 'Labour in Politics,' *Worker*, 19 September 1891, 2.



This earlier argument differs from the arguments made later by Sceusa in 1907 and by Moraes-Gorecki because it is focused primarily on the labour system rather than the nature of the work. In other words, in this earlier argument, 'blackness' is not found in the work that one performed but the system of contract labour under which it was performed. It was the contract, interpreted as a tool of slavery by a labour movement that conflated contract labour with indentured labour and slavery, that was the source of 'blackness' rather than the difficulty of the work itself or the harshness of the climate in which the work was performed. This perspective also challenges some arguments that have been made by historians with regards to ideas about the racial inferiority of Italians. Helen Andreoni, for example, has argued that replacing indentured Melanesian workers with Italians demonstrated their racial inferiority – in other words, the industry needed to exploit non-white workers in order to be profitable and so Italians were targeted as a racially inferior group.<sup>97</sup> While it is true that ideas of race were important in the decision to recruit Italians in the sugar industry, it was usually the case that these ideas led to opposite outcomes. That is, Italians were desirable because of their whiteness or were undesirable because of their supposed racial superiority.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, in the labour movement framework that found the contract the most objectionable aspect of the schemes, the relationship between race and labour worked in the opposite direction. It was not that Italians were recruited for contract work because they were racially inferior but rather that they were made racially inferior as a result of being recruited under contract – that is, a system of labour associated with slavery and blackness or with indenture and being Chinese. In other words, recruitment under contract was a process of racialisation that Sceusa by 1907 had termed 'Chinesisation' and opposing contract labour meant resisting this racialisation.

Outside of this labour framework, historians have also researched the conferral of 'blackness' onto Italians as a result of racial ideas that divided the northern and southern regions of the Italian peninsula. Developed first in Italy and then spread throughout the world, this distinction informed the arguments of the schemes' supporters who argued against Sceusa and the IWMBs. The Italians recruited for work in the sugar industry were to be drawn from the northern regions – in 1891 this was exclusively Piedmont and Lombardy. Editorials in the moderate and

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<sup>97</sup> Helen Andreoni, "Olive or White? The Colour of Italians in Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 77 (2003): 81. See also: Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 57.

<sup>98</sup> 'Italian versus Kanaka,' *The Telegraph*, 3 December 1891, 4.

conservative press extolled the virtues of the northern Italian – supposedly hardworking, honest, frugal, industrious, the finest peasant to be found in all of Europe, even better than the average migrant from Britain, and good colonists who will bring with them knowledge, skills, culture and industry that will be beneficial to Queensland.<sup>99</sup> This appraisal of the northern Italian was shared by Oscar Meyer who described the Piedmontese as ‘the very flower of the Italian population.’<sup>100</sup> Even Sceusa shared this appraisal of the northerner when he clarified that there was nothing wrong with the Italians coming from Piedmont and Lombardy from the perspective that they were respectable, hardworking and moral – however, that was beside the point because, from the perspective of labour, their recruitment under contract meant that they were coming as the ‘helpless victims of deep scheming international capitalism.’<sup>101</sup> In contrast to the positive image of the northern Italian, the southern Italian was deemed an undesirable migrant who could not be a good colonist. An editorial in the *Darling Downs Gazette*, for example, provided an explanation for this, arguing that the southerner had been degraded as a result of ‘the demoralising and grinding tyranny under which Sicily and the southern states of the peninsula withered for centuries left its accursed blight upon the people.’<sup>102</sup> In other words, southern Italians could not become good colonists because, unlike the Italians of the north, they had not experienced the modern values of freedom and liberty. The southern Italian was therefore more a colonised subject than a potential colonist.<sup>103</sup>

The acceptance of northern Italians as good colonists was built into the schemes under which they were recruited. It was envisioned that after working for two years on a plantation, they would then buy their own farms that were the foundation of the new centralised mill system of production. As such, the Italians were not meant to be a source of ‘throwaway labour’. According to Gaia Giuliani, ‘throwaway labour’ was a system that emerged after the abolition of slavery that used the temporary employment of bound labour in order to ‘preserve the national

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<sup>99</sup> *The Brisbane Courier*, 28 December 1891, 4; ‘Ill Birds,’ *Darling Downs Gazette*, 8 February 1892, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Oscar Meyer, ‘Italians in Sydney,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 December 1891, 6.

<sup>101</sup> ‘Alien Labor,’ *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 January 1892, 9.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Ill Birds,’ *Darling Downs Gazette*, 8 February 1892, 2.

<sup>103</sup> Regarding southern Italians as colonised subjects, see, for example: Joseph Pugliese, “Whiteness and the Blackening of Italy: La Guerra Cafona, Extracomunitari and Provisional Street Justice,” *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 5, no. 2 (2008): 1-35; Gaia Giuliani, “Whose Whiteness?: Cultural Dis-Locations between Italy and Australia,” in *Transmediterranean: Diasporas, Histories, Geopolitical Spaces*, ed. Joseph Pugliese (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010), 125-38; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 54.

space' from unwanted racialised peoples 'without depriving it of exploitable coloured hands.'<sup>104</sup> The South Sea Islanders were an example of 'throwaway labour' as a segregated labour force that would eventually be deported so as not to threaten the goal of a homogenous white Australia.<sup>105</sup> While Italians coming under such schemes were to be a temporary form of bound labour that was segregated from the rest of the Australian labour force, instead of being deported after their contracts were completed, they were then to be incorporated into the white national space. However, Sceusa and other Italian socialists viewed the recruitment of Italians under contract, due to the associations of contract labour with slavery and indenture, as a potential impediment to their incorporation into the white national space and their future participation in the settler colonial project. As such, protecting the position of Italians in the national space as potential colonists meant preserving their whiteness – and to do this, they had to resist schemes that could lead to their racialisation.

### **Chinesisation, immigration restriction and race learning**

In his letter to the Trades and Labour Council in December 1891, Sceusa also sought the council's response to a set of four questions with the intention of gathering further information to bring before the Italian Government. The third of these questions asked:

Is it not true that, if Italians will be used here against local labour, or if they indulge any further in itinerant trades and other unproductive occupations, the Italian name will be brought down to the level of the Chinese, and, as in the case of the Mongolians, measures to restrict the Italian immigration may be resorted to.<sup>106</sup>

The fourth question then connected these concerns more explicitly to schemes such as Fraire's, by asking if it was true or not that the IWMB's policy to oppose 'the introduction of their fellow countrymen into Queensland under a system of contract slavery is the only one which can command the respect of Australians, and make their residence possible in this free land.'<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Giuliani, "Throwaway Labour: Blackbirding and a White Australia," 105.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>106</sup> 'Italian Labor,' *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1.

<sup>107</sup> 'Italian Labor,' *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1.

Over fifteen years later, when campaigning against the introduction of more Italians under contract, Sceusa published an article in a December 1906 issue of *Avanti!* in which he urged Italian workers to oppose the scheme as it would lead to a ‘Chinesisation of the Italian labourer’ on the grounds that ‘work at the cane-fields hitherto manned by Chinese and Polynesian semi-slaves, is unhealthy, enervating, unsuitable to Europeans, and spurned by Australians, Britishers and whites in general.’ Furthermore, in his opinion, ‘by accepting an occupation which is looked down upon by labour generally in this continent ... would substantiate the charge now levelled against us by some prejudiced people of being the “Chinese of Europe”’.<sup>108</sup>

Each of these examples show that one of Sceusa’s primary goals was to preserve the right for Italians to migrate to Australia without restriction as long as they were coming as free migrants. At a time when immigration policy was becoming increasingly hostile to non-white peoples, the preservation of this right to enter without restriction also required the preservation of Italians’ status as white. Alternatively, even if this whiteness could not be guaranteed, at the very least, it meant resisting their further racialisation along similar lines to the Chinese, since the restrictive immigration legislation introduced, first in the Australian colonies from the 1870 onwards and then the newly federated Commonwealth in 1901, was formed predominately in opposition to the Chinese presence.<sup>109</sup> For Sceusa and his contemporaries then, it was this Chinese model of racialisation and restriction that was most salient. In June 1892, Sceusa wrote that being called ‘The Chinese of Europe’ meant facing the fact ‘that sooner or later (if we do not defend ourselves) will result in a poll tax like that which is imposed on the Chinese.’<sup>110</sup> Thus far, scholars of Italian immigration to Australia have so far left this comparison under-researched, preferring instead to take the blackness of ‘Kanakas’ as the primary model for the racialisation of Italians.<sup>111</sup> The work that has been done on the comparison between the Italians and the Chinese has

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<sup>108</sup> See: Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 10 July 1907, 265.

<sup>109</sup> Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1923), 90; Charles Price, *The Great White Walls Are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australasia 1836-1888* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), 197-98; A.T. Yarwood, *Asian Migration to Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1964); Phil Griffiths, "The Strategic Fears of the Ruling Class: The Construction of Queensland’s Chinese Immigrants Regulation Act of 1877," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 58, no. 1 (2012): 1-19.

<sup>110</sup> Kookooburra, ‘Dagli Antipodi [From the Antipodes],’ *Isola*, 25 June 1892.

<sup>111</sup> See: Moraes-Gorecki, "'Black Italians' in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland: A Reflection on Labour Inclusion and Cultural Exclusion in Tropical Australia," 306-19.

remained minimal and confined mostly to brief mentions within research focused on other topics.<sup>112</sup> Examining the writing of Sceusa therefore makes it possible to apply to the Australian context the argument made by Erika Lee that Italians and other Southern Europeans in the United States were 'more closely racialized along the Chinese immigrant model' rather than in counterpoint to African-Americans.<sup>113</sup>

Although not yet racialised in the same way as the Chinese, Italians such as Sceusa and his fellow socialists were anxious in facing this potential outcome due to the racial prejudice that Italians already faced. This anxiety was articulated, for example, by 'Enrico' in a letter to *The Socialist* in May 1907:

Our position is very precarious, through racial animosity, caused by the economic problem. I know perfectly well the evil caused by racial feeling, and the results. Why, I ask, displace 1000 men from a nation, leaving their wives and children and relatives, and import them like slaves in a country with a different climate, language, costumes, etc., and, worst of all, in a land where the feelings of the population is bitterly against them?<sup>114</sup>

Enrico also wrote that the Fraire scheme migrants had faced 'demoralisation, suffering and racial hatred' and he was convinced that conditions had not changed in the fifteen years that followed. This perception that the attitudes of the broader Australian population were against the Italians guided the campaigns against the recruitment of Italians under contract. As noted above for example, according to Sceusa, the key to their campaign was understanding that it was designed to 'clear the Italian name here of some ugly accusations rightly or wrongly cast upon it'.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, Sceusa wrote about an 'Italophobia' that permeated Australian society that can be observed in the arguments of the supposed supporters of Italians. In 1891, for example, the supporters of Fraire and the supporters of Sceusa both seemed capable of expressing their

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<sup>112</sup> See, for example: Catherine Dewhurst, "Collaborating on Whiteness: Representing Italians in Early White Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 33-49; Andreoni, "Olive or White?," 86.

<sup>113</sup> Erika Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (2002): 42-43.

<sup>114</sup> Enrico, 'The Immigration to Queensland: The Italian Case,' *The Socialist*, 4 May 1907, 3.

<sup>115</sup> 'Alien Labor,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 January 1892, 9.

support for a particular set of Italians while maintaining prejudicial attitudes towards another set of Italians.<sup>116</sup>

It was these attitudes to Italians that Sceusa was so anxious to avoid encouraging and exaggerating that gave a sense of urgency to his campaigns against the itinerant workers of Sydney and the recruitment of migrants under labour contracts with the ultimate fear that Italians would be subject to the tightening immigration policies of the Australian colonies. As he told his fellow members of the IWMBS after he was censured by some of them who asked how far he was willing to go with his campaign: 'As far as to obtain the full respect for the Italians in Australia or the shutting off of the Australian ports against them. I intend to solve the foreign question here before it reaches the incurable stage in which it presents itself in America.'<sup>117</sup> In addition to the practical measure of immigration restriction in order to avoid aggravating the prejudicial attitudes towards Italians that already existed in Australia, solving the 'alien question' also required a strategy of differentiating the Italian migrant from the Chinese migrant and managing the boundary between the two. This strategy of differentiation is one of the strategies that Ricatti identifies within a broader strategy of countering racial prejudice that he calls 'whitening'.<sup>118</sup>

According to Ricatti, whitening is one of the strategies, along with the development of ethnic solidarity, used by Italian migrants 'to contrast or manage the racism' that they had to endure. Whitening, more specifically, involved 'the tendency by Italian migrants, especially from the north, to insist on the whiteness of (northern) Italian people and to differentiate themselves as much as possible from more subaltern people, who are identified as racially inferior, or at least more racially ambiguous and thus less trustworthy.'<sup>119</sup> Although Sceusa, by resisting the 'Chinesisation' of Italian labour, is clearly attempting to differentiate Italians from the Chinese as a group identified as racially inferior, it is less clear that this also involves an insistence on their whiteness. In their research on the racial consciousness of southern European migrants in the US, Barrett and Rodiger argue that although some migrants embraced whiteness, for others the act of separating themselves from African-Americans or Asian-Americans did not necessarily

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<sup>116</sup> 'Ill Birds,' *Darling Downs Gazette*, 8 February 1892, 2.

<sup>117</sup> *The Australian Workman*, 26 December 1891, 1.

<sup>118</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 63-64.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

mean an identification with whiteness because often ‘they were curiously indifferent to whiteness.’<sup>120</sup> In his writing, Sceusa is often not only indifferent to whiteness but often hostile to certain expressions of whiteness as well as the whole system of racial hierarchy that gives whiteness its value. For example, in an article written in September 1907, Sceusa maintained that he had been ‘detached from the Australian socialists by reason of their hostility to Asian, Polynesian immigration, etc. and their “whiteness” (*bianchismo*) in short.’<sup>121</sup> This ‘whiteness’ involved a parochialism that was repulsive to Sceusa’s internationalist and cosmopolitan sympathies that he consistently implored his Australian comrades to adopt. One such example, was in a letter sent to *The Worker* in which he wrote that CSR’s agent was facing problems in the recruitment of workers, and attributed that to the efforts of himself and his contacts in Italy who brought the issue before the Italian Government. Sceusa used this occasion to criticise the Australian labour movement and push it towards internationalism by concluding: ‘From this the Australian workers can see the advantages of international action in certain labour difficulties and matters, and the necessity for coming to a closer understanding and falling in line with the organised workers of the rest of the world.’<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, as well as rejecting what he saw as the trappings of whiteness, Sceusa also expressed his opposition to the racial hierarchy that gave whiteness its value or the Chinese its unenviable place in that hierarchy. In a letter to *L’Italo-Australiano* written in 1907, Sceusa wrote: ‘Only some, not all, restrictive immigration laws I deride and condemn: among them is the Chinese Restriction Act – a real offence to the humanity and brotherhood of peoples – which existed, however, for thirty years when the Labor Party was always in the minds of Gods.’<sup>123</sup> Sceusa here is also making a distinction between immigration restrictions based on labour recruitment methods versus those based on race and attributing these to different class interests. On the one hand, there were pieces of legislation that Sceusa supported such as Job Sheldon’s Labour Protection Bill brought before the NSW Legislative Assembly in 1891 and the Contract Immigrants Act of 1905 which were designed to protect the labour market from unfair competition, while on the other hand there were the pieces of legislation that were based on race which Sceusa opposed and attributed their origin

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<sup>120</sup> James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the "New Immigrant" Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (1997): 28-29.

<sup>121</sup> Kookaburra, ‘Lettere dall’Australia [Letters from Australia],’ *Avanti!*, 3 November 1907.

<sup>122</sup> Francis Sceusa, ‘Can’t Catch ‘Em,’ *The Worker*, 16 May 1907, 7.

<sup>123</sup> K’burra, ‘Cronaca degli Italiani in Australia [Chronicle of the Italians in Australia],’ *L’Italo-Australiano*, 7 December 1907, 2.

to ruling class interests – an argument that has only begun to be made more recently by labour historians such as Burgmann and Griffiths.<sup>124</sup>

In the examples above, Sceusa's ability to learn and identify with the white racial schemes of Australia was inhibited by his ideological commitment to internationalist and cosmopolitan values. In his discussion of strategies of 'whitening', Ricatti points out that, since its unification, racist and colonial attitudes have been an important part of Italian culture and society and, leading on from this, argues that many Italians were already racist before coming to Australia and responded to the racism they experienced by becoming even more racist themselves.<sup>125</sup> This is similar to an argument made in the broader scholarship on whiteness studies and immigration history about the influence of the migrant's background on the development of a racial consciousness in the new world that has called these migrants 'race thinkers before coming'. In his work on Greek immigration to Australia during the same time period covered in this thesis, Andonis Piperoglou argues that 'Greeks came with their own patterns of race thinking which facilitated speedy learning of white racial schemes when they were questioned within the racialised operations of labour in Australia.'<sup>126</sup> The example of Sceusa shows that the patterns of race thinking brought to Australia could also inhibit rather than facilitate their learning of white racial schemes. The speedy learning of white racial schemes did not necessarily lead to the speedy endorsement of and identification with these schemes. Returning to Ricatti's argument about Italians being racist before coming to Australia given Italy's history of racist and colonial attitudes, I would argue that under such conditions it would be just as valid to assume that some Italians were opposed to racism before coming to Australia.

That is not to say that Sceusa and other Italians who were against racism before coming to Australia did not have these ideological commitments challenged in their encounters with white racial schemes after arrival. Other Italian socialists in Australia seem to have more readily

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<sup>124</sup> Verity Burgmann, "Capital and Labour: Responses to Immigration in the Nineteenth Century," in *Who Are Our Enemies?: Racism and the Australian Working Class*, ed. Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (Neutral Bay, NSW: Hale and Iremonger, 1978), 20-34; "Writing Racism out of History," *Arena*, no. 67 (1984): 78-92; Griffiths, "The Strategic Fears of the Ruling Class: The Construction of Queensland's Chinese Immigrants Regulation Act of 1877," 1-19.

<sup>125</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 64.

<sup>126</sup> Andonis Piperoglou, "Greek Settlers: Race, Labour, and the Making of White Australia, 1890s-1920s" (La Trobe University, 2016), 111.



identified themselves with the racism they encountered in Australia than Sceusa – however, even when that was the case, this identification remained in tension with their commitment to internationalism. A demonstrative case is that of Pietro Munari, another member of the IWMB. Munari came from Schio in the Veneto region of northern Italy and arrived in Australia in 1892.<sup>127</sup> In 1897 he published a book about his observations in Australia titled *Un Italiano in Australia* (An Italian in Australia). In this book, Munari claimed that the laws against the Chinese were right because they were too backwards in comparison with the modern worker, had a low standard of living, were in economic competition with other workers and took money out of Australia through remittances.<sup>128</sup> Laura Olcelli argues that Munari's concept of his own superiority over Chinese migrants 'is modelled on the mid- and end-of-century xenophobia of British-Australian settlers.'<sup>129</sup> However, Munari expressed this in a way that suggests a self-reflexivity when he admitted that the reasons behind the 1882 anti-Chinese immigration laws were right 'although at first they might seem hateful and contrary to liberty.'<sup>130</sup> This admission – addressed to a reader in Italy – suggests that what he is saying goes against what he had learnt elsewhere. Even when the racism encountered in Australia is identified with, there is a tension. Furthermore, in the same year that his book was published, Munari still articulated a commitment to internationalism in his other writings. For example, in an article that he wrote for a newspaper in Milan in March 1897 about the labour movement in Japan, he concluded: 'we, who know neither frontiers nor distinctions of race, are sending our greetings of solidarity and triumphal augury to our brethren of Japan who are struggling in the common cause.'<sup>131</sup> It would seem, therefore, that some Italians had an inconsistent and selective approach to racism that was influenced by their socialist politics and their experiences in Australia.

A commitment to internationalism and cosmopolitanism was much less an impediment to the Italians socialists' endorsement of the settler colonial dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Munari, for example, wrote unsympathetically about Aboriginal peoples in his

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<sup>127</sup> Cresciani, "The Making of a New Society: Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Intellectual Reformers in Australia 1876-1906," 92.

<sup>128</sup> Pietro Munari, *Un Italiano in Australia: Note E Impressioni* [*An Italian in Australia: Notes and Impressions*] (Milan: Tipografia degli Operai (Società cooperativa), 1897), 42-43.

<sup>129</sup> Laura Olcelli, "Questions of Authority: Italo-Australian Travel Narratives of the Long Nineteenth Century" (University of Sydney, 2014), 164-65.

<sup>130</sup> Munari, *Un Italiano in Australia: Note E Impressioni* [*An Italian in Australia: Notes and Impressions*], 43.

<sup>131</sup> P Munari, 'The Labor Movement in Japan,' *The Australian Workman*, 20 March 1897, 1.

book – arguing that they were the lowest of the human species, will eventually die out, were of the most savage type and were intellectually inferior. However, despite adopting what Gaetano Rando calls ‘a pointedly racist stance on Australia’s Indigenous people’, Munari also wrote critically of their treatment at the hands of British colonists.<sup>132</sup> On this point, Olcelli notes that Munari was simultaneously able to denounce British brutalities as an outsider while also writing about Aboriginal peoples as an insider, ‘facilitated by a fast adaptation to his new reality.’<sup>133</sup> In some of his earlier writings from the early 1880s, Sceusa wrote about Aboriginal peoples in a similar fashion – describing them as lazy, indolent, and ‘physically and morally the most deformed of the human species’. However, he also projected an atheism and anarchism onto them when he identified one supposed aspect of Aboriginal life that he viewed positively: ‘the lack of idols, kings or leaders, and the lack of religious sentiment.’<sup>134</sup> Like Munari, Sceusa also believed that Aboriginal people were destined to die out as a result of European colonisation:

Full exhaustion of the indigenous race of Australia is a matter of time. The breath of European civilisation suffocates and extinguishes it: as our soft plants burst into rugged native flora and replace it. The last Aborigine of Tasmania died eighteen or twenty months ago; and the last black Australians will perish in ten or twenty years and forever.<sup>135</sup>

This historical inevitability obscured the dispossession of Aboriginal land that allowed Sceusa to later articulate what I would call an ‘internationalist settler colonialism’. Writing in December 1887 in response to an article critical of Italian immigration published in *The Australian Star* that described Italians as ‘The Chinese of Europe’, Sceusa countered British chauvinism by placing the British colonisation of Australia within a larger history of international exploration in which Italians had set the standard for the British. After establishing the contingency of British settlement in Australia, Sceusa argued ‘that all modern acquisitions are the result of an

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<sup>132</sup> Gaetano Rando, "Raffaello Carboni's Perception of Australia," *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 10, no. 1 (2008): 134.

<sup>133</sup> Olcelli, "Questions of Authority: Italo-Australian Travel Narratives of the Long Nineteenth Century," 164. The concept of ‘adaptation’ is taken from Charles Price’s scale of assimilation that he used in Charles Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>134</sup> Jackass, ‘Lettere dall’Australia [Letters from Australia],’ *La Lega Della Democrazia*, 12 November 1881. Jackass was another of Sceusa’s pseudonyms.

<sup>135</sup> Jackass, ‘Lettere dall’Australia [Letters from Australia],’ *La Lega Della Democrazia*, 12 November 1881.

uninterrupted series of international efforts, and, therefore, are the common inheritance of the civilised world.' Summarising his argument in a single statement, Sceusa declared: "The lands of the Earth belong collectively to the peoples of the Earth, without distinction of race or nationality."<sup>136</sup> In *Hail Australia!* the pamphlet-length response to the article in *The Australian Star*, Sceusa built on this argument and referred to Australia as an 'All-Men's Land' and a 'land of freedom' that was a refuge from 'overcrowded, oppressed Europe' and its despotisms and international rivalries and jealousies.<sup>137</sup> In this pamphlet Sceusa also builds this into a civilisational argument of the type identified by Ricatti as another strategy of whitening.<sup>138</sup> Building on the argument that British settlement of Australia was the result of a collective toil going back generations, Sceusa went as far as to argue that the modern Englishman, while typifying nineteenth century civilisation, was 'Italian-bred' or 'Italian-reared'.<sup>139</sup> In his particular argument, Sceusa lays out a brief history of Britain, beginning with Roman conquest and then moves into the modern era to claim that Italy gave Britain language, art, commerce, finance and navigation as well as a number of the social and legal foundations of British liberalism – such as the principle of freedom, the partitioning of large landed estates, the abolition of capital punishment, the separation of church and state, free-trade, trade unions, cremation, and other social reforms.<sup>140</sup> Piperoglou has argued that at the heart of Greek strategies of whitening was the ability to 'fashion their civilizational heritage as the archetypal "generative" culture of free democratic societies across the globe.'<sup>141</sup> Other 'Christian settler minorities' such as the Irish, Italians, Syrians and Maltese, Piperoglou argues, could not make the same connections between their Christian faith and civilisational heritage and as a result 'their whiteness was therefore harder to substantiate and historically harder to sustain.'<sup>142</sup> The arguments of Sceusa show that a civilisational argument could be made without Christianity. As a staunch anti-clerical atheist, Sceusa instead linked the civilisational argument to secular and progressive ideas.

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<sup>136</sup> Francis Sceusa, 'Italians in Sydney: To the Italian Residents of Sydney,' Unpublished letter, 17 December 1887.

<sup>137</sup> Sceusa, "Hail Australia! Morituri Te Salutant!," 9.

<sup>138</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 64.

<sup>139</sup> Sceusa, "Hail Australia! Morituri Te Salutant!," 4.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>141</sup> Piperoglou, "Greek Settlers: Race, Labour, and the Making of White Australia, 1890s-1920s," 15.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 16.

A view with similarities to Sceusa's 'All-men's Land' was also articulated Giuseppe Giovanardi, another of the Italian socialists in Sydney, who had emigrated in 1898.<sup>143</sup> In Australia and other New World colonies he saw a revolutionary potential that could overcome racial prejudice. As outlets for the surplus population of Europe produced by modern industrial development, there would be an intermingling of nationalities in the New World that 'will inevitably help to bring solidarity of the workers' which would then 'break down national and racial prejudices, racial jealousies that have made nations enemies of each other.' Ultimately, this solidarity will lead humanity 'towards a more harmonious whole, towards a world's federation, where geographical boundaries will be wiped away, and a grander humanity will rise, working and striving towards a great co-operative Commonwealth'.<sup>144</sup> It is obvious that in these visions of an internationalist or anti-racist settler colonialism that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were excluded from the 'grander humanity' to come – it was their land not their ideas or labour that were desirable in this future. However, it was not always clear who else were excluded. While Giovanardi spoke specifically of 'the surplus population of Europe', Sceusa spoke more vaguely of 'the civilised world'. His attempts at highlighting the history of Italian exploration in India and 'Cathay' might suggest that the people of those countries were excluded, however, in 1907, Sceusa wrote to *Avanti!* reporting that he had openly expressed 'the view that Northern Australia is destined to be, sooner or later, occupied and colonised by the yellow race, an opinion that cannot be manifested here without attracting the public disdain'.<sup>145</sup> This was an argument that had been made by his moderate or conservative counterparts such as Giovanni Pulle and Leopoldo Zunini who used 'yellow peril' discourses in order to campaign for Australia to be open to more immigration from Italy and the rest of Europe.<sup>146</sup> In light of some of his other statements about Chinese migrants that have been discussed in this chapter, it remains unclear as to whether he shared this alarmism or saw it as an inevitable part of the international effort to colonise the Australian continent.

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<sup>143</sup> Cresciani, 'The Making of a New Society: Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Intellectual Reformers in Australia 1876-1906,' 93.

<sup>144</sup> G. Giovanardi, 'Italians and the Dago Invasion,' *Sunday Times*, 28 July 1901, 9.

<sup>145</sup> K'burra, 'Lettere dall'Australia [Letters from Australia],' *Avanti!*, 3 November 1907.

<sup>146</sup> Giovanni Pulle was an editor of *L'Italo-Australiano*. For examples of this argument being made in this newspaper, see: 'Australia's Necessity,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 16 September 1905, 2; 'Italians in Argentina,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 4 July 1908, 2; 'Supine Australia,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 18 July 1908, 2; 'The Invisible Immigrant,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 25 July 1908, 2. See also: Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness." For Leopoldo Zunini, see the report he wrote after visiting Western Australia in 1906: Leopoldo Zunini, *Western Australia as It Is Today, 1906*, ed. R. J. B. Bosworth and Margot Melia (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 1997), 94.

These arguments made by Pulle and Zunini were a response not only to debates over Italians arriving in North Queensland but also similar debates over the arrival of Italians in Western Australia during the same period of time. The issue of contract labour was at the centre of these debates too where it was feared that the arrival of Italians represented the continuation of unfree labour relations in a new White Australia. As this chapter has shown, the issue of unfree labour was central to schemes that sought to recruit Italians to replace the South Sea Islander field workers and encourage the restructuring of the sugar industry on a system of small farms worked by free white labour. Opponents of these schemes, including Italian socialists such as Sceusa, argued that these schemes, by recruiting Italian workers under contract, would lead to the racialisation and exclusion of Italians in a manner similar to the Chinese. This forced Italian socialists to confront the racism, nationalism and the parochialism of the Australian labour movement. In the next chapter, I return to some of these themes, where I examine how Italian newspapers of different ideological positions responded to claims that Italians were migrating to Western Australia under contract and the labour movement's campaign to have Italians subject to exclusionary immigration legislation.

## Chapter 3:

### Italians and Unfree Labour in Western Australia

By the end of the 1890s, Italians had begun entering Western Australia in significant numbers in search of work on the colony's recently established goldfields. The first arrivals were individuals who travelled overland from the eastern colonies where they worked in other mining areas or in industries such as construction.<sup>1</sup> Their small numbers were supplemented in April 1896 when Eugene Vanzetti, a mining metallurgist and speculator who had previously worked at Broken Hill as a mining engineer, recruited twenty-five families from Lucca to work on his Seabrook estate close to the town of Northam in the colony's wheatbelt region where they built a stamping battery for processing ore transported from the goldfields. Vanzetti also had plans to bring out up to 300 more families to settle and work on agricultural estates between Northam and Albany and he controlled a number of mines while providing labour for others.<sup>2</sup> By January 1898, forty of the one hundred men employed in development work at three mines close to Geraldton were employed by Vanzetti.<sup>3</sup> The dual role that Vanzetti played in settling Italians in agricultural colonies and providing labour contracts for the mining industry was viewed with suspicion by local labour organisers who suggested that these agricultural colonies were 'merely depots from which men are drafted on the fields by a syndicate to which the men are bound for a few shillings per week.'<sup>4</sup>

An early warning that Italians were arriving under contract had already come a year earlier in February 1897 when the *Coolgardie Miner* warned that Italians were arriving in Western Australia 'in an insidious manner' and 'to wealthy countrymen of their own, known to them as *padroni*'. The arrival of 'gangs of Italian serfs' under such conditions was deemed to be as dangerous as 'the influx of Asiatics'. Although, as the newspaper argued, northern and central Italians – 'not the Neapolitans and Sicilians' – could become good Australian colonists, 'against the imported

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Gentilli, *Italian Migration to Western Australia, 1829-1946*, ed. C. Stransky and C. Iraci (Nedlands, W.A.: Dept. of Geography, University of Western Australia, 1982), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 12. Robert Pascoe, 'Vanzetti, Eugenio (1844–1908)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/vanzetti-eugenio-8905/text15643>, published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 14 March 2019.

<sup>3</sup> 'Mining News,' *The West Australian*, 11 January 1898, 3.

<sup>4</sup> 'Mining News,' *The West Australian*, 8 April 1896, 5.

slave of the contractor, be he Chow, Jap, Hindoo, Nigger, or Italiano, we declare unceasing war'.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, Italians were regarded as the latest iteration in a continuum of unfree labour relations that linked Melanesian, Asian and Southern European workers and pitted them against white workers. The history of unfree Melanesian and Asian labour has been revisited in recent years by labour historians in Australia who are concerned with what they call the 'coolie question' and have grappled with its implications for theorising race, empire and capitalism.<sup>6</sup> Whilst this group of labour historians have generated valuable new research, other forms of unfree labour such as contract labour, which involved Southern European workers, have not yet been re-examined. As a result, important connections between earlier immigration from China, India and the Pacific Islands and later immigrations from Southern European have remained unexplored even though such connections had been identified by an earlier generation of labour historians.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, these studies focussed on North Queensland rather than Western Australia which had its own history of unfree labour.<sup>8</sup>

Once again, Donna Gabaccia's transnational study of labour migrations from Italy and China is a useful starting point. Gabaccia has argued that in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the dichotomy of 'free' and 'unfree' labour collapsed a variety of labour systems into the racially charged category of slavery but failed to transform all unfree workers into 'blacks'. Whilst the term 'white' was reserved for those workers who performed free, waged labour, a third and overlapping racial category existed in the free/unfree dichotomy which brought together terms such as 'yellow', 'olive' and 'swarthy'.<sup>9</sup> Gabaccia also identifies, within this continuum of unfree labour, terms for these overlapping systems of labour such as 'credit-ticket',

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<sup>5</sup> 'Still They Come!' *Coolgardie Miner*, 6 February 1897, 4.

<sup>6</sup> See the special issue of *Labour History* dedicated to the 'coolie question' published in 2017: Diane Kirkby and Sophie Loy-Wilson, "Introduction," *Labour History*, no. 113 (2017): iii-v.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example: Kay Saunders, "Masters and Servants: The Queensland Sugar Workers' Strike 1911," in *Who Are Our Enemies?: Racism and the Australian Working Class*, ed. Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (Neutral Bay, NSW: Hale and Iremonger, 1978), 20-34; *Workers in Bondage: The Origins and Bases of Unfree Labour in Queensland, 1824-1916* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> See: Sean Winter, "Coerced Labour in Western Australian During the Nineteenth Century," *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 34 (2016): 3-12; Julia Martinez, "The End of Indenture? Asian Workers in the Australian Pearling Industry, 1901-1972," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 67 (2005): 125-47.

<sup>9</sup> Donna Gabaccia, "The 'Yellow Peril' and the 'Chinese of Europe': Global Perspectives on Race and Labor, 1815-1930," in *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, ed. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 196.

‘contract’ and ‘*padrone*’ - which also gave its name to derivative terms such as ‘*padrone* coolies’.<sup>10</sup> This chapter and the preceding chapter both expand on Gabaccia’s work by examining how these overlapping systems of unfree labour were at the centre of constructions of Italians as desirable or undesirable migrants in a White Australia. While the preceding chapter focused on North Queensland, this chapter focuses on Western Australia.

In this chapter, I examine the debates and events that arose around the fears and allegations that Italians were arriving in Western Australia under labour contract with a focus on the years immediately after Federation in 1901. In these years, two pieces of legislation were passed to guard against migrant workers arriving under contract – the first was the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901 and the second was the Contract Immigrants Act in 1905. Between these pieces of legislation, there were also two Royal Commissions that were appointed in direct response to the increase in immigration from Italy and the allegations that many of these migrants were arriving under contract. Although neither of these commissions found sufficient evidence to prove Italians were arriving under contract, the perception that they were recruited under conditions that were detrimental to Australian workers survived for at least the rest of the decade as Italian arrivals continued to increase.

Firstly, I look at the contract labour issue as it was debated in Federal Parliament, particularly in response to a case in which 31 Italians were denied permission to land in Western Australia in February 1902. I argue that this event brought to the fore a struggle between the three major political parties of the time over the definition of White Australia and the purpose of immigration legislation. While this debate was taking place in Federal Parliament, a similar debate was taking place amongst workers on the Western Australian goldfields. I examine specifically the debate that arose in April and May 1902 within the Amalgamated Workers’ Association that eventually led to Thomas Beasley’s resignation from the position of general-secretary as a result of his pro-Italian stance. The concern that Italians were arriving under contract eventually led to two royal commissions into Italian immigration to Western Australia – the first of which was in 1902 and the second in 1904. Although neither of these commissions found proof that Italians were arriving under contract, the belief Italians were continuing a system of unfair labour

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 178. See also: David R. Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 82.



relations persisted. By turning my attention to the employment of Italians under contract after – rather than before – arrival and the existence of Italian contractors or middlemen who provided labour to large mining companies, I examine the available evidence to suggest that a *padrone* system was in operation in Western Australia. This was not the *padrone* system that was discussed in the first chapter – that is, of men abducting children from southern Italian villages to work for him as itinerant vendors and musicians – but a newer, modern *padrone* system that was linked to free labour in the modern capitalist economy. Finally, I look at how Italians in Sydney and Melbourne responded to the debates that arose from events in Western Australia with particular attention paid to two newspapers that were published in Sydney during this time: *Uniamoci* (1903-1904) and *L'Italo-Australiano* (1905-1909). I argue that urban Italians attempted to incorporate these debates into a broader conceptualisation of an Italian diaspora that was in turn influenced by the newspapers' ideological attachments to either bourgeois nationalism or socialist internationalism.

### **The Immigration Restriction Act and the 31 Italians**

On 4 February 1902, 32 Italians arrived at the port of Fremantle on board the German steamer *Bremen*. Only one of these Italians had booked their ticket for Fremantle and was therefore allowed to disembark and enter the country. The other Italians, whose tickets were booked for Melbourne and Sydney, had desired to disembark as well and this was treated with suspicion by the customs officer. After interviewing some of the men, he decided to subject them each to a dictation test and upon failure of the test all 31 men were refused permission to disembark.<sup>11</sup> Speaking in the House of Representatives a few days after this event, Edmund Barton explained the actions of the officer:

The officer, on examination of the Italians, found that a number of them admitted that they all had come out under an arrangement or agreement. Afterwards someone came along and spoke to the men, and then those who had already committed themselves,

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<sup>11</sup> 'Immigration Restriction. Italians Blocked.' *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 6 February 1902, 5; 'Immigration of Italians,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 February 1902, 8.

withdrew their admission. That made the case more suspicious than ever, and I entirely concur in the action taken by the officer.<sup>12</sup>

The captain of the *Bremen* was, as a result, compelled to carry the 31 Italians on the ship's journey to the eastern states and potentially back to Genoa. This seemed to be the likely outcome when the ship arrived in Adelaide on the ninth and six of the men tried to disembark and were once again subject to the dictation test and refused permission after failing.<sup>13</sup> However, when the ship arrived in Melbourne on the twelfth, the eleven men who wished to disembark were examined by the tide-inspector who found that they were all men aged between 19 and 30, were in possession of sums between £4 10s and £8, were mostly farm hands or miners, had paid for their own passages and had not come out under contract but were encouraged to come by advertisements in the Italian press. The tide-inspector deemed them to be 'eligible colonists', however they were still not granted permission to disembark until they had approval from the Prime Minister.<sup>14</sup> That approval was given and Barton's accompanying speech portrayed a much more positive view of the Italians than his speech a week earlier upon their arrival in Perth:

Eleven of the twelve Italians were examined to-day. Mr. Hunt, secretary of my department, was present, and the examination was of a most searching description. The men are of the ordinary type of decent working men, with a fair amount of money to keep them going for a time, and ready to take any work they can get. The men are of the type of immigrants to whom, as I said in my speech to the House, the education test should not be applied. They will be admitted.<sup>15</sup>

A few days later, on the sixteenth, the *Bremen* arrived at Sydney. Prior to its arrival there, the Italian Consul, Vincenzo Marano, was confident that the fifteen men intending to disembark in Sydney would be able to do so. On arrival, the men were met by the chief tide surveyor of the

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<sup>12</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 6, 7 February 1902, 9873. Allegedly, the contracts were for woodcutting at a wage of 10 shillings per day, see: 'Immigration Restriction. Italians Blocked.' *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 6 February 1902, 5. It was also alleged that they were contracted to the one Italian that was allowed entrance, see: 'Immigration of Italians,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 February 1902, 8.

<sup>13</sup> 'Italians Excluded,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 February 1902, 5.

<sup>14</sup> 'Alien Immigration. Italians Admitted.' *The Herald*, 12 February 1902, 2; 'Arrival of Italians,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 February 1902, 6; 'Alien Immigration. Italians Not Allowed to Land at Perth.' *The Age*, 13 February 1902, 6; 'Italian Immigrants. Their Landing Delayed.' *Evening Journal*, 13 February 1902, 3.

<sup>15</sup> 'Alien Immigration. The Bremen Italians Admitted.' *The Age*, 14 February 1902, 4.

Customs Department who, after securing the services of an interpreter, allowed the men to go ashore and with this the saga of the 31 Italians seems to have been brought to an end.<sup>16</sup> This was confirmed in October 1902 when Alfred Deakin told the House of Representatives that in the case of the 31 Italians the dictation test was wrongly applied.<sup>17</sup> Yet, despite the resolution of this case, it is worth examining further in the context of a struggle over the meaning and administration of the Immigration Restriction Act in the four years between the act being passed in December 1901 and the passing of the Contract Immigrants Act in December 1905.

The administration of the dictation test to migrants arriving under contract was provided for in the Immigration Restriction Act. Section 3 of the Act listed the types of prohibited migrants and clause *g* of this section prohibited migrants under contract except for those who possessed a special skill needed in Australia or if they were a crew member of coastal vessel. Exemptions were also made for arriving migrants who had been granted a certificate of exemption or who had been formerly domiciled in the Commonwealth or former colony. This category was first added to the list of prohibited immigrants as an amendment proposed by the Australian Labor Party during a reading of the Immigration Restriction Bill. According to Layman, Labor was able to successfully attract the cross-class support necessary for the inclusion of this amendment because of its lack of clarity in terms of its purpose and scope. The reasons Layman gives for this lack of clarity are: firstly, the conflation of indentured and contract systems of labour meant that it was mostly understood as a measure against non-white labour; and secondly, Labor obfuscated the purpose of this amendment by underplaying their craft and class interests.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Layman argues that this cross-class consensus over contract labour was shattered only eleven months after the passing of the Act when in December 1902 six English hatters were refused entry into Australia because they were migrating under contract. It became clear that the Act could be used for more than just the exclusion of indentured, 'coloured', unskilled workers but also for skilled workers from Britain. An argument made during this time was that the Act was never meant 'to exclude white skilled labour of our own race'.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 'The Alien Restriction Act,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 February 1902, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 40, 2 October 1902, 16346.

<sup>18</sup> Lenore Layman, "'To Keep up the Australian Standard': Regulating Contract Labour Migration 1901-50," *Labour History*, no. 70 (1996): 25-52.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

If the case of the 'six hatters' shattered that consensus, it had already been tested ten months earlier with the case of the 31 Italians as similar arguments were already being made during the debates on Italian immigration into Western Australia. For example, when the case of the '31 Italians' was first discussed in parliament, the Labor members were supportive of the officers' actions and stuck to the argument that the Italians had arrived under contract. These claims were questioned by other members such as the Free Trade member for Werriwa, Alfred Conroy, who, along with arguing that there was no proof that the Italians had arrived under contract, praised Italian immigration and argued that the restriction of these Italians meant that 'the Act was passed upon a pretence, and is being administered quite differently from what was expected.'<sup>20</sup> In making this argument, Conroy also noted that at the same time that the 31 Italians were refused permission to disembark, two 'Hindoos'<sup>21</sup> were allowed to disembark after passing a language test administered in English.<sup>22</sup> Although they did not agree when it came to the Italians, Conroy and Watson, the leader of the Federal Labor party, were in agreement on the need to restrict the entrance of 'Hindoos'. Watson pointed out that the fact these two 'Hindoos' were allowed to disembark proved that 'the Act is not proving so effective as it said it would be' and that it affirmed the threat that educated 'Hindoos' could pose because they would more easily be able to 'compete with our own people.'<sup>23</sup> In both cases, the 31 Italians and the two 'Hindoos', members of Parliament were concerned that a reliance on the language test rather than a more direct method indicated the Immigration Restriction Act was not working as it should..<sup>24</sup>

Two weeks before the '31 Italians' arrived in Western Australia, the Free Trade member for Fremantle, Elias Solomon, read a letter out in the House of Representatives written by the secretary of the Coastal Trades and Labour Council of Western Australia. This letter wished to

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<sup>20</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 6, 7 February 1902, 9870.

<sup>21</sup> According to Kama Maclean, the term 'Hindoo' was used by Australian authorities 'as a form of nationality that included all Indians, including Muslims' which emphasised their supposedly 'heathen' rituals and thus placed them outside the 'normatively Christian Australian community.' See: Kama Maclean, *British India, White Australia: Overseas Indians, Intercolonial Relations and the Empire* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2020), 32.

<sup>22</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 6, 7 February 1902, 9870.

<sup>23</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 6, 7 February 1902, 9870.

<sup>24</sup> The purpose of the dictation test was to discriminate on the basis of race without appearing to do so, see: Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 145. The colonial government of Western Australia had provided the rest of Australia with a 'prototype' for employing this outwardly 'non-racist' test, see: Jeremy Martens, "Pioneering the Dictation Test?: The Creation and Administration of Western Australia's Immigration Restriction Act, 1897-1901," *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 28 (2013): 48-49.

draw the attention of the House ‘to the increasing influx of Italians and other aliens into this State’ as well as to request that the government enforce the provisions of the Immigration Restriction Act in the case of Italians.<sup>25</sup> Edmund Barton’s response made it clear where he believed Italians stood in relation to the Act:

It was the complete understanding of the House during the debates upon the Immigration Restriction Bill, that immigrants of European race should be admitted without restriction, unless they were specifically found to be undesirable. Where people of European race, whether Italians or of other nationalities, show that they are undesirable, or are discovered to be so, upon grounds independent of colour, there will be no hesitation in applying the educational test; but I do not think it was intended by Parliament, or desired by the country, that persons of European race should be subjected to the test, unless there be some specific reason for their exclusion.<sup>26</sup>

This interpretation of the Act was subsequently challenged during debates on Italian immigration that took place during the years between 1901 and 1905. Whilst Free Trade and Protectionist members continued to argue that it was not the intention of the Act to exclude Europeans such as Italians, Labor members asked for stricter enforcement of the Act in relation to Italian migrants arriving in Western Australia. In April 1902, for example, Hugh Mahon requested a more stringent application of the Act in the case of ‘the Austrians and Italians who are now overrunning the goldfields of West Australia.’<sup>27</sup> In his view, these migrants constituted ‘a great national danger’ because they would enter into competition with local workers and reduce wages. Barton, however, would not have any of this argument and told Mahon that the Immigration Restriction Act is ‘an Immigration Act, and not a Labour Act.’<sup>28</sup> Samuel Mauger, another Protectionist, also reminded Mahon that the exclusion of Italians was not possible under this Act which was meant only to apply to non-Europeans when he asked him: ‘Surely the honorable member does not contend that it was designed to keep out white people?’<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 3, 16 January 1902, 8860.

<sup>26</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 3, 16 January 1902, 8860.

<sup>27</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 18, 29 April 1902, 12068-12069.

<sup>28</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 18, 29 April 1902, 12069, 12074.

<sup>29</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 18, 29 April 1902, 12074.

For Protectionists such as Barton and Mauger, the purpose of the Act was to enforce a general prohibition on non-European immigration. As Europeans, Italians were not to be subject to a general prohibition but could only be excluded on specific grounds – such as arrival under contract or other grounds provided for in the Act such as suffering from mental illness, having a criminal record, or living off of prostitution – and on a case by case basis. Free Trade members such as Conroy were in agreement with this interpretation of the Act. Labor, on the other hand, assumed that the Act could be used to restrict any kind of migrant for any purpose deemed to be important. Under this interpretation, the Act could and should be used to intervene in the labour market and regulate competition between workers over available employment. Labor's class and craft interests that Layman argues were obfuscated when they introduced the amendment to the Immigration Restriction Bill were on clear display when it came to the issue of Italian immigration to Western Australia.<sup>30</sup>

Labor's attempts to re-interpret the purpose of the Immigration Restriction Act in order for it to be used to protect the labour market from unwanted competition never succeeded in gaining support from the other parties. As a result, it was necessary for Labor to articulate their opposition to Italian immigration to Western Australia within the bounds of the Immigration Restriction Act, which meant that they had to continually argue that Italians were arriving under contract. As will be demonstrated below, even after two royal commissions failed to find proof that Italians were arriving under contract, Labor politicians persisted with articulating their opposition to Italian immigration in terms of contract labour as set out in the Immigration Restriction Act and the Contract Immigrants Act that was passed in 1905. This position was taken up not only by the Labor party as the parliamentary wing of the labour movement but also the industrial trade unions on the Western Australian gold fields where most Italians were going to work.

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<sup>30</sup> For another history that places the contract labour within categories of labour and class, see: Franca Iacovetta, Michael Quinlan, and Ian Radforth, "Immigration and Labour: Australia and Canada Compared," *Labour / Le Travail* 38 (1996): 90-115. For a brief and general history of legislation against European immigrants arriving under contract, see: Michele Langfield, "Attitudes to European Immigration to Australia in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (1991): 1-15. While Langfield notes that the debate over the admission of immigrants under these acts often involved disagreements over who was 'white' and who was 'coloured', she attributes this to Social Darwinian theories that were concerned with 'tinted complexions' and neglects how these categories were often conflated with class interests and systems of labour.

## The Industrial Response to the Italian 'Problem'

At the same time that Federal Parliament was divided over the issue of Italian immigration to Western Australia the organised labour movement in areas that Italians were migrating to was in conflict with itself over the issue. In April 1902, the recently appointed general-secretary of the Amalgamated Workers Association (AWA), Thomas Beasley, found himself in the middle of a public debate with the Cue branch over the union's stance on Italian immigration and the best way to ensure that European workers were not arriving in Australia under contracts detrimental to their fellow workers. These disagreements would eventually lead to Beasley resigning from his position at the end of May.

In March and April of 1902, Beasley toured the gold mining towns of the Murchison district in order to re-organise the local branches of the association while also taking the opportunity to discuss with these branches the issue of Italian immigration.<sup>31</sup> The last stop on this tour was Day Dawn, where, on the topic of Italian immigration, he told the audience of union members that he believed Italians were not arriving under contract, that many Italians were just as desirable – if not more – than some British migrants, that Italians must be organised in the union to secure good conditions for the entire industry, and that the only way to stop unwanted immigration from Italy was to organise Italians who would then persuade their countrymen to come only through desirable channels and in desirable numbers.<sup>32</sup> Within two weeks of this meeting, the Cue branch of the AWA held a meeting to discuss Beasley's speech, which the meeting ultimately condemned, calling upon Beasley to explain or retract the statements that he had supposedly made at the original meeting.<sup>33</sup> Although an editorial in the *Westralian Worker* attempted to downplay the conflict by arguing that both Beasley and the Cue branch were fundamentally in agreement – that is, both parties wanted to exclude undesirable aliens, neither side believed in Italian labour displacing Australians, and both sides believed in persuading Italians to join the AWA – the public debate that followed revealed some fundamental disagreements over labour

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<sup>31</sup> 'The Amalgamated Workers' Association,' *The West Australian*, 9 April 1902, 5.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Amalgamated Workers' Association,' *The West Australian*, 9 April 1902, 5.

<sup>33</sup> 'Cue Branch AWA and the General Secretary,' *The Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette*, 22 April 1902, 2; 'Mr Beasley and the AWA,' *The West Australian*, 22 April 1902, 5.

movement ideology and strategy.<sup>34</sup> As such, it is useful to further examine Beasley's arguments in this debate and how they were received by others in his own union as well as the broader public. These arguments represent a broader debate over the understanding of White Australia – in particular, how a labour movement should behave in this new nation and also the place of Italians within both the union and the nation.

On the question of whether or not Italians were arriving in Western Australia under contract, Beasley believed that Italians were not arriving under contract but were the relatives or friends of Italians already in Australia.<sup>35</sup> However, Beasley proposed that if the practice of recruitment under contract did in fact exist, then the best strategy for stopping it was not through legislation that barred Italians from entering the state but through industrial means by recruiting Italians into the union. Since it was believed that the recruitment of Italians under contract would be a strategy used by mining companies to drive down wages and conditions, it was therefore assumed that bringing Italians into the unions would take away the incentive for companies to recruit Italians under contract.<sup>36</sup>

Despite their hostility towards Beasley's arguments, J B Holman, the secretary of the Cue branch, supported Beasley's suggestion to have Italians organised in the AWA. In fact, the Cue branch had made attempts over the previous two years to encourage Italians to join the union by having the union rules printed in Italian. In February 1901, an AWA organiser at Day Dawn wrote that, since Italians were outnumbering Australian workers and had not joined the union, it was a matter of great urgency to print a hundred or more pence cards and rule books in Italian.<sup>37</sup> The issue was raised once again a few months later in July when a meeting of the Day Dawn branch affirmed the importance of recruiting Italians into the AWA.<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere on the goldfields, Italians had already been involved in union organising. At Broad Arrow in February 1902, union meetings were led by a mix of British and Italian leaders. One important figure was Vincenzo Marinoni who, in that same month, was awarded a gold medal on behalf of the Paddington

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<sup>34</sup> 'Mostly Critical,' *Westralian Worker*, 25 April 1902, 2.

<sup>35</sup> 'Italian Immigration: Beasley's Beautiful Beatitudes: How to Deal With the Dago,' *The Sun*, 13 April 1902, 5.

<sup>36</sup> 'The Amalgamated Workers' Association,' *The West Australian*, 9 April 1902, 5.

<sup>37</sup> 'Day Dawn Delvings,' *Westralian Worker*, 8 February 1901, 3.

<sup>38</sup> 'Union Meetings,' *Westralian Worker*, 5 July 1901, 3.



branch of the AWA for his services during a strike at Paddington in 1900 when he convinced Italians employed as strike-breakers to join the striking workers.<sup>39</sup> Marinoni also toured the wood-cutting districts on behalf of the AWA to organise Italians working on the woodlines.<sup>40</sup>

Italians had also proven themselves as unionists in other Western Australian industries. In calling for the further recruitment of Italians into the union, Beasley referred to a strike in Albany where he found no fault with the behaviour of Italians and other foreigners there. Instead, it was found 'with our own white-livered cowards who glorified in lowering themselves to become beasts of burden and eaters of other men's bread.'<sup>41</sup> For Beasley, a unionist in Italy, Austria, Germany or Belgium was just as good as a unionist from other mining areas such as Broken Hill, Bendigo, or Charters Towers.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Beasley also assumed that many Italians already had been engaged in unionism in Italy and, as a result, their reasons for leaving Italy were tied to their status as political exiles. In Italy these men may have each been 'a hero, a fighter for liberty' and came to Australia 'in the good hope that he might get a little justice from those that talked a lot about British fairplay.'<sup>43</sup> This view of Italians was not, however, shared by all. For example, *The Sun* questioned whether the class of migrant arriving from Italy was even capable of becoming a good unionist and accused Italians who had already joined the AWA of possessing only a 'skin-deep unionism ... influenced by expediency and regard for their own safety.'<sup>44</sup>

In addition to protecting the wages and conditions of labour in Australia, Beasley also argued that recruiting Italians into the union was the best strategy for stopping any unwanted influx of arrivals from Italy. In this argument, it was only the Italians themselves who, by writing to family, friends and other contacts in Italy and informing them of conditions in Australia, would have enough influence to block further large influxes of their fellow nationals.<sup>45</sup> This was Beasley's argument for recruiting Italians into the union that drew most criticism from those both within and outside of his union. A column in the *Westralian Worker* argued that recruiting Italians into

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<sup>39</sup> 'Among the Unions,' *Westralian Worker*, 21 February 1902, 3; 'Paddington Consols Strike,' *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 9 August 1900, 7.

<sup>40</sup> W Scateni, 'The Dago Question,' *The Sun*, Kalgoorlie, 8 May 1904, 12

<sup>41</sup> 'The Amalgamated Workers' Association,' *The West Australian*, 9 April 1902, 5.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Italian Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 30 May 1902, 2.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Italian Labor Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 25 April 1902, 5.

<sup>44</sup> 'Italian Immigration: Beasley's Beautiful Beatitudes: How to Deal With the Dago,' *The Sun*, 13 April 1902, 5.

<sup>45</sup> 'The Alien Worker Question,' *The Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette*, 1 May 1902, 2.

the union would have the opposite effect, as it would only lead to Italians writing home encouraging others to follow them in their migrations.<sup>46</sup> *The Sun* also made this same argument but added that recruiting Italians into the union would only serve to encourage Italians to persuade relatives and friends to come out as it would allow them to experience better working conditions. Instead of 'moral suasion', *The Sun* argued, a successful outcome could only be achieved with the 'vigorous application of the education test'.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to these specific disagreements on strategy, this debate highlighted more general disagreements between Beasley and his opponents, on issues such as migration, national and racial prejudice, and internationalism. In his speech at Day Dawn, Beasley also spoke out against national prejudice, which he argued was a result of ignorance and regrettably admitted that it had become popular in the union to sneer at workers from other countries.<sup>48</sup> Holman responded by calling the notions of 'brotherhood' and 'the equality of all mankind' an 'old delusion' and argued that the main consideration of the unionist should be his fellow countrymen rather than any grander idea of international solidarity.<sup>49</sup> Holman's argument was supported by a number of Western Australian newspapers such as the *Murchison Advocate* who criticised Beasley's 'olive-branch speech' and 'brother spirit' for being too idealistic and the *Sunday Times* who argued that 'universal brotherhood' was a betrayal of 'national trades unionism' and therefore anathema to the AWA.<sup>50</sup> A column in the *Sunday Times* also called Beasley a 'dagophile'.<sup>51</sup> 'Dago', a racial slur in transnational circulation at this time, was also invoked in other newspaper commentary to highlight a set of negative traits attributed to the Italians, including their supposedly inferior racial origins, morally questionable behaviour and servility at work.<sup>52</sup>

By arguing against national prejudice in general, Beasley also argued against its influence on immigration restriction. Responding to the Cue branch's attempts to censure him, Beasley

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<sup>46</sup> The Growler, 'The Alien Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 30 May 1902, 3.

<sup>47</sup> 'Italian Immigration: Beasley's Beautiful Beatitudes: How to Deal With the Dago,' *The Sun*, 13 April 1902, 5.

<sup>48</sup> 'The Amalgamated Workers' Association,' *The West Australian*, 9 April 1902, 5.

<sup>49</sup> J B Holman, 'Italian Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 23 May 1902, 4.

<sup>50</sup> 'Italians v. Australians,' *Murchison Advocate*, 26 April 1902, 3; 'Beasley on Dagos,' *Sunday Times*, 27 April 1902, 4; 'Kalgoorlie Ketchup,' *Sunday Times*, 8 June 1902, 8.

<sup>51</sup> 'Kalgoorlie Ketchup,' *Sunday Times*, 8 June 1902, 8.

<sup>52</sup> See: Helen Andreoni, "Olive or White? The Colour of Italians in Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 77 (2003): 84.

argued that the desirability of immigrants was not a matter of nationality but rather an 'undesirable alien was one who, by nature or circumstances, was unable or unwilling to conform to our mode of life.'<sup>53</sup> Under this definition, some Britishers could be considered undesirable, and Beasley drew on discourses of respectability to describe these undesirable Britishers as 'loafing, swindling, ignorant, beer-soaked'.<sup>54</sup> For this, Holman accused Beasley of elitism.<sup>55</sup>

Although it is clear that Beasley opposed national prejudice and its manifestation in restrictive legislation as it related to Italians and other Europeans, it is less clear in this debate whether he agreed or disagreed with prejudice against non-European migrant groups as he did not speak directly on these issues. However, a clue can be found in his usage of the term 'national prejudice' rather than 'racial prejudice' which could suggest that Beasley was thinking in terms of what historians of whiteness have referred to as 'nation-race' rather than 'colour-race'.<sup>56</sup> This distinction was made more clearly in the writing of his supporters – for example, a supportive article published in the *Western Mail* conceived of the debate purely in terms of 'white immigration'. Beasley had not mentioned 'Asiatics' in his speech, the author of the article argued, because they were not 'white' and it would therefore be unnecessary to do so.<sup>57</sup> This was itself a response to an article published in the *Sunday Times* which sought to discredit Beasley's arguments against national prejudice by asking:

Why take the Italian to his bosom and reject the Chinaman and Kanaka? The Christian altruism of universal brotherhood of man includes these aliens just as much as it does the Dagoes. And it is as true of the Chinaman as it is of the Italian that he is a better man than the lazy lout of a "beer sparrer." The Kanaka, too, why should he not join the A.W.A. and become a better workman than the average Australasian worker?

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<sup>53</sup> 'The Italian Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 30 May 1902, 2.

<sup>54</sup> 'The Italian Labor Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 25 April 1902, 5.

<sup>55</sup> J B Holman, 'Italian Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 23 May 1902, 4.

<sup>56</sup> For example, see: Georgia Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," in *Historicising Whiteness Conference (2006: Melbourne, Vic.)* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007), 305-18.

<sup>57</sup> 'A Labour Programme,' *Western Mail*, 12 April 1902, 45.

Therefore, when Beasley wrote a letter to *Westralian Worker* saying that he had for fifteen years advocated the exclusion of undesirable aliens and he specified that this did not include Germans, Italians, French, Russians, Danes or Swedes, he may have been talking not just of the British ‘beer-sparrer’ but of non-European migrants too.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, it would seem that in Beasley’s opinion, non-Europeans were ‘by nature or circumstances ... unable to conform to our mode of life.’ Leading on from this, it would also seem that the difference of opinion that separated Beasley from his opponents was where they decided to draw the line between desirable and undesirable. For Beasley, that line was drawn between Europe and Asia or Africa, however for his opponents, that line was drawn within Europe or even between the British Isles and continental Europe. This can be seen for example, when Holman firmly stated the undesirability of Italians:

Undesirable aliens are people who come here from foreign countries, taking the place of those already here, by accepting such conditions that are detrimental to our interests, competing unfairly, living in such a way that tends to lower our moral status, who never intend to stop nor assist in building the country up, and who prevent the people here from getting a living by their unfair competition. I maintain the Italians are doing that.<sup>59</sup>

Italians, therefore, were not compatible with the goals of a labour movement that saw itself as the most progressive in the world. A letter published in the *Westralian Worker* that was written by one of Beasley’s opponents pointed out that Australian workers were more advanced than any other country, including England.<sup>60</sup> As such, the line between undesirable and desirable may have actually been drawn by some workers around the continent of Australia, separating it from everywhere else. Within this context, opposition to national prejudice and the rhetoric of internationalism was seen as an encouragement of immigration and therefore, not only opposed to notions such as ‘Australia for Australians’ but also pro-capitalist. The aforementioned letter, for example, explicitly accused Beasley of adopting ‘a capitalist view’ and the *Sunday Times* accused him of assisting ‘the cause of every capitalistic cheap labour agitator in Western

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<sup>58</sup> ‘The Italian Question,’ *Westralian Worker*, 30 May 1902, 2.

<sup>59</sup> J B Holman, ‘Italian Question,’ *Westralian Worker*, 23 May 1902, 4.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Beasley and Alien Immigration,’ *Westralian Worker*, 18 April 1902, 3.

Australia.<sup>61</sup> In the view of Beasley's opponents, national prejudice was necessary to see Italians for the threat they posed to organised labour because they were unable to truly become militants. Furthermore, they were a threat to the Australian miner's job security, rate of wages, standard of living and also contributed to 'the indefinite retardation of an ideal and honorable democracy.'<sup>62</sup>

By the end of May, Beasley had indicated his intention to resign from his position as the general-secretary of the AWA. In letters that were published in newspapers, Beasley explained that his choice to resign was due to a difference between himself and the Cue branch on the question of Italian immigration and he did not want to retain his office at the price of sacrificing his opinions.<sup>63</sup> In these letters he affirmed his opposition to national prejudice and his solidarity with Italian workers: 'I have found the Italians good men and good unionists, and decline to be a party to abuse a class of men who are for the great part worthy of every respect.'<sup>64</sup>

However, Beasley's resignation did not mean that the union had turned its back on Italian workers. In fact, only a week before Beasley's resignation, a meeting was held in Day Dawn on 20 May 1902 to bring Italians into the AWA and make a united and strong branch. This meeting was led by the leader of the local AWA branch and Italian speakers, including Botta who emphasised the importance of preparing to fight a battle for liberty, Loni who spoke of the necessity of joining the labour bodies of the country that Italians lived in, and Zaina who said that Italians were willing to join the AWA and uphold the standard wage despite the ill-feeling that existed between nationalities. As a result of the meeting, 96 Italians enrolled as members of the AWA. An hour after this meeting, another meeting was held for Austrian subjects in which similar speeches were made and 25 Austrians joined the AWA.<sup>65</sup> An Italian who attended the meeting wrote to Beasley to inform him of the outcome and also told him that the Italians decided to write to Italy to point out the danger of unrestricted immigration.<sup>66</sup> The issue of

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<sup>61</sup> 'Beasley and Alien Immigration,' *Westralian Worker*, 18 April 1902, 3; 'Beasley on Dagoes,' *Sunday Times*, 27 April 1902, 4.

<sup>62</sup> 'Beasley on Dagoes,' *Sunday Times*, 27 April 1902, 4.

<sup>63</sup> 'The Italian Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 30 May 1902, 2; 'Mr Beasley's Resignation,' *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 2 June 1902, 2.

<sup>64</sup> 'Mr Beasley's Resignation,' *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 2 June 1902, 2.

<sup>65</sup> 'Italians and Austrians on the Murchison,' *The West Australian*, 22 May 1902, 5; 'Austrians and Italians Join the AWA,' *Westralian Worker*, 30 May 1902, 4.

<sup>66</sup> C Garbellin, 'The Italian Question,' *Westralian Worker*, 20 June 1902, 2.

Italian immigration was once again discussed at the next meeting of the Cue branch that was held a month later and the proceedings suggest the impact of bringing Italians into the union. It was said that Italians were deceived as to the conditions of their employment and unfairly treated to the detriment of all workers. At the same meeting, the issue of Afghan labour was discussed without the same feeling of sympathy or solidarity.<sup>67</sup>

This debate over desirability, national prejudice and respectability also pointed to a debate over the definition of White Australia. Like the disagreements in parliament discussed above, this debate over Italian immigration that emerged after Beasley's tour of the Murchison district also reveals competing ideas over what White Australia was to be and for whom it was to be built. It also revealed the 'proletarian nationalism' and parochialism of the Australian labour movement that Italian workers and socialist leaders had confronted all over Australia over the preceding decades.<sup>68</sup> Later in this chapter, I will examine how Italian socialists in Sydney responded to this anti-Italian position that was prevalent in the labour movement. However, before doing that, I will first look at how concerns that Italians were arriving under contract persisted in the years that followed.

### **Contractors and Labour Agents**

In June 1902, the Federal Government appointed a royal commission led by August Roe, a police magistrate in Perth. The commission was directed to inquire into eight areas of attention. The first four related to the collection of general information in relation to non-British migrants such as numbers of arrivals, their origins, their occupations and their wages. The rest were to deal specifically with contract labour, in particular: '5. The existence of any organisation for importing such laborers. 6. Whether any have become inmates of charitable institutions for relief. 7. Whether there are any facts which prove that any recently arrived have come under

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<sup>67</sup> 'The Cue AWA: A Splendid Record,' *Westralian Worker*, 4 July 1902, 4. For studies of Afghans on the Western Australian goldfields, see: Brian Willis, "From Indispensability to Redundancy: The Afghans in Western Australia 1887-1911," *Papers in Labour History*, no. 9 (1992): 39-61; Nahid A. Kabir, "The Economic Plight of Afghans in Australia, 1860-2000," *Islamic Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 229-50.

<sup>68</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia and Fraser Ottanelli, "Diaspora or International Proletariat?: Italian Labor, Labor Migration, and the Making of Multiethnic States, 1815-1939," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 1 (1997): 66; Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 112

contract. 8. Whether there are any facts which lead to the suspicion that they have come under contract.<sup>69</sup> A royal commission became necessary after the previous method of investigation – namely, instructing border officers to gather information from prospective migrants in regards to their arrangements and intentions in Australia – was criticised by Mahon and Kirwan who both expressed a distrust in Italian interpreters who were believed to be directing the migrants to deny coming under contract and providing acceptable answers to questions.<sup>70</sup>

Inquiries began in June 1902 and the final report was submitted to Parliament on 22 August. The report found no evidence for arrivals under contract and recorded that the majority of men came out at the invitation of friends or relatives while others were engaged on arrival at Fremantle before being sent to certain districts. It was found that migrant workers received the same wages as English and Australian workers, they made no effort to cut rates and most of them worked in wood cutting rather than in the mines. Roe also claimed that the mines could not survive without Italians doing all the woodcutting and predicted the influx was unsustainable over the long term and would last only as long as employment in wood cutting was easily obtained.<sup>71</sup> The final report was criticised by Labor politicians on the basis that Roe limited the scope of the report to the eastern goldfields even though it was the districts further north which had more substantial Italian populations.<sup>72</sup> In fact, Thomas Beasley, had already brought this to the attention of the Government while Roe was still conducting the inquiry.<sup>73</sup>

Two years later, in 1904, another Royal Commission was appointed, this time by the Western Australian state government, in order to once again inquire as to whether Italians were arriving under contract to work in the mines and to investigate the employment of non-British miners generally. The Premier suggested that the royal commission had been appointed in order to stop the ‘regrettable’ attacks on Italians.<sup>74</sup> The attacks the Premier was referring to may have included recent large meetings that were held by a group of property owners in Coolgardie and the Goldfields Trades and Labor Council in Kalgoorlie which sent a protest to the State

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<sup>69</sup> ‘The Alien Labor Question. Mr. Roe’s Enquiries.’ *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 17 June 1902, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 18, 29 April 1902, 12074-12075.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Alien Immigration,’ *The West Australian*, 23 August 1902, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 39, 26 September 1902, 16198-16199.

<sup>73</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 25, 20 June 1902, 14013.

<sup>74</sup> ‘West Australia. The Employment of Aliens. Royal Commission Appointed.’ *Norseman Times*, 20 May 1905, 3.

Government to take steps to protect unemployed British workers by enforcing the Immigration Restriction Act.<sup>75</sup> Alternatively, the Premier could have been referring to the decision by the newly formed Federal Labor Government to appoint a special officer at Fremantle who had the power to restrict the movement of Italian and Austrian migrants who were merely suspected of coming under contract – a move which was criticised in Parliament by the Protectionist member for Swan, Bruce Smith, for being an arbitrary abuse of power that singled out two nationalities.<sup>76</sup> The Premier may also have been referring to violent attacks on Italian workers, which the mayor of Kalgoorlie warned could be a potential outcome if the issue was not dealt with by a royal commission and which were already a reality in some of the districts away from the main centres. The town of Leonora, for example, which was close to the Sons of Gwalia mine where a substantial proportion of the workforce was Italian, experienced frequent outbreaks of violence between Italian and British workers throughout 1904.<sup>77</sup> Once again, the royal commission found no evidence to confirm that Italians or other non-British migrants were arriving under contract. However, it did find evidence to suggest preference was being shown for Italian workers by some mining companies.

Despite the fact that neither of these royal commissions found evidence to prove that Italians were arriving in Western Australia under contract, the issue of contract labour persisted. In January 1906, a deputation of Federal and State Labor members waited on Senator Playford in Perth to submit to the Government their request that all Italians arriving in Western Australia be subject to the language test under the Immigration Restriction Act. These Labor members once again raised the concern that Italians were arriving under contract – citing, for example, the observation that Italians were going straight to work in places that very few people even knew about, despite not being able to speak English. Playford countered these arguments, saying that although there was no proof that they were arriving under contract, their ‘methodical movement’ could indicate this was the case. He was unsure how this could actually be proven

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<sup>75</sup> Farmers Are Socialists,’ *The Worker*, 7 May 1904, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 21, 26 May 1904, 1653.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example: ‘Dismissal of Italians,’ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 26 April 1904, 6; ‘Leonora: An Alien Commotion,’ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 3 June 1904, 2; ‘Affray at Leonora. Italians v. Britishers. Two Men Injured.’ *Day Dawn Chronicle*, 6 July 1904, 3; ‘Leonora,’ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 28 October 1904, 7.



and therefore the Federal government was powerless to do anything, unless it decided to use the language test to exclude Italians altogether.<sup>78</sup>

By the end of the decade organised labour began to look beyond immigration under contract to identify the separate issue of contract labourers recruited after arrival. An exchange that took place in the House of Representatives in November 1909 between the Labor member for Kalgoorlie, Charles Frazer, and the Minister for External Affairs, Littleton Groom provides an example through which to draw out the distinction between labour that was contracted before or after arrival. In this exchange, Frazer raised the issue of Italians arriving under contract once again, claiming that the ease with which new arrivals were finding employment was suspicious and seemed to ‘suggest that some secret machinery to defeat the Act is moving’. In his view, something needed to be done because most Italians were employed under contract. In response, Groom told Frazer that nothing could be done about the employment of Italians under contract in his department – it was not an immigration issue but an issue of industrial relations, internal to Western Australia. In Groom’s words: ‘The Commonwealth has power to regulate the admission of immigrants coming here under contract, but once a man is admitted, and mixes with the general body of citizens, he is entitled to engage in industry in accordance with State laws and the conditions prevailing in the different States.’ Italian migrants might have been employed under contract and received wages that were considered unfair but after their arrival these things are entirely a ‘matter of internal concern.’<sup>79</sup> Arriving under contract and working under contract were therefore entirely different issues and to be dealt with by entirely different mechanisms.

The practice of hiring Italians under contract after they had arrived in Western Australia was documented in the reports of the royal commissions. The report of the 1904 Royal Commission frequently mentioned an Italian contractor named ‘Cheruti’. According to the commissioners, he controlled a large portion of the workforce at the Great Fingall mine, which was a clear case of preference for Italians because the contract was let to him privately without giving British miners a chance to put in a price. Elsewhere in the report, the commissioners included evidence that suggested ‘Cheruti’ was underpaying his workers, dismissing them if they demanded the

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<sup>78</sup> ‘Contract Labor,’ *The Worker*, 11 January 1906, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 46, 17 November 1909, 5903.

standard rate of wages, and that he was even responsible for importing Italian workers under contract, however these claims were ultimately dismissed as hearsay and unable to be confirmed.<sup>80</sup> The 'Cheruti' of the report was Pietro Ceruti, an Italian from Bergamo in Lombardy, who worked in that region's zinc mines and in gold mines in Mysore, India before working in Western Australian mines from the late 1890s, first at Broad Arrow and then at the Great Fingall. As Richard Hartley points out, his arrival at the Great Fingall coincided with the introduction of mechanical drills and it was his experience with machine mining in Mysore that was influential in him winning a contract there. These contracts were also on a lower rate of pay, resulting in a strike by British and Italian workers that initially made it difficult for Ceruti to find labour. However, after the strike, he was retained as a contractor and encouraged to take up further contracts.<sup>81</sup> According to evidence he gave before the Royal Commission on Miners' Lung Disease in 1911, Ceruti employed six men at first, followed by 12, and eventually he came to be responsible for most of the underground work on the mine, employing as many as 250 at a time. These workers were mostly Italians, but also included some Englishmen, Germans and Africans. When Ceruti held these contracts, only trucking, shovelling down of ore, and mullocking were done by the company's workers on hourly rates.<sup>82</sup>

Pietro Ceruti is one example of the Italian labour agents that were employed as intermediaries to obtain labour for large mining firms such as Bewick Moreing – a mining company that, in 1898, instituted a policy of employing Italian labour on its mines as part of a broader plan to reduce the costs of production as well as disrupt worker militancy.<sup>83</sup> After employing 15 Italians in a total workforce of 130 at the Sons of Gwalia mine, Superintendent Herbert Hoover noted: 'rivalry between them and other miners is no small benefit. Although the Italians are fully 20% superior we do not intend placing them throughout the mine for when in a majority they are somewhat troublesome.'<sup>84</sup> This policy was adopted in most of Bewick Moreing's northern mines by the early 1900s but not in its Kalgoorlie mines where, according to Hartley, 'labour relations

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<sup>80</sup> See: Gianfranco Cresciani, *Emigranti O Compari: Vita Italiana in Australia / Migrants or Mates: Italian Life in Australia* (Sydney: Knockmore Enterprises, 1988), 47.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Hartley, "Bewick Moreing in Western Australian Gold Mining 1897-1904: Management Policies & Goldfields Responses," *Labour History*, no. 65 (1993): 4.

<sup>82</sup> 'Miners' Lung Disease. Mr. Pietro Ceruti's Evidence.' *The Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette*, 14 November 1911, 4.

<sup>83</sup> See: Hartley, "Bewick Moreing in Western Australian Gold Mining 1897-1904: Management Policies & Goldfields Responses."

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in: *ibid.*, 3.

were more sensitive because labour organisation was stronger and the actions of mine managements were more subject to public scrutiny.<sup>85</sup> The introduction of Italian labour was just one part of a broader strategy to increase labour productivity in mines that also included the increase of working hours from 44 to 48 hours per week, and the introduction of single-hand drilling. Other reforms included more work on contracts, the cancellation of double time payment for Sunday as well as allowances for wet working conditions, and the reorganization of underground operations to reduce trucking distances and to permit the systematic mining of payable ore.<sup>86</sup> Within this context, the introduction of Italian workers aggravated suspicions that Italians were arriving under contract and lowering the standard of wages and working conditions.

Furthermore, as Patrick Bertola points out, the employment of such intermediaries by large mining firms was another factor that contributed to the perception that Italians were arriving under contract.<sup>87</sup> However, the actions of these men in Australia – such as Ceruti and Vanzetti (who is discussed above) – have remained under-researched in comparison to the work of North American historians who have identified a new *padrone* system of labour agents operating within various migrant groups such as Italians, Greeks, Mexicans, Turks, Bulgarians, Macedonians, Austrians, Mexicans, Japanese and Chinese between 1885 and 1925.<sup>88</sup> They have defined the new *padrone* system as ‘an expansive system of coercive labour relations’ which used the hallmarks of ‘free’ labour relations: the wage contract and the right to quit.<sup>89</sup> They have also emphasised that the *padrone* was not a pre-industrial or pre-modern figure, nor was he a figure of ‘ethnic crime’ but linked to the development of modern industrial capitalism in these regions.<sup>90</sup> The *padrone* was not a ‘primitive progenitor of unfree labour relations’ but possessed close ties to the modern corporation and it was for these North American corporations that the most

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Patrick Bertola, "Italian Migration to Western Australia before World War One: Some Observations on Ethnicity and Conflict," *Italian Historical Society Journal* 1, no. 2 (1993): 7.

<sup>88</sup> See: Humbert S. Nelli, "The Italian Padrone System in the United States," *Labor History* 5, no. 2 (1964): 153-67; Robert F. Harney, "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism," *Labour / Le Travail* 4 (1979): 57-84; Gunther Peck, "Reinventing Free Labor: Immigrant Padrones and Contract Laborers in North America, 1885-1925," *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 3 (1996): 848-71.

<sup>89</sup> Peck, "Reinventing Free Labor: Immigrant Padrones and Contract Laborers in North America, 1885-1925," 849.

<sup>90</sup> Harney, "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism," 84; Peck, "Reinventing Free Labor: Immigrant Padrones and Contract Laborers in North America, 1885-1925," 850.

successful *padroni* worked, helping them meet their expanding needs for unskilled labour.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, their power did not originate in the Old World or the pre-industrial culture left behind – rather, *padroni* gained power first as labour market entrepreneurs in North America and subsequently reached back to the villages to organise new chain migrations.<sup>92</sup>

While the US had its own legislation against immigration under contract – the Foran Act introduced in 1885 which targeted Italian and Slavic workers – instead of obstructing *padroni* it increased both the corporation's and the worker's reliance on middlemen and so they were able to capitalise while circumventing the law's requirements.<sup>93</sup> With a sparse population and enduring labour scarcities, regions in the North American West became a bastion of coercive labour relations as they 'presented remarkable potential to middlemen who could traverse those spaces and regulate the mobility of workers through space and between jobs.'<sup>94</sup> In Australia, regions such as the Western Australian goldfields, especially those in the Murchison and the 'northern fields' may have offered similar potential. These *padroni* were also entrepreneurs who apart from playing the role of contractor or labour agent often played the role of banker, steamship agent or employment agent and 'in many other businesses made possible by the migrants' dependence on them.'<sup>95</sup> Within this relationship of dependence, migrants were not only a pool of exploitable labour but they were a consumer base too.<sup>96</sup>

In the Australian context, Andonis Piperoglou has recently taken up the lead of these historians of the North American experience to argue that Greek migrants in the early twentieth century constructed a system of 'business-chain-migration' that was tied to clientelism and was similar to the *padrone* system that existed in the US.<sup>97</sup> Historians of Italians in Australia, however, while implying its existence, have downplayed the importance of such a system on the Western Australian goldfields. Robert Pascoe and Patrick Bertola, for example, argue that the *padrone*

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<sup>91</sup> Peck, "Reinventing Free Labor: Immigrant Padrones and Contract Laborers in North America, 1885-1925," 850.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 852.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 853-54.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 869-70.

<sup>95</sup> Harney, "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism," 72-73.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>97</sup> Andonis Piperoglou, "Greek Settlers: Race, Labour, and the Making of White Australia, 1890s-1920s" (La Trobe University, 2016), 122-23. See also: Charles Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963), 64.

system was never important in Western Australia because it developed out of forms of patronage that were prevalent in areas of Italy that did not provide migrants before 1939.<sup>98</sup> This argument was founded on Pascoe's broader conception of Italian immigration in which he tied patterns of immigration and settlement in Australia to the socioeconomic patterns of the migrants' region of origin. Pascoe identified five main socio-economic zones of Italy: the north, the centre and Puglia, the deep south, west Sicily, and Sardinia. Apart from the central zone, all of these zones were characterised by low incomes and high rates of emigration, however they were distinguished by patterns of land ownership and the class relations that developed out of these patterns. Furthermore, emigration took on different characteristics from each of these zones as the experience and patterns of emigration reflected their individual socio-economic conditions. As such, Pascoe argues that 'chain' migration (or delayed family migration) dominated the areas of the deep south, 'circular' migration (or male serial migration) dominated the north, and 'indentured' migration (or *padrone*-led migration) dominated western Sicily and Sardinia.<sup>99</sup>

Pascoe's research must either contradict or allow a flexibility within this geographic framework of socio-economic conditions and emigration because the one example he gives of a *padrone* in Western Australia was Agostino Armanasco who had emigrated from the Sondrio province in northern Italy. In Western Australia, Armanasco was a contractor and ran a hotel and boarding house through which he could offer many services to new arrivals – such as banking, travel documentation and regular employment.<sup>100</sup> However, in his discussion of Armanasco and other unnamed *padroni* in Western Australia, Pascoe continues to conceive of the *padrone* system separate from the chain and circular migrations.<sup>101</sup> As Peck argues in relation to North America, the *padrone* system did not exist in opposition to chain migration, but rather it 'helped reorganise and stimulate chain migrations.'<sup>102</sup> Leading on from this, Pascoe also perpetuates the problem of looking for the *padrone* system in the process of emigration, or in the region of origin, rather than something that developed within the New World as an intermediary between capital and

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<sup>98</sup> See footnote 37 of Robert Pascoe and Patrick Bertola, "Italian Miners and the Second-Generation 'Britishers' at Kalgoorlie, Australia," *Social History* 10, no. 1 (1985): 31.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage* (Richmond, Vic.: Greenhouse Publications, 1987), 22.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-11.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Peck 1996, 851-852.

labour. Similarly, he perpetuates the conception of Italian contract labour as a problem of immigration rather than a problem of industrial relations within Western Australia.

In addition to figures such as Ceruti, Armanasco and Vanzetti who are already known to historians, a number of other archival fragments suggest that a *padrone* system was known to be in existence on the Western Australian goldfields. In 1899, Luigi Guannini was an employer of woodcutters near Kalgoorlie while also running a boarding house where his workers stayed. Despite receiving two thousand pounds for the contract, the forty men working for him were not paid.<sup>103</sup> The issue was later raised in June in the Western Australian Legislative Assembly by Fredrick Vosper who noted that Guannini's workers received nothing but board from him and this, therefore, meant that he was a '*padrone*'.<sup>104</sup> In this debate, Vosper also likened what he was seeing emerge in Western Australia to the *padrone* system that had developed in the mining industry of Pennsylvania and other parts of the US.<sup>105</sup> The underpaying of contracted workers was perceived to be a common behaviour of a *padrone* and as late as 1928, this was the perception of figures such as Ceruti. It was believed to be common that these men would take contracts at a standard rather than a cut price, however he would not pay the workers what was owed to them.<sup>106</sup>

The case of Alberto Zerbi demonstrates another aspect of a *padrone* system at work. Appearing before the Cue Police Court in September 1904, Zerbi was accused of receiving five pounds from an 'Austrian' named Peter Marinovich in exchange for a job on the Great Fingall mine. Zerbi claimed to have been doing it on behalf of another Italian named Botta who was a long time contractor at the Great Fingall and an associate of Ceruti.<sup>107</sup> It is possible that Zerbi was receiving a '*bossatura*' – that is, the commission paid to the *padrone* for the obtainment of employment – on behalf of the *padrone* who, in this case, was the contractor.<sup>108</sup> This Zerbi case also suggests that the practice of receiving a payment for employing a worker was generally acceptable because Zerbi was charged and found guilty, not for the act of receiving money, but

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<sup>103</sup> 'The System of Truck,' *The Sun*, 15 January 1899, 12.

<sup>104</sup> WA, Parliamentary Debates, *Legislative Assembly*, 18 July 1899, 339-342.

<sup>105</sup> WA, Parliamentary Debates, *Legislative Assembly*, 18 July 1899, 339-342.

<sup>106</sup> WA, Parliamentary Debates, *Legislative Assembly*, 22 August 1928, 413-414.

<sup>107</sup> 'Simple Peter Marinovich,' *Murchison Advocate*, 26 September 1903, 4.

<sup>108</sup> Nelli, "The Italian *Padrone* System in the United States," 157.

for receiving money and failing to uphold his end of the agreement. By failing to find Marinovich a job, Zerbi was punished for having obtained the money 'by means of a fraudulent trick.'<sup>109</sup>

Apart from the fragments referred to in this section, the evidence that a *padrone* system similar to that which existed in the North American West had existed in Western Australia remains relatively difficult to find. This research could be taken further by taking lessons from the North American historiography and conducting extensive research into the biographies of figures such as Armanasco, Ceruti and Vanzetti which, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of this thesis. This work is important to overcome the limitations of the Australian historiography which has inherited the limitations of its source material. The English-language sources – from newspaper articles to parliamentary debates, royal commissions, and the speeches of union leaders – demonstrate a general sense of uncertainty over whether or not a system of contract labour existed in Western Australia. As I will demonstrate in the next section, this uncertainty was a feature of Italian-language sources too.

### Italian Responses from Sydney and Melbourne

There was at least one Italian organisation on the Western Australian goldfields. That was the *Società di Mutuo Soccorso Italia* (Italian Mutual Aid Society) of Kalgoorlie. Sources on this society are scarce, however it was clearly active between 1906 and 1908. In January 1906, the society responded to the deputation of Labor representatives that argued for the language test to be applied to all Italians arriving in Western Australia, saying that Italians took exception to Labor's repetition of the same claims that had led to the Royal Commission two years earlier and found the accusations had no founding whatsoever. The society also pointed out that Italians had no need to come out under contract because they were good, industrious workers and there was always 'fair and honest' work to be found by such workers. At the time, it was reported that the Society had amongst its members, 'all the Italian labourers engaged on the eastern goldfields'.<sup>110</sup> The leadership of this society was made up of men who had been on these fields since the early gold rush period and had already established themselves. The president of the society was Henry

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<sup>109</sup> 'Simple Peter Marinovich,' *Murchison Advocate*, 26 September 1903, 4.

<sup>110</sup> 'Italian Immigration,' *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 12 January 1906, 6.

Fey, a northern Italian of French background who in 1906 was already described as ‘an old and respected colonist, and one of the hardy band of pioneers who, braving the trials and dangers to be encountered in the outback country years ago, laid the foundation of the state’s great mining industry as it exists today.’<sup>111</sup> By the time he had died in January 1921, Fey had been a manager for the Hampton Plains Company, managed the Great Ophir mine, prospected in the Murchison district, was an interpreter for the Italian community and represented the Italian Consul on several occasions.<sup>112</sup> The townsite of Feysville, about twenty-five kilometres south of Kalgoorlie, was also named after him.<sup>113</sup> The society’s vice-president was Lodovico Gianini, another pioneer of the Western Australian mining industry, having arrived in 1892.<sup>114</sup> By 1902, he had bought a share of the Hidden Secret mine and by 1908 was the largest shareholder on that mine.<sup>115</sup> Apart from this group led by established Italian mine managers, there was no other group who participated in the public debate over the supposed arrival of Italians under contract. Despite having the largest numbers of any Australian state at the time, the Italian-born population of Western Australia was mobile and spread out over a large area and as such there was no class of urban intellectuals and no Italian-language newspapers through which an Italian position could be debated and expressed. On the other side of the continent, however, two Sydney-based newspapers – *Uniamoci!* (1903-1904) and *L’Italo-Australiano* (1905-1909) – were responding to the events and debates emerging in Western Australia from their own vantage points. Articles and letters published in both of these newspapers demonstrate how Italians in the urban centres of Sydney and Melbourne responded to these events by fitting them into their broader ideas on issues such as citizenship, settlement, respectability, race, nationalism and internationalism.

*Uniamoci!* and *L’Italo-Australiano* represent two different orientations in migrant Italian journalism that Catherine Dewhirst has labelled ‘the socialist stance’ and ‘the assimilative orientation’. *Uniamoci!* represented the former orientation, while *L’Italo-Australiano* represented the latter – however, as Dewhirst emphasises, it embraced assimilation in a cultural sense: ‘integration

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<sup>111</sup> ‘Italian Immigration,’ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 12 January 1906, 6.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Mining and Counter-Mining,’ *Truth*, 1 January 1921, 7.

<sup>113</sup> ‘The Silent Partner,’ *Western Argus*, 4 January 1921, 18.

<sup>114</sup> NAA: A1, 1905/569, Lodovico Gianini – Naturalization.

<sup>115</sup> ‘The Hidden Secret,’ *Sunday Times*, 5 January 1908, 1.



without loss of culture'.<sup>116</sup> This distinction was originally articulated by Samuel Baily who, in his research on Italians in Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo, distinguished between the 'radical' and 'bourgeois' press in the Italian migrant context. The radical stance was adopted by anarchist and socialist newspapers that lasted only a short time, had a small circulation and had a limited influence upon the mass of Italian workers. Most of their efforts were defending class interests and attacking 'bourgeois nationalism'. However, these newspapers also played several roles in encouraging adaptation and social assimilation – for example, they often encouraged migrants to become citizens of the nations they migrated to in order to participate in the political process and they also sought to help workers organise to improve the working and living conditions of their new environment.<sup>117</sup> The bourgeois press, on the other hand, had a far larger circulation as it sought to speak for Italian migrants of all classes, advocating on behalf of the working class well as the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois press also had a much greater influence in the process of assimilation and cultivated an attitude towards assimilation that was quite different from those of the radicals.<sup>118</sup>

The socialist newspaper *Uniamoci!* was founded in 1903 with the purpose of facilitating the establishment of a new Italian union or society after the dissolution of the Italian Workmens' Mutual Benefit Society. Its founding editor, Giuseppe Prampolini was a socialist exile who fled Venice in 1899 and was therefore one of the younger and more recent members of that society.<sup>119</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani has described him as 'after Sceusa, ... the most important figure in the group of Italian Socialists in Sydney'.<sup>120</sup> Through *Uniamoci!*, Prampolini tried to mobilise the Italians in Australia, 'to spur them to become politically active, to integrate them into the political and trade union institutions set up by Australian labour, but to no avail'.<sup>121</sup> Like other radical or socialist Italian newspapers around the world, such as those in Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo, this included encouraging Italians to become naturalised Australians as soon as they satisfied the

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<sup>116</sup> Catherine Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness: Representing Italians in Early White Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 35.

<sup>117</sup> Samuel L. Baily, "The Role of Two Newspapers in the Assimilation of Italians in Buenos Aires and São Paulo, 1893–1913," *International Migration Review* 12, no. 3 (1978): 325.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 325–26.

<sup>119</sup> F Sceusa, 'The Mafia,' *Truth*, 7 October 1900, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, "The Making of a New Society: Francesco Sceusa and the Italian Intellectual Reformers in Australia 1876–1906," in *Stories of Australian Migration*, ed. John Hardy (Kensington, N.S.W.: New South Wales University Press, 1988), 93.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

necessary conditions required by law. This way they could contribute to the formation of laws and take part in the government of public affairs.<sup>122</sup> *Uniamoci!* argued that the refusal to become a naturalised citizen of one's country of residence was a form of strike-breaking behaviour. Unable to exercise their rights at home, Italians abroad had the obligation to take on such rights and make use of them in the country where they were in order to make a contribution to the general improvement of the global working class.<sup>123</sup> In the words of the newspaper: 'Every man, whatever the land where he lives, has social duties to perform and rights to exercise: and he who fulfills his duty and does not care to exercise his right, commits a crime of public action, since, in addition to harming himself, harms the community.'<sup>124</sup>

*L'Italo-Australiano* was founded in 1905 by businessman Giovanni Pulle and socialist Quinto Ercole.<sup>125</sup> Despite Ercole's political orientation, the newspaper represented the 'assimilative' or 'bourgeois' orientation and as such it attempted to accommodate all classes and diverse political persuasions.<sup>126</sup> For example, the newspaper responded to claims that Italians were 'cheap' by arguing that Italians were willing to demand and fight for their entitlements, were always at the fore of aiding their fellow workers in obtaining standard wages and conditions and denied knowing of any Italians who were strike-breakers or snitches.<sup>127</sup> Sometimes this involved highlighting the role Italians played in key historical events such as the 1892 Broken Hill miners' strike or reinterpreting other events such as Fraire's failed attempt to recruit Italians in the sugar industry as an example of industrial militancy.<sup>128</sup> However, such attempts to highlight the industrial militancy of Italians were always made to construct Italians as good settlers and worthy members of White Australia rather than as members or an international proletariat uniting against capitalism. *L'Italo-Australiano* criticised the Labor party and the labour movement for fostering a culture of dependency within the working class, and argued that 'when the working-man shall learn to depend more on himself ... there will be more hope for him.'<sup>129</sup> This encouragement of individualism was connected to the newspaper's construction of the ideal

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<sup>122</sup> 'Gli Italiani in Australia [The Italians in Australia],' *Uniamoci*, 14 May 1904, 1.

<sup>123</sup> 'In Difesa del Lavoro [In Defence of Labour],' *Uniamoci*, 4 June 1904, 1.

<sup>124</sup> 'Gli Italiani in Australia [The Italians in Australia],' *Uniamoci*, 14 May 1904, 1.

<sup>125</sup> Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness," 33-35.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>127</sup> 'Italians as Colonists,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 30 September 1905, 2.

<sup>128</sup> 'Italians as Colonists,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 30 September 1905, 2.

<sup>129</sup> 'Labour and Immigration,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 28 October 1905, 2.

Italian migrant which, unlike *Uniamoci!*'s ideal of the industrially militant and politically engaged proletarian, could be best described as 'a sturdy, intelligent race of yeoman'.<sup>130</sup> The newspaper's yeoman ideal was to be achieved through the establishment of agricultural colonies in underdeveloped parts of Australia. In fact, *L'Italo-Australiano* was founded with the purpose of establishing such agricultural colonies in Western Australia.<sup>131</sup> Although agricultural colonies were also encouraged by Italian socialists in the US as a solution to the hostility towards southern Italian peasants in North American industrial centres, in Australia they were the preferred solution of the bourgeois press to the 'Italian problem'.<sup>132</sup>

Underlying these different orientations were a different set of allegiances. *Uniamoci!* was primarily devoted to the international working class in the struggle against capital. While this involved giving up Italian citizenship for strategic purposes it was not necessarily opposed to a sense of Italian nationalism or national feeling. In the face of hostility from the Australian press, the Australian labour movement and the Australia Labor Party, *Uniamoci!* encouraged Italians to unite as a matter of defence and protection. At the beginning of 1904, the newspaper hoped that in the new year 'the common hope of a general Italian brotherhood [would be] realised'.<sup>133</sup> This position was also put forward in letters written by the newspaper's readers who highlighted the necessity for Italians to come together to defend against attacks from the general population and to improve their material and moral condition in Australia.<sup>134</sup> This defensive nationalism was contrasted to Australian nationalism or British chauvinism which was perceived to be sowing hatred amongst workers and was therefore against their interests and only served to increase the oppressive force of capitalism.<sup>135</sup> These letters also demonstrated that Italians understood their position within the Australian racial hierarchy – for example, one letter writer noted that 'the Italian name alone is considered as much as the Chinese one, and sometimes even worse'.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> 'The Contract Labour Bugbear,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 16 December 1905, 2.

<sup>131</sup> 'To Our English Readers,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 11 March 1905, 2. For the planned Italian agricultural colonies in Western Australia, see: Catherine Dewhurst, "Colonising Italians: Italian Imperialism and Agricultural 'Colonies' in Australia, 1881–1914," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no.1 (2015): 23–47.

<sup>132</sup> Il Proletario, 'Per La Nostra Emigrazione [For Our Emigration],' *Uniamoci*, 5 December 1903, 1.

<sup>133</sup> 'Uniamoci,' *Uniamoci*, 2 January 1904, 1.

<sup>134</sup> L Camusso, 'Corrispondenza [Correspondence],' *Uniamoci*, 11 June 1904, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Lorenzo Camusso, 'L'Anti-Italianismo in Australia [Anti-Italianism in Australia],' *Uniamoci*, 21 May 1904, 1.

<sup>136</sup> P Vanni, 'Corrispondenza [Correspondence],' *Uniamoci*, 14 May 1904, 3.

Without the same internationalist allegiance, *L'Italo-Australiano* was more concerned with nationalism and declared its allegiances as such: 'although *L'Italo-Australiano* will always be found at its post as a faithful sentinel of Italian interests, we are also Australians in our aspirations, and mean to uphold the Australian ideal of a WHITE AUSTRALIA.'<sup>137</sup> It was through adopting the discourses of White Australia that *L'Italo-Australiano* declared that it would make sure not to 'encourage any class of immigration that might clash, or enter into competition, with the labourers of this country, and thereby reduce wages.'<sup>138</sup> The newspaper would instead warn undesirable migrants against coming, 'and only advise the advent of hardy, intelligent, and industrious farmers, with sufficient capital to settle on the land, and to extract from the soil the riches which are now lying idle.'<sup>139</sup> It was also in defence of this White Australia ideal, that *L'Italo-Australiano* made their case for agricultural colonies more persuasive by arguing that Australia was in desperate need of population and defended this assertion by drawing on yellow peril discourse. The newspaper pointed to the rising development and power of Japan, exploited Australian anxieties about the allegiance of Britain and also emphasised the rising threat of China too as well as 'the countless hordes of India, to say nothing of the Malay races.'<sup>140</sup> In short, Australia needed population and to get it Australia needed immigration.<sup>141</sup> It was within this broader argument for a White Australia populated with hard-working agriculturalists from all over Europe that *L'Italo-Australiano* weighed in on the contract labour debate. In the newspaper's view, legislation such as the Immigration Restriction and the Contract Immigrants Act, by erecting barriers to European immigration, put Australia into a semi-helpless condition, dependent on Britain for protection.<sup>142</sup> Labor's support of these legislative restrictions on immigration were described by the newspaper as a symptom of 'suicidal egoism' – as was the notion of 'Australia for Australians'.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> 'About Italian Immigration, *L'Italo-Australiano*, 11 March 1905, 2.

<sup>138</sup> 'About Italian Immigration, *L'Italo-Australiano*, 11 March 1905, 2.

<sup>139</sup> 'About Italian Immigration, *L'Italo-Australiano*, 11 March 1905, 2.

<sup>140</sup> 'Australia's Necessity,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 16 September 1905, 2. There were other articles in which they referred to 'Australia's need', see: 'Mr Coghlan's and Others on Australia's Need,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 23 September 1905, 2. Regarding the 'yellow peril', see: 'Australia Through Italian Spectacles,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 29 February 1908, 2.

<sup>141</sup> 'Australia's Necessity,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 16 September 1905, 2; 'Mr Coghlan's and Others on Australia's Need,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 23 September 1905, 2.

<sup>142</sup> 'The Contract Labour Bugbear,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 16 December 1905, 2.

<sup>143</sup> 'Immigration,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 9 September 1905, 2; 'Where the Italian Comes In,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 18 November 1905, 2.

In *Uniamoci!* the issue of contract labour in Western Australia was understood within a larger debate on anti-Italianism around the world which conceptualised Italians in Australia as part of a broader Italian diaspora or international proletariat.<sup>144</sup> In May and June 1904, an interesting debate took place in the pages of *Uniamoci!* between P. Vanni, a resident of Sydney who had also been a member of the Italian Workmen's Mutual Benefit Society, and Lorenzo Camusso, a resident of Melbourne who was a member of the Socialist Party in Victoria. *Uniamoci!*'s editor, Prampolini, mediated the debate and noted that there was some exaggeration on both sides with Camusso being overly optimistic and Vanni being overly pessimistic in relation to certain questions such as whether or not Italians were working below award standards, if they were being recruited under contract and their involvement in the Australian labour movement.<sup>145</sup> Camusso wrote most directly in response to the question of Italian workers in Western Australia and argued that Italians in general were aware of their value as workers and while keeping their price high, were almost always preferred. Prampolini generally agreed with Camusso on this point but also admitted that there were exceptions: "There are special cases of isolated, inexperienced and needy individuals who work at non-remunerative prices; but the isolated cases do not have much influence on the market and in any case, as such, they cannot be blamed on generality."<sup>146</sup> In these cases, it was Italian entrepreneurs who were to blame and all three men agreed that Italian employers should be made to set a good example by paying their workers in accordance with local conditions and not taking advantage of new arrivals.<sup>147</sup> In relation to this point, Prampolini also raised the possibility that Italians were arriving under contract by speculating that the recruitment of 'needy individuals who work at non-remunerative prices' could have happened in either Australia or Italy.<sup>148</sup>

This debate extended beyond the case of Western Australia. Indeed, Camusso was criticised by Vanni for confining his analysis of the situation only to Italians in Australia while Vanni and Prampolini both made reference to Italian workers all over the world – from European cities in

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<sup>144</sup> Donna Gabaccia and Fraser Ottanelli, "Diaspora or International Proletariat?: Italian Labor, Labor Migration, and the Making of Multiethnic States, 1815-1939," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 1 (1997): 61-84.

<sup>145</sup> 'In Difesa del Lavoro [In Defence of Labour],' *Uniamoci*, 28 May 1904, 2-3.

<sup>146</sup> 'In Difesa del Lavoro [In Defence of Labour],' *Uniamoci*, 28 May 1904, 2-3.

<sup>147</sup> 'In Difesa del Lavoro [In Defence of Labour],' *Uniamoci*, 28 May 1904, 2-3; P. Vanni, 'Corrispondenza [Correspondence],' *Uniamoci*, 28 May 1904, 3; L. Camusso, 'Corrispondenza [Correspondence],' *Uniamoci*, 11 June 1904, 3.

<sup>148</sup> 'In Difesa del Lavoro [In Defence of Labour],' *Uniamoci*, 28 May 1904, 2-3.

Germany and France to cities in both North and South America. The experiences of Italian migrant workers in these cities were treated as examples to follow and markers in the stages of development of all Italian communities around the world.<sup>149</sup> Vanni, for example, raised the memory of the Aigues-Mortes massacre in 1893 in which French villagers and labourers massacred a number of Italian migrant workers. This was just one example of many ‘past and present cases’ that Vanni said he could cite where Italians, working for a lower price, ‘attracted the wrath of different populations.’<sup>150</sup> However, the usefulness of such a comparison was dismissed by Prampolini and Camusso who countered by saying he could quote ‘numerous cases of Italian workers ... who in the face of Australian capitalism, were able to resist and be respected even at the cost of very serious sacrifices.’ Furthermore, Camusso argued that another Aigues-Mortes could not happen again because that experience had taught Italian migrants the necessity of finding common ground with local workers in union and solidarity to resist capitalism through an international resistance.<sup>151</sup> As such, the discussion of contract labour in Western Australia was just one small part of a broader conceptualisation of Italian migrants as an international proletariat.

For Italians in Sydney, the arrival of their fellow countrymen in mining towns on the other side of the continent was not at the centre of their attention. However, they still recognised the importance of the debates that emerged in response to this influx of Italians and incorporated them into their own conceptualisations of Italian immigration. The Italian socialists engaged with the broader Australian labour movement by criticising its parochial nationalism and Anglo chauvinism – issues that were already dividing the labour movement and led to the resignation of the AWA’s general-secretary Thomas Beasley in 1902. The bourgeois Italians, on the other hand, were engaging in the debates that divided the Australian parliament on how White Australia was to be defined and administered. Through publishing *L’Italo-Australiano* and advocating for agricultural colonies, they imagined a White Australia strengthened with migrants from all over Europe. In doing so, they challenged the perception that Italians were arriving under contract while also challenging the laws that restricted immigration under contract by arguing that such laws were antithetical to a strong White Australia. By conceptualising White

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<sup>149</sup> ‘In Difesa del Lavoro [In Defence of Labour],’ *Uniamoci*, 28 May 1904, 2-3.

<sup>150</sup> P. Vanni, ‘Corrispondenza [Correspondence],’ *Uniamoci*, 28 May 1904, 3.

<sup>151</sup> L. Camusso, ‘Corrispondenza [Correspondence],’ *Uniamoci*, 11 June 1904, 3.

Australia in these terms, *L'Italo-Australiano* also asserted the right for Italians to belong and contribute to the development of this White Australia. In the chapters that follow, I explore this theme further through case studies in which Italians asserted their rights to settle and work in Australia through appeals to citizenship and whiteness.

## Chapter 4:

### Model Settlers and Pioneers

In June 1925, Filippo Sacchi, a journalist for the Milan-based *Corriere della Sera*, travelled around Queensland where he found journalists, nationalists and trade unionists all raising the alarm of an Italian invasion. All around him he found a race-based aversion to Italian immigration, expressed in calls to 'Keep Australia white' by restricting Southern European arrivals who, like the Chinese before them, supposedly constituted a threat to the purity of 'British blood'. The racist language of the past was recycled into the construction of what Sacchi described as 'a kind of second yellow peril (the olive peril).'<sup>1</sup> This broad-based opposition to immigration from Southern Europe emerged in response to a sharp increase in arrivals, especially from Italy, during the early 1920s. In 1920, 697 migrants sailed from Italy to Oceania (most of them landing in Australia), in 1921 that number grew to 1468, and in 1922 it grew to 4226, triggering a public debate that, without any immediate consequences or solutions, had dissipated as the 1923 number dropped to 963. However, the next year the number of arrivals increased once again to 4498 in 1924 and 5182 in 1925.<sup>2</sup> The majority of them went to the sugar districts of North Queensland where, in the space of an eleven-day period in March 1925, 500 Italians arrived at the town of Ingham with many unable to obtain accommodation and forced to sleep at the town's train station or return to Townsville.<sup>3</sup> This crisis reignited public debate as the issue reached a 'tipping point' and led to the appointment of a Royal Commission headed by Thomas Ferry who was given the task of examining the 'social and economic effects of increase in the number of aliens in North Queensland'.<sup>4</sup> Ferry published his findings in a report that has come

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<sup>1</sup> Filippo Sacchi, "From Our Archives: Italians in Queensland," *Italian Historical Society Journal* 14, no. 1 (2006): 16-18.

<sup>2</sup> William A. Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1995), 113-25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 135. Also: 'Italians in the North,' *Toowoomba Chronicle and Darling Downs Gazette*, 30 March 1925, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Drawing on the work of Ghassan Hage and others, Shiells notes that a tipping point is reached when 'those who consider themselves hosts or gatekeepers of the national space begin to publicly "worry" at the number of "Others" within *their* space' and she argues that in the case of Italian arrivals in Queensland, that point was reached in 1924 and 1925; see: Georgia Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," in *Historicising Whiteness Conference (2006: Melbourne, Vic.)* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007), 308. See also: Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 2003). On the Ferry Report, see: Catherine Dewhirst, "The 'Southern Question' in Australia: The 1925 Royal Commission's Racialisation of Southern Italians," *Queensland History Journal* 22, no. 4 (2014): 316-32.



to be referred to as the 'Ferry Report' in the same month that Sacchi was travelling around Queensland. Historians have argued that while this report was a vindication of the Italians by showing that they were acceptable settlers in terms of their standard of living, adherence to award working conditions and respect for social conventions, it was also at times racist and biased, and was instrumental in establishing the government's attitude to southern Italians based on racial ideas that differentiated between the north and south of Italy.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I analyse the public debate on Southern European immigration that emerged in the late-1910s and took place in the Queensland press with a focus on the segment of the press that William Douglass called 'moderate-to-conservative'. This segment included newspapers such as *The Brisbane Courier* and the *North Queensland Register* that were sometimes accused of being pro-management and pro-immigration.<sup>6</sup> My analysis of the 'moderate-to-conservative' segment of the press gives particular attention to the articles written by a small group of freelance journalists including those who were commissioned by newspapers based in urban centres to travel around North Queensland and write about their experiences and observations there. These writers include Archibald Meston who, apart from being a journalist, had previously managed a sugar cane plantation near Cairns and was a member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly in the 1880s; Malcolm Henry Ellis who was also a historian and had been a campaigner for the National Party in Queensland; Vance Palmer, a nationalist novelist and literary critic who travelled along the Queensland coast in 1924 and 1925; and Vance Marshall who was a travel writer with trade union sympathies who travelled through Queensland at around the same time as Palmer.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore important to note that the 'moderate-to-conservative' category was

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<sup>5</sup> Dewhirst, "The 'Southern Question' in Australia: The 1925 Royal Commission's Racialisation of Southern Italians," 316-32; Gianfranco Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 67; Francesco Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 58.

<sup>6</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 125. Douglass also identified two other segments: the labour movement press represented by the *Brisbane Worker* and the sensationalist genre typified by newspapers such as the *Truth* and *Smith's Weekly*.

<sup>7</sup> For biographies on these journalists, see: S. E. Stephens, 'Meston, Archibald (1851–1924)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/meston-archibald-4191/text6741>, published first in hardcopy 1974, accessed online 28 October 2020; B. H. Fletcher, 'Ellis, Malcolm Henry (1890–1969)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ellis-malcolm-henry-10116/text17855>, published first in hardcopy 1996, accessed online 28 October 2020; Geoffrey Serle, 'Palmer, Edward Vivian (Vance) (1885–1959)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University,

not homogenous and included a range of views that could be described as conservative, nationalist or broadly socialist.

These journalists praised Italians by constructing a figure of the Italian migrant that was hard-working, industrious, sober, independent and respectable. In contrast, the British-Australian worker was often constructed as an inversion of the Italian migrant: supposedly lazy, a drunkard, ungovernable, entitled, and dependent on the state and its institutions. The behaviour of the British-Australian worker was represented as a betrayal of the hard work of the pioneers that settled the area in the nineteenth century while the Italian migrant supposedly possessed the positive attributes of these earlier generations of pioneers. Since the figure of the pioneer was a fundamental construction of Australian national identity, at stake was a contest over who would become the future custodians of white Australia in North Queensland. On this issue, the journalists of the moderate-to-conservative press were ambivalent: they did not want to see the British displaced by the Italians, yet they saw no reason why the hard-working Italian should not be encouraged to succeed.

In the first part of this chapter, I give a broad overview of Italian immigration to North Queensland in the 1910s and 1920s while tracing a discourse of displacement that emerged in moderate-to-conservative newspapers during this same period. From as early as 1914, voices in this segment of the press warned of Italians replacing British-Australians in the sugar districts which became increasingly frequent over the following decade as Italians began arriving in larger numbers and settled in significant concentrations, particularly in the Johnstone and Hinchinbrook Shires. I demonstrate that the discourse of displacement was connected to ideas of pioneering and custodianship of white Australia. These ideas are then developed in the next section where I outline the pioneer legend and discuss its relevance for talking about Italian immigration to Queensland in the 1920s. I highlight the conservative nature of the legend and how it was central to the constructing Italians as role models for British-Australian workers.

In the middle section, I look at how the moderate-to-conservative depiction of Italian migrants was influenced by the pioneer legend. Two elements contributed to this depiction in particular:

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<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/palmer-edward-vivian-vance-7946/text13831>, published first in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 28 October 2020.

the willingness of the Italian migrant to settle on the land and the Italian's supposed predisposition to co-operation. I highlight the conservatism of this construction with particular attention to the Italian 'syndicate' as a form of social organisation that enabled settlement and economic mobility while fostering self-reliance and a strong work ethic in opposition to the unionism of British-Australian workers that supposedly fostered dependence, entitlement and laziness. The conservatism of the pioneer legend is also found in a sense of nostalgia which is pervasive in the moderate-to-conservative depiction of Italians as having an essential connection to the land and a predisposition to certain pre-industrial and pre-modern values and forms of social organisation.

In the final section of the chapter, I examine the explicit construction of an Italian pioneer legend by Italians and their supporters that emerged in 1925. Sacchi was himself a progenitor of this legend when he declared that 'the name and the work of the Italian is ... indissolubly linked to the history of the colonisation and development of these lands,' and without them European settlement would not have been successful.<sup>8</sup> In the years that followed this would become a common argument used by Italians and their supporters, however the construction of an Italian pioneer legend was just as nostalgic as the legend identified by John Hirst, described below, and can be read as an obituary for an earlier phase of Italian immigration that was marked by a supposed cultural and political homogeneity.<sup>9</sup> The end of this phase began with the increase of arrivals from more diverse regions in Italy during the early 1920s, was hastened by the sugar industry recession of 1925 that made it increasingly harder for Italians to enjoy the same level of social mobility and access to property that earlier arrivals had and would finally be terminated with the arrival of antifascist exiles in the late 1920s that introduced a foundation of political conflict within the Italian community for the decade that followed.

## **Influx and Displacement**

Between 1921 and 1933, the Italian-born population of Australia more than tripled from 8135 to 26,756. Nowhere was the increase more noticeable than in Queensland, where there were

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<sup>8</sup> Sacchi, "From Our Archives: Italians in Queensland," 20.

<sup>9</sup> J. B. Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend," *Historical Studies* 18, no. 71 (1978): 316-37.

1838 Italians counted in 1921 and 8355 in 1933.<sup>10</sup> These numbers reflect a significant influx of Italian immigration which began in 1920 when regular shipping routes between Italy and Australia resumed in the aftermath of World War I and ended in 1928 with the introduction of tighter regulations in both Italy and Australia.<sup>11</sup> These regulations limited migration to the wives and children of Italians already in Australia, however between 1921 and 1933 the male proportion of the total Italian population only decreased only slightly from seventy-five to seventy-two per cent.<sup>12</sup> The three major factors behind this influx were the introduction of immigration quotas in the United States in 1921 and 1924, the deterioration of economic opportunities for Italians in Brazil and Argentina and the increased demand for labour in Queensland's expanding sugar industry.<sup>13</sup> The majority of Italians arriving in Queensland therefore went to the sugar growing districts of North Queensland where they joined Italians who had been settling there since the early-1890s.

The Italians were drawn to the region north of Townsville and south of Cairns, in particular the Hinchinbrook Shire that was located around the mouth of the Herbert river and the Johnstone Shire which was located further north around the Johnstone River. The major towns in these districts were Ingham and Innisfail respectively. In 1921, these two districts accounted for 55 per cent of the Italian-born population in Queensland. In that same year, Italians accounted for around twelve per cent of the total population of the Hinchinbrook Shire and around six per cent of the total population of the Johnstone Shire.<sup>14</sup> By 1933, the proportion of Italian-born residents doubled in each of these districts to twenty-five and twelve per cent in the respective districts. Italians also formed significant portions of the populations in the district of Cairns where they accounted for almost ten per cent of the population and in the Douglas and Cardwell

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<sup>10</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 3-4 April 1921, Volume I, Part II – Birthplace (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1921), 45-63; Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, Volume I, Part X – Birthplace (Canberra: Government Printer, 1933), 752-763.

<sup>11</sup> Michele Langfield, "White Aliens": The Control of European Immigration to Australia 1920-30," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (1991): 1-14. The restrictions are discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 3-4 April 1921, Volume I, Part II – Birthplace (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1921), 45-63; Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, Volume I, Part X – Birthplace (Canberra: Government Printer, 1933), 752-763.

<sup>13</sup> Lyn Henderson, "Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939: Motives for Migration," in *Lectures on North Queensland History: Third Series*, ed. B. J. Dalton (Townsville: History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1979), 198.

<sup>14</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 3-4 April 1921, Volume I, Part XII, Queensland – Population of Local Government Areas (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1921), 828-837.

districts located between the Hinchinbrook and the Johnstone where they made up 8.5 and 7.5 per cent respectively.<sup>15</sup> Italians were drawn to these districts for two main reasons. Firstly, these districts were more attractive in terms of the migrants' aspirations for economic mobility than the shires further south of Townsville where there was a limited availability of land for sugar cultivation.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, Italian arrivals in the interwar period were migrating through established chains. This led to certain areas of these districts being settled by migrants from the same villages or provinces of Italy. In the Johnstone Shire, for example, Sicilian settlements had formed in Mourilyan, Moresby and Eubenangee, while El Arish became a northern Italian settlement.<sup>17</sup>

This influx coincided with a boom in the sugar industry. In 1921 sugar was a very secure and protected industry and, in the boom years of 1921 and 1922, the price of sugar rose from £21 to £30.6.8 per ton. This gave great impetus to the industry in the Johnstone and Herbert districts and expansion followed.<sup>18</sup> Not only were Italians attracted by the boom, but they also made important contributions to it. In 1928, an author who wrote under the initials 'J.E.S.' evaluated this period of growth and highlighted the contribution of Italians in these boom years:

Frenzied finance was the order of the day, and a mad orgy of speculation set in, farmers who had never dreamt of selling their holdings being tempted past all resistance by the amazing figures offered. Fortunes were made, in which a host of agents reaped their share, all forms of real estate participating in the boom. In this stupendous boom the Italian speculator and investor played a dominant and decisive part.<sup>19</sup>

Sacchi had also claimed that Italians played an important role in the expansion of the sugar industry during this period. Noting that the land under cultivation for sugar cane had increased from 160,534 acres in 1918 to 219,965 in 1923, Sacchi argued that 'these 24,000 hectares of increase are almost exclusively the product of Italian work.'<sup>20</sup> However, as the cultivation of sugar continued to expand, production soon outstripped the needs of the domestic market and

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<sup>15</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, Volume I, Part III, Queensland – Population, Detailed Tables for Local Government Areas (Canberra: Government Printer, 1933), 292-299.

<sup>16</sup> Henderson, "Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939: Motives for Migration," 203-04.

<sup>17</sup> J. M. Bertei, "Innisfail" (University of Queensland, 1959), 35.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>19</sup> J.E.S., 'Italian Settlers: Are They True Pioneers?' *The Age*, 29 June 1928, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Sacchi, "From Our Archives: Italians in Queensland," 21.

the heavily subsidised and protected Australian sugar was forced to compete on the global market with 'black sugar' which led to a drop in the price of sugar in 1923 and a subsequent decrease in wages. Italians were sometimes blamed for this problem of overproduction.<sup>21</sup> By 1925, Italians were arriving in numbers that outstripped the amount of work available which exacerbated competition in the labour market and intensified the labour movement's opposition to Italian immigration. When Commissioner Ferry visited the sugar districts there were about 1200 unemployed Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire alone.<sup>22</sup>

Although 1925 can be considered the 'tipping point' in attitudes to Italian immigration, voices in the moderate-to-conservative press were worrying about the number of Italians in North Queensland from as early as 1914.<sup>23</sup> This was a response to a smaller, yet still significant, influx of Italian immigration that occurred in 1912 and 1913.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Sacchi believed that the wave of immigration he was observing in 1925 had started as early as 1912 with over 1500 Italians arriving in Australia each year before this influx was halted and reversed with the outbreak of war.<sup>25</sup> Those worrying about Italian arrivals during this period were preoccupied with processes of demographic change in North Queensland and shared an anxiety that British-Australians were being displaced by Italians. This was exacerbated during World War I as these worrying journalists observed that Italians were able to establish themselves on some of the best lands in these districts while Australian men were off fighting overseas.<sup>26</sup> In 1917, an article published in the sensationalist Brisbane *Truth* declared that the area between Babinda and the Herbert River was 'purely a foreigners' sugar belt of country' shared between Italians, Chinese, Japanese and 'Hindoos'.<sup>27</sup> In 1919, a journalist for the more moderate *Brisbane Courier* identified Halifax and Ingham as towns where an 'Italian invasion' had meant nearly all hotels, stores and farms were owned and run by Italians.<sup>28</sup> Before the war had ended, further articles appeared in moderate and conservative newspapers that, if they did not share the *Truth's* surrender of this region, predicted this strip of coastline would soon become an Italian settlement, perhaps within the

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<sup>21</sup> 'Circolo Italiano,' *Nambucca and Bellinger News*, 3 September 1926, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 140.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>24</sup> See: Karen Agutter, "National Identity Explored: Emigrant Italians in Australia and British Canada in Wwi," *Flinders Journal of History and Politics* 23 (2006): 85, 97.

<sup>25</sup> Sacchi, "From Our Archives: Italians in Queensland," 21.

<sup>26</sup> A. Meston, 'Influx of Foreigners: Sugar Industry Threatened,' *Cairns Post*, 1 May 1919, 8.

<sup>27</sup> 'Northern Notes,' *Truth*, 11 November 1917, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Woree, 'Our Sugar Industry: The Italian Invasion,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 February 1919, 4.

next ten years.<sup>29</sup> Further predictions of an Italian takeover appeared in the press as more Italians arrived after the war.<sup>30</sup>

Predictions of a takeover emphasised the transfer of land from British-Australian farmers to Italian farmers. By 1916, one in four cane farmers in the Hinchinbrook and Johnstone shires were Italians. In the same year, only one in five cane cutters were British and since Italian farmers almost always started out as cutters it was assumed that they would soon own the majority of cane farms in the district.<sup>31</sup> Some journalists as early as 1919 were claiming that Italians already owned 60 per cent of farms in the town of Babinda near Cairns and 70 percent of farms in the Johnstone Shire.<sup>32</sup> A more modest figure was given by Lyn Henderson for 1923 that nevertheless demonstrates a significant increase on the 1916 figures, when she found that Italians owned 45 percent of farms in the Hinchinbrook Shire and 40 per cent of farms in the Johnstone Shire.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, since Italian farmers often preferred to employ other Italians, this was a population that, once able to control the means of production, would reproduce itself. Once established, any further labour required could be sent for through the developing systems of chain migration that remained unregulated throughout the early 1920s.<sup>34</sup>

The sugar industry at this time was still the dominant industry in North Queensland and considered the cornerstone of white settlement in the tropics. In 1918, a journalist writing under the name of 'Wanderer' found in North Queensland the general opinion that the sugar industry was the only industry in the region that could keep any considerable number of white people employed directly or indirectly – other crops such as rice, coffee, tobacco and cotton had been tried and failed because they all required an unlimited supply of cheap labour that could not be met with white labour.<sup>35</sup> In 1924, the editor of *The Daily Mail* in Brisbane declared that 'it is in the north that the White Australia Policy must stand or fall.'<sup>36</sup> It was for this reason that the

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example: A. Meston, 'Influx of Foreigners: Sugar Industry Threatened,' *Cairns Post*, 1 May 1919, 8.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example: 'Co-operation Among Cane Growers,' *Shepparton Advertiser*, 9 March 1922, 3; 'Millionaires in the Making,' *North-Eastern Advertiser*, 8 December 1922, 3; Vance Palmer, 'Edge of the Tropics,' *The Daily Mail*, 5 January 1925, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 108; Henderson, "Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939: Motives for Migration," 204.

<sup>32</sup> Wanderer, 'Queensland Revisited,' *Cairns Post*, 8 July 1918, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Henderson, "Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939: Motives for Migration," 204.

<sup>34</sup> See: Langfield, "'White Aliens': The Control of European Immigration to Australia 1920-30," 1-14.

<sup>35</sup> Wanderer, 'Queensland Revisited,' *Cairns Post*, 8 July 1918, 3.

<sup>36</sup> See: Vance Marshall, 'Million-Pound Town,' *The Daily Mail*, 29 December 1924, 8.

south continued to pay high taxes for the protection of the sugar industry.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, when Italians bought land from British-Australian farmers, these purchases were not seen as simple economic transactions but were imbued with a deeper symbolism that defined these transactions as a transfer of custodianship over the future of White Australia. In the words of a journalist writing in 1919 under the name of Woree, 'within the next ten years the whole of the coastal lands of North Queensland will pass into Italian hands, and the white Italians will become the defenders in the North of a white Australia policy.'<sup>38</sup> Five years later, Steve Blackman, the northern manager of the Ocean Accident and Guarantee Corporation, toured the sugar districts of North Queensland and, upon finding an industrious and hard-working community of Italians, believed that they were 'solving the White Australia question up there.'<sup>39</sup> Even less enthusiastic voices defended Italians on the basis of their contributions to White Australia. An editorial published in *The Brisbane Courier* in August 1924, argued that while Italians might not be as valuable as British migrants or as assimilable as French, German or Danish migrants, 'any white community that is opening up the country, endeavouring to develop its industries, and adding to the wealth of the nation, cannot be described as "a grave menace".'<sup>40</sup> This editorial further defended Italians on the basis of white racial unity:

Our White Australia Policy is based on the principle that racial unity is essential to national unity and to national progress; but there are no strongly marked divergent national or physical characteristics to prevent the Italian from becoming a useful citizen. In the eyes of some people his crime appears to be his unusual energy, and his willingness to face pioneering hardships.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, argued in 1925 that it was necessary to allow Italians, or else potentially be faced with future arrivals who were even more foreign than the Italians: 'If we do not allow into this country those that will fill up the vacant

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<sup>37</sup> Wanderer, 'Queensland Revisited,' *Cairns Post*, 8 July 1918, 3. For more on the sugar industries reliance on consumers and taxpayers in the south, see: Stefanie Affeldt, "The Burden of 'White' Sugar: Producing and Consuming Whiteness in Australia," *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 52, no. 4 (2017): 439-66.

<sup>38</sup> Woree, 'Our Sugar Industry: The Italian Invasion,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 February 1919, 4.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Great North: 'Way Up Past Mackay,' *Coffs Harbour Advocate*, 23 July 1924, 2.

<sup>40</sup> 'Italian Settlers,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 13 August 1924, 6. This editorial was a response to a conference held by the New Settler's League which resolved that Italians in the north were a 'grave menace' to White Australia.

<sup>41</sup> 'Italian Settlers,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 13 August 1924, 6.



spaces instead of crowding into cities, then we may expect more trouble in the future and trouble too, from people who may be much more alien to us than Italians or Germans.<sup>42</sup>

Claims that Italians would become custodians or defenders of White Australia were supported by assertions that the Italians of North Queensland were indisputably white. This involved differentiating them from the general stereotype of Italians in Australia and was achieved primarily through racial discourses that highlighted their northern origins and their ability to pass as British. Woree, for example, found in Ingham and surrounding districts ‘a people to all outward appearance, Anglo-Saxon (reasonably tall, fair haired, blue eyed), save that the language used is not English.’ These men were ‘Franks in appearance’, they had ‘traditions to maintain’, and ‘a proper appreciation of the vast heritage of the white.’<sup>43</sup> Ellis described the migrants from Lombardy as being ‘fully 6ft. high, broad shouldered and fair’ and able to pass as Swede or Dane.<sup>44</sup> This depiction of the stereotypical Italian in the north as the fair-skinned northerner had some basis in the demographic reality of the Italian communities of these regions. In 1923, Father Mambrini conducted a census amongst Italians in Ingham and surrounding districts and found that 1469 were from Northern Italy (mostly Piedmont and Lombardy), 21 from Central Italy, 31 from Southern Italy and 381 from Insular Italy (mostly from eastern Sicily).<sup>45</sup> Assertions of racial similarity and white racial unity were sometimes also based on arguments of biological compatibility and racial health. In 1925, Palmer argued that racial admixture ‘within certain limits ... increases the vitality of a people’ and, adding anthropological weight to this argument, pointed out that border tribes had historically been strong and laws against intermarriage always led to decay. Furthermore, Palmer argued that to oppose Italian immigration on the basis of preserving racial purity, was detrimental to the White Australia policy because it spread the idea that it was not a serious policy ‘but merely an excuse for keeping a partly unoccupied country to ourselves.’<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in: Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 133.

<sup>43</sup> Woree, ‘Our Sugar Industry: The Italian Invasion,’ *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 February 1919, 4.

<sup>44</sup> M. H. Ellis, ‘Giacomo Goes North,’ *The Sun*, 4 June 1922, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Rev. Fr. Mambrini, ‘Report of a Two Months’ Visit to the Italian Settlement on the Herbert River (Parish of Ingham),’ 1923.

<sup>46</sup> Vance Palmer, ‘Those Italians,’ *The Daily Mail*, 7 March 1925, 14.

By depicting the stereotypical Italian in a way that emphasised their racial similarity with the British-Australians, the moderate-to-conservative press stands in stark contrast to the labour movement press which, as Shiells found, depicted Italians as racially distinct from the idea of the 'white worker'.<sup>47</sup> Even in the 'tipping point' years of 1924 and 1925, the Brisbane *Worker's* cartoonists portrayed the Italian arrivals as 'stout, with dark skin' in line with the common stereotype of the 'swarthy' Southern European, while writers in the moderate-to-conservative press countered this stereotype by pointing out that the Italians in Ingham were not 'the dagoes of popular legend', highlighting their sense of dress and 'intelligent faces' that proved that they were a different type.<sup>48</sup> The Ferry Report drew on both of these stereotypes to differentiate more clearly between the desirable northern Italians from the undesirable southern Italians – both of which could be found in North Queensland. With regards to the northerners, Ferry wrote: 'The general opinion is that the Northern Italian is a very desirable class of immigrant. He is thrifty and industrious, law abiding, and honest in business transactions. Those arriving in the past have generally been trained agriculturalists, many of whom have become successful farmers.' In contrast, the southerners were described as 'shorter in stature and more swarthy' deemed a 'hopelessly inferior type' that was 'easily exploited' on account of being accustomed to 'very low [wages] and living conditions' and being poorly educated or even illiterate.<sup>49</sup>

The demographic changes in North Queensland were interpreted as a process by which the British race was giving up on its heritage and the hard work of previous generations.<sup>50</sup> Writing in 1919, Archibald Meston, predicted that 'in two or three years all our mills north of Townsville will be crushing cane owned and cut by foreigners who had nothing to do with the discovery of the country, with any of the pioneer work, the blazing of the track, or the clearing of the scrubs.'<sup>51</sup> To allow the displacement of British-Australians was a betrayal of the past – in particular, the pioneering efforts of earlier generations. To understand the importance of this, it is important

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<sup>47</sup> Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane *Worker*, 1924-26," 305-18.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 316. Also: Vance Palmer, 'Edge of the Tropics,' *The Daily Mail*, 5 January 1925, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in: Dewhirst, "The 'Southern Question' in Australia: The 1925 Royal Commission's Racialisation of Southern Italians," 324.

<sup>50</sup> 'Northern Notes,' *Truth*, 11 November 1917, 12; Vance Palmer, 'Edge of the Tropics,' *The Daily Mail*, 5 January 1925, 8.

<sup>51</sup> A. Meston, 'Influx of Foreigners: Sugar Industry Threatened,' *Cairns Post*, 1 May 1919, 8.

to look at the pioneer legend as one of the dominant legends underlying the construction of Australian national identity.

### **Pioneering in North Queensland**

In his study of conservationism and farming in Queensland between the 1860s and the 1970s, Ian Frazer found that farmers made sense of their work primarily through a number of constructions – the first of which was pioneering.<sup>52</sup> In doing so, these farmers were connecting themselves with Australia's 'pioneer legend'. According to Hirst, the 'pioneer legend' was a nationalist legend constructed around the heroic figure of the pioneer that dealt with the central experience of European settlement: 'the taming of the new environment to man's use.'<sup>53</sup> The pioneers were usually defined as 'those who first settled and worked the land', however, as Hirst points out, the legend usually commemorates the pastoralists and farmers but not usually those who were employed by them and, therefore, it assumes wrongly that landowners always did their own pioneering work.<sup>54</sup> The pioneers were often an anonymous group and the legend accorded historic status to the ordinary man or woman and transformed him or her into a nation builder. The figure of the pioneer acquired this meaning in the 1880s and 1890s through nationalist literary works but its meaning continued to shift over time. By the early twentieth century, a new meaning of pioneer came into use which applied the label to people who were at present working on the land, particularly on new farms or at the edge of the settlement. According to Hirst, this 'extension of meaning occurred at a time of heightened concern for racial strength and purity and a new awareness of the vulnerability of the nation.'<sup>55</sup>

Hirst's history of the pioneer legend, however, ends immediately after World War I with the creation of the Anzac legend that linked diggers and pioneers; a link that was not merely symbolic

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<sup>52</sup> Ian Frazer, "Conservationism and Farming in North Queensland, 1861-1970" (James Cook University, 2003), 114.

<sup>53</sup> Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend," 316.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 332. The pioneer legend's basis in concerns of race and possession have also been explored by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, see: Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

but literal in some parts of Australia in the form of soldier settlement schemes.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, as Waterhouse has argued, the process of urbanisation that began in the late-nineteenth century had accelerated after World War I which ensured that the pioneer legend was less relevant as a role model for contemporary urban Australians by the 1920s.<sup>57</sup> However, as Ann Curthoys has argued, it was in the lead up to the sesquicentenary celebrations of 1938 that white Australian women were incorporated into the pioneer legend with the construction of memorials and gardens and the publications of histories and novels that commemorated the figure of the pioneer woman.<sup>58</sup> The case of Italian immigration to North Queensland offers another example that demonstrates that the pioneer legend still held relevance in the interwar period. Especially for those areas on the edge of European settlement at a time when it was believed that the British race was especially vulnerable in those areas and it was feared that those areas would be 'lost' to the race.<sup>59</sup> Its relevance is further demonstrated by understanding how the pioneer legend was used to advance a conservative agenda in moments of crisis that were defined in terms such as 'displacement' or 'invasion'.

As Hirst noted, the two factors that make the pioneer legend 'legendary' also imbued the legend with an inherent conservatism. Firstly, it is legendary because it posits that pioneers were not working merely for themselves or their families but for 'us' – that is, those who are defined at any particular moment in time as being 'Australian'. The legend, therefore, encourages reverence for the past and later generations are obliged not to tamper with the world that the pioneers made. Secondly, it is legendary in that it leaves out the social, legal or economic determinants of land settlement. The pioneers inhabited a world limited by the boundaries of their properties, in which they subdued the land while battling against several enemies: 'drought, flood, fire, sometimes Aborigines'.<sup>60</sup> The legend, therefore, excludes Indigenous peoples and legitimises their dispossession by encouraging a sense of belonging that is, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson

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<sup>56</sup> Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend," 334.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Waterhouse, "The Pioneer Legend and Its Legacy: In Memory of John Hirst," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 103, no. 1 (2017): 18.

<sup>58</sup> Ann Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology," *Journal of Australian Studies* 23, no. 61 (1999): 7. See also: Jemima Mowbrey, "Examining the Myth of the Pioneer Woman," *Eras Journal* 8 (2006).

<sup>59</sup> These anxieties were expressed in terms of the 'empty north'. See: David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1999), 113-26; Russell McGregor, *Environment, Race and Nationhood in Australia: Revisiting the Empty North* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend," 316.

explains, 'derived from ownership within the logic of capital.'<sup>61</sup> It also celebrates individual rather than collective or state enterprise and valorises a set of individualist values that include courage, enterprise, hard work and perseverance. It provides a classless view of society and teaches that success is open to all since all may possess these values and this is reaffirmed by the generous application of the pioneer label to all which supposedly obliterates all social and economic differences. Hirst also pointed out the pioneer legend had historically been used by conservatives and capitalists to criticise socialists, unionists and other opponents.<sup>62</sup> This strand in conservative discourse can be identified in the moderate-to-conservative press coverage of the influx of Italian immigration into North Queensland as journalists blamed British-Australian workers for the displacement of members of their race. Their militancy, dependence on the government and its institutions, and their reluctance to settle on the land had caused this predicament. The moderate-to-conservative press blamed British-Australian workers for the demographic changes that were taking place in the North Queensland sugar districts through two main strategies: an historical narrative of how these demographic changes emerged and a construction of the British-Australian worker based on traits that were the opposite of those celebrated by the pioneer legend.

While the labour movement blamed the Australian capitalist class for orchestrating the introduction of southern European labourers to drive down wages and working conditions and thus eroding 'the white man's standard', conservatives and capitalists blamed the workers themselves for leaving employers no other option other than to employ migrant workers. In his study of Innisfail, J M Bertei noted: 'The problem of the growers was one of choosing between the Italian's willingness to work and the Australian's willingness to strike.'<sup>63</sup> In 1919, Archibald Meston explained the reasons why British-Australians had sold off their farms, blaming the militancy of workers: 'The frequent strikes, the unreliability of labour, the exasperation caused by ever-changing conditions and prices of cane and sugar, are the causes which disgust our own growers until they are only too pleased to accept a liberal offer from the Italians, and go out of cane-growing and out of the district.'<sup>64</sup> Meston also blamed the workers' industrial unrest for

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<sup>61</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend," 316-17.

<sup>63</sup> Bertei, "Innisfail," 39.

<sup>64</sup> A. Meston, 'Influx of Foreigners: Sugar Industry Threatened,' *Cairns Post*, 1 May 1919, 8. A similar argument was made a few years later in 1922 by a writer who had been in the Herbert River district for decades: 'the

opening the door to ‘a stream of alien races, and brought about the downfall of British labour on the cane fields’. These so-called ‘alien races’ included Italians, ‘Hindoos’, Austrians, Chinese and others who had supposedly proved themselves more reliable.<sup>65</sup> A similar argument was later published in the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* in 1926 which placed this narrative within the discourse of White Australia and the expensive subsidies enjoyed by the sugar industry: ‘The unions have the satisfaction of knowing that they have made the employing of Britishers in the sugar industry next to impossible, and also that Australia is maintaining a White Australian industry for the benefit of foreigners, because of the stand-and-deliver methods of Australian unionism.’<sup>66</sup> This issue was further exacerbated when Italians became employers and supposedly preferred to employ anyone other than a British-Australian worker. As the journalist and historian Malcolm Henry Ellis put it in 1922, they had ‘a policy preference to black, brown and brindle labour – anything in fact to avoid employing the ... Australian or British.’<sup>67</sup>

This argument that blamed worker’s militancy was perhaps, at least partly, a reaction to the strength of the union in the sugar districts. Vance Marshall, on a trip through North Queensland described Innisfail as the town where ‘unionism reigns supreme’ and that new arrivals were greeted outside Innisfail train station by members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) who gave them information on recent strikes and encouraged them not to be employed as strike-breakers.<sup>68</sup> This perception had already been noted in the 1919 sugar commission which found that British canefarmers were of the opinion that the demands of the AWU the Dickson Award had priced the British worker out of the market.<sup>69</sup> The Dickson Award had been introduced in 1916 and, along with the industrial strife that occurred with its introduction, exacerbated the perception that had already been growing at the time that the independent British grower could not survive if forced to employ British gangs backed by the AWU and Dickson and saw the only alternative was to sell out to an Italian syndicate.<sup>70</sup>

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white worker was too ready to obey the dictates of the organisers, and to strike on the slightest pretext’ and as a result industry felt as though it had no order and the growers lost confidence and sought labour from elsewhere, see: ‘Millionaires in the Making,’ *North-Eastern Advertiser*, 8 December 1922, 3.

<sup>65</sup> A. Meston, ‘Influx of Foreigners: Sugar Industry Threatened,’ *Cairns Post*, 1 May 1919, 8.

<sup>66</sup> ‘The Italian in Queensland,’ *Morning Bulletin*, 27 August 1926, 8.

<sup>67</sup> M. H. Ellis, ‘Giacomo Goes North,’ *The Sun*, 4 June 1922, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Vance Marshall, ‘Million-Pound Town,’ *The Daily Mail*, 29 December 1924, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 111.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

Reliability was a measure not just of the willingness of workers to engage in industrial unrest but also a general level of respectability. The argument that blamed British-Australian workers for the displacement of their race was accompanied by a construction of the typical British-Australian worker as ungovernable, nomadic, lazy and entitled – a set of traits that were antithetical to the pioneer legend and notions of respectability. Journalistic accounts of North Queensland towns produced a caricature of the British-Australian worker that highlighted a particular set of attitudes, behaviours and a style of dress. Unlike the Italians who were scattered about on the land, British-Australian workers were typically found congregating outside hostels and pubs in towns such as Ingham and Innisfail where they were distinguishable by their preference for flannel shirts in contrast to the silk shirts preferred by Italians.<sup>71</sup> The stereotypical British-Australian worker also had no aspiration for land ownership, preferring to spend his money on alcohol and leisure rather than save it and would take his money down south at the end of every season, returning at the beginning of the next season with nothing but the shirt on his back. In the words of Vance Palmer, the British-Australian workers were ‘content to become a mobile proletariat, working hard for a season, and then drifting off to some city to play two-up or pick winners on a pony racecourse.’<sup>72</sup> With no ties to the land or aspirations for land ownership, the British-Australian worker was considered unreliable and uncontrollable. As the *Morning Bulletin* put it in 1926, the Italian grower ‘works his farm with labour that aims at owning his farm next year or the year after’, while the Australian grower ‘is forced to employ labour that has no responsibilities and no intention of incurring any.’<sup>73</sup> This stereotype of the British-Australian worker was often constructed in relation to its complimentary stereotype of the Italian who was supposedly industrious, hard-working, and aspired to land ownership. They were also constructed as sober and law-abiding. It was common for journalists to argue that while making up significant portions of the districts surrounding Innisfail and Ingham, Italian names were rarely found on the lists of offenders who faced court. For Malcolm Ellis, displacement had its positive consequences, arguing that with the further entrenchment of Italian growers and cutters

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<sup>71</sup> M. H. Ellis, ‘Giacomo Goes North,’ *The Sun*, 4 June 1922, 3; Vance Marshall, ‘Million-Pound Town,’ *The Daily Mail*, 29 December 1924, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Vance Palmer, ‘A Northern Pilgrimage,’ *The Brisbane Courier*, 25 August 1924, 5. Palmer’s description presents a negative spin on Russell Ward’s legend which identified within this mobile proletariat a set of values that defined Australian identity, see: Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Melbourne : Oxford University Press, 1966).

<sup>73</sup> ‘The Italian in Queensland,’ *Morning Bulletin*, 27 August 1926, 8.

in the industry, ‘every year the Herbert River country becomes a more and more prosperous and law-abiding Italian community.’<sup>74</sup>

Although voices in the moderate-to-conservative press argued that Italians were displacing the pioneers they were still believed to possess all the qualities of the pioneer. As a result, it could not be argued that they did not deserve to be in the position that they were in as farmers and landowners. As one writer for the *North-Eastern Advertiser* who had lived in the Hinchinbrook Shire wrote in 1922: ‘The fact must be faced that Giuseppe is going to own the greater part of the Queensland sugar lands, and, personally, I can mention no reason why he should not do so.’<sup>75</sup> Whilst displacing the pioneers, Italians also became the new custodians of pioneering values and were subsequently turned into model settlers that would guide the British-Australian proletariat in recovering the values that they had supposedly lost. The construction of the Italian model settler was a nostalgic one that was based on an essentialised connection to the land and idealised social solidarities that, like the pioneer legend, obscured political and class conflicts.

### **The Italian model settler**

Supporters of Italian migrants emphasised their ability to enter the industry as cane cutters and quickly settle on the land as farmers while maintaining a high standard of living. Visiting journalists, for example, noted high rates of car ownership among Italians in the sugar districts – particularly their preference for Fiat and other European manufacturers – which aroused envy amongst British-Australians in the district.<sup>76</sup> This hostility is captured in a story told by Vance Palmer of a ‘stout commercial traveller’ he met at a hotel in Ingham who, upon observing an Italian man and woman pulling up in a car outside, interjected:

The young Italian comes here, gets hold of a plantation in a few years, and buys a car. Then he goes whirling about the country taking the girls to dances. A young fellow who owns a car here is a little king in these parts, even if he can’t speak 30 words of English.

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<sup>74</sup> M. H. Ellis, ‘Giacomo Goes North,’ *The Sun*, 4 June 1922, 3.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Millionaires in the Making,’ *North-Eastern Advertiser*, 8 December 1922, 3.

<sup>76</sup> ‘The Great North: Way Up Past Mackay,’ *Coffs Harbour Advocate*, 23 July 1924, 2.



You'll find plenty of pretty girls ready to throw themselves at his head. It makes bad blood. Probably you'd find half a dozen young men round here who haven't Buckley's chance of owning a car themselves ready to spoil that young dago's beauty if they got a chance. And no wonder!<sup>77</sup>

After visiting Ingham only a few months later, Filippo Sacchi could have been responding directly to the man Palmer met outside the hotel when he wrote: 'If the Australians want a white force in Queensland, they will have to resign themselves to the likelihood of seeing the wage-earner of today becoming the master of tomorrow.'<sup>78</sup> In both of these sources there is an underlying theme of Italian economic progression and mobility.

In its most basic form, this narrative told the story of the Italian migrant arriving as a cane cutter and within a season or two becoming a farmer by purchasing his own property. This cutter to grower narrative had its roots in Fraire's scheme of 1891 and subsequent state-sanctioned attempts in the 1900s to recruit Italian workers for the sugar industry in which the expected trajectory of the recruits would be to become owners of small-holdings after graduating from an initial period of cane cutting under contract on a major plantation. The memory of these schemes influenced some of the journalists and commentators of this period, especially those who were around for these schemes, such as Archibald Meston.<sup>79</sup> However, it is necessary to note that this triumphant narrative of economic mobility did not necessarily reflect the reality of immigration for most Italians that came to Australia. As Douglass points out, the successes of a few masked the failures of many, not to mention the questionable business tactics and abuses that led to many Italian-owned farms rapidly changing hands.<sup>80</sup> However, despite this reality, the narrative held enough currency to transform the Italian migrant into a role model for others to follow.

The Italians were turned into role models first and foremost because the narrative of their movement from cutter to farmer demonstrated to British-Australians what was possible in the

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<sup>77</sup> Vance Palmer, 'Those Italians,' *The Daily Mail*, 7 March 1925, 14.

<sup>78</sup> Sacchi, "From Our Archives: Italians in Queensland," 21.

<sup>79</sup> According to Meston, he had been commissioned by colonial governments of the 1880s and 1890s to report on the sugar industries of NSW and Queensland, which included writing a history of the sugar industry, see: A. Meston, 'Influx of Foreigners: Sugar Industry Threatened,' *Cairns Post*, 1 May 1919, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 110-11.

sugar industry. The success of Italians could be pointed to by moderates and conservatives who wished to project a functioning meritocratic society where success or failure was simply a matter of hard work. In the simplest versions of these arguments, it was only hard work that separated the successful Italians from the British-Australians who were deemed to be trailing behind due to their laziness. These arguments highlighted the Italian practice of working in the morning, afternoon and night – a practice that was heavily criticised in the labour press as proof that Italians had a lower standard of living, were dupes of the capitalist class and were endangering the entirety of the Australian working class.<sup>81</sup> For others, such as the *Shepparton Advertiser*, Italian success was based on more than just hard work but a combination of factors: ‘intelligent co-operation, patient industry, and an adaptability to the circumstances and conditions of the country.’<sup>82</sup> Of these factors, co-operation was most often identified as the primary factor behind Italian success.

It was co-operation that was supposedly at the centre of Italian property acquisition. This process was recounted in a wide range of sources but is perhaps best described by an article published in the *Herbert River Express* in 1928:

When the new-comers come out they work for a season or two, then they form little syndicates and buy up a farm; one of them is placed on it and the others, when they cannot obtain work elsewhere, all help in cultivating and clearing uncleared land, hoeing and chipping amongst the growing cane. When the season is over they all put their cash together again and clear up any encumbrance on the farm, and the following season they buy another farm, place another of the syndicate on the new farm, and proceed as before until nearly everyone has a farm. Then comes the time to send home for reinforcements.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Regarding the practice of working long hours, see: A Rebel, ‘North Queensland Unemployed,’ *The Workers’ Weekly*, 3 July 1925, 4; John Dondilo, ‘Italians in the North,’ *Worker*, 5 February 1925, 17; ‘Italians in the Sugar Industry: White Workers Alarmed,’ *The Australian Worker*, 8 April 1925, 15; ‘Italian Invasion: Evidence Before Queensland Royal Commission,’ *The Australian Worker*, 20 May 1925, 20.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Co-operation Among Cane Growers,’ *Shepparton Advertiser*, 9 March 1922, 3.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 97.

It was also believed that Italians used co-operation not just for buying land but for all parts of industry such as the sharing of tools and labour. This led to some declaring that Italians 'have solved the problems of co-operative settlement' as well as a range of other problems such as unemployment and industrial unrest. The syndicate was subsequently encouraged as an alternative form of social organisation to the trade union that fit the ideology of the moderate-to-conservative press. Unlike the trade union, the syndicate was not a class organisation – that is, an organisation whose purpose is to defend the interests of a particular class – but was rather an organisation that facilitated a movement between class positions. Since the purpose of the syndicate was not to advance the interests of one class, it was not predisposed to class conflict like a trade union or employer's organisation. The syndicate, therefore, encouraged Italians to be, in the words of Douglass, 'strike averters' rather than 'strike breakers' as they were motivated to maximise savings for purchasing property and by the prospect of sponsoring a friend or cousin in Italy who wished to migrate.<sup>84</sup> Although celebrating the syndicate would seem antithetical to the pioneer legend which, as Hirst described it, celebrates individual enterprise and does not account for collective or state enterprise, the system of co-operative labour sees the Italians as free from the corrupting influence of the union and the syndicate was an example of social organisation that encouraged self-reliance in the sense that it was separate from and ambivalent towards the state.<sup>85</sup>

Furthermore, because the syndicate was seen to encourage individualist values albeit in a collective structure, this led some to argue that Italians were the perfect capitalists. As Woree noted, 'ultimately each Italian becomes a farmer and a small capitalist, because unlike many other labourers he has a proper appreciation of economics to realise that labour is capital.' In the same article, he also declared: 'The Italian labourer realises that his body is his capital ... he is a true capitalist.'<sup>86</sup> Others, however, argued in the opposite direction: that the co-operation of Italians proved that they understood socialism better than British-Australian workers and their unions.<sup>87</sup> One letter writer to *The Brisbane Courier* in 1928 argued that 'Italians seem to practice Socialism and mutual trust instead of talking about it, and there is no reason why native Australians cannot

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>85</sup> Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend," 316.

<sup>86</sup> Woree, 'Our Sugar Industry: The Italian Invasion,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 February 1919, 4.

<sup>87</sup> 'Co-operation Among Cane Growers,' *Shepparton Advertiser*, 9 March 1922, 3.

do it, too'.<sup>88</sup> Both of these arguments, whether the Italian was socialist or capitalist, were based on the assumption that Italian workers were properly modern subjects who understood their position in modern capitalism even better than the British-Australians. This is an assumption that was out of kilter with the social conditions of the Italian migrants' origins. According to J S MacDonald, there was relatively little immigration from areas such as Central Sicily, the Po Valley, Emilia-Romagna and Apulia 'where aspirations for material betterment were expressed in broad associative behaviour' such as through trade unions, consumer and producers' co-operatives and mutual benefit society. On the other hand, immigration rates were relatively high from areas such as Messina and Catania in eastern Sicily 'where economic aspirations were integrated only with the welfare of the individual's nuclear family'.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the self-reliance of the syndicate was perhaps a product of the forms of social organisation in the areas of origin and the syndicate functioned in the same way that the nuclear family did in Italy until it could be brought out, which gradually happened and became drawn into the expected labour patterns of the industry.<sup>90</sup>

Other voices in the moderate-to-conservative press chose to interpret the migrant's predisposition to land ownership and co-operation through a nostalgic lens. According to Hirst, the pioneer legend constructed by nationalist writers of the 1890s was shaped by nostalgia and a desire to find an ideal past to condemn the troubled present. The work of these writers was suffused with a generalised nostalgia that also created a highly specific past that was free from the social evils of the present. The past was used to condemn the present and settlers were elevated to the status of heroic pioneers.<sup>91</sup> In 1920s North Queensland, the pioneer had been betrayed but the past was once again used to condemn the present, by finding in the past the figure of the Italian migrant. From this position, the differences between the Italian syndicate and the British-Australian union were not the result of understanding capitalism or socialism any better or worse than the other, rather these differences were reflective of a fundamental difference between the agricultural peasantry and the industrial proletariat. The Italians who

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<sup>88</sup> Detonator, 'Italian Immigrants,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 14 April 1928, 7,

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in: Henderson, "Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939: Motives for Migration," 201.

<sup>90</sup> Regarding the role of the family in the sugar industry, see: Vanda Moraes-Gorecki, "'Black Italians' in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland: A Reflection on Labour Inclusion and Cultural Exclusion in Tropical Australia," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 5, no. 3 (1994): 311; Nino Randazzo and Michael J. Cigler, *The Italians in Australia* (Melbourne: AE Press, 1987), 27-28.

<sup>91</sup> Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend."

migrated to North Queensland came from the rural areas of Italy where independent peasants and small proprietors predominated. As such, they were not the poorest residents of Italy nor were proletarians.<sup>92</sup> However, it was unlikely that the young adult males who were migrating had owned their own land but were probably tenant farmers or labourers for their fathers or other relatives.<sup>93</sup> Their aspirations for land ownership, and the achievement of *sistemazione*, were frustrated by declining economic opportunities in their villages of origin.<sup>94</sup> As the *Daily Mail* explained:

Families in Italy are large, and however frugal may be their way of life, the holding is not sufficient for his sons. Many in late years have been absorbed in the growing industry of the towns, but others will not abandon farm for factory, their independence for wages, without a struggle, and it is the more venturesome of these in whom the inherited hunger for land is most urgent, who have entered Australia.<sup>95</sup>

Indeed, it was the peasant background of Italian migrants that differentiated them from British migrants who were deemed to be exclusively unemployed 'industrial types' and 'chiefly city bred in search of town jobs'.<sup>96</sup> Palmer, for example, argued that: 'It would be absurd to expect a highly industrialised country like England to produce numbers of people with strong roots in the soil.' It was therefore necessary to be open to immigration from 'agricultural Europe' so as not to flood the labour market with anymore 'industrial types'.<sup>97</sup> Italians also caught on to this difference between the Italians and the British. Sacchi, for example, argued that the English did not take to cane farming as the Italians did. They did not feel like it suited them, having had no agricultural traditions like the Italians – they were industrialists not agriculturalists: 'They lack

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<sup>92</sup> Henderson, "Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939: Motives for Migration," 200. See also: Vance Palmer, 'Edge of the Tropics,' *The Daily Mail*, 5 January 1925, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> According to Ricatti, '*sistemazione*' simply indicates the 'achievement of a comfortable stability', see: Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 36. Furthermore, Baldassar explains: 'The desire for *sistemazione* is recognised as the most common incentive for migration. Historically, migration was an opportunity to "set oneself up" with house and family when the means to do so were not available at home.' See: Loretta Baldassar, *Visits Home: Migration Experiences between Italy and Australia* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 40.

<sup>95</sup> 'Racial Fusion,' *The Daily Mail*, 1 January 1926, 9.

<sup>96</sup> 'Italian Immigration,' *Southern Cross*, 12 January 1923, 21.

<sup>97</sup> Vance Palmer, 'Those Italians,' *The Daily Mail*, 7 March 1925, 14.

the tenacity, patience and love of the land that we possess."<sup>98</sup> A few years later, Grossardi wrote about 'the apparently deracinated and sickly industrial human waste imported from Great Britain' and attributed the failure of British assisted migration schemes to settle the land 'to a lack of homesteading virtues.'<sup>99</sup> This connection to the land and agricultural labour also differentiated Italians from most other Southern European migrants. Attempts to introduce cane cutters from Spain as an alternative source of labour were considered failures because they were recruited from the larger cities of Spain.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, it was said that Scandinavians and Greeks were typically proletarians who had already been severed from the land.<sup>101</sup> The Italian, on the other hand, was believed to possess within his own blood the desire for land ownership and a love of the land that he would only allow himself to be severed from as a last resort.<sup>102</sup>

There was often a nostalgic element to these arguments, as Italians were seen to possess something that the British had lost in the development of industrial capitalism. In the processes of proletarianisation, British-Australian workers had supposedly lost their attachment to the land and values such as 'co-operation'. For example, Palmer observed that the Italians 'have a sense of community, too, such is little cultivated in Australia, where the tradition is more

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<sup>98</sup> Sacchi, "From Our Archives: Italians in Queensland," 20.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in: Gerardo Papalia, "Imaginary Colonies: Fascist Views of Australia in Italian Diplomatic Correspondence 1922-1940," *Eras Journal* 6 (2004).

<sup>100</sup> Millionaires in the Making,' *North-Eastern Advertiser*, 8 December 1922, 3. One reason for their failure to become a reliable workforce was that in 1913 Spanish immigrants were recruited from urban and industrial areas of Spain and Latin America that were centres of anarcho-syndicalism. In Australia, they had a reputation for being provocative and unpredictable workers who were prone to strike. See: Robert Mason, "Anarchism, Communism and Hispanidad: Australian Spanish Migrants and the Civil War," *Immigrants & Minorities* 27, no. 1 (2009): 30-31. Six years earlier, a group of Catalan migrants had been recruited for the sugar industry in 1907. This scheme was also unsuccessful when the workers protested their labour conditions, however some of these men remained in the region and became established farmers. See: Robert Mason and Marc Gibert, "Cane Farming and Cultural Difference: Catalan Migration and Land Practices in Early Twentieth-Century Queensland," *History Australia* 17, no. 3 (2020): 550.

<sup>101</sup> According to *The Daily Mail*, Italians were harder to assimilate because they had a more conservative attachment to the land which bred a strong sense of nationality, in comparison to the Scandinavian or Greek 'whose country is his pocket,' see: 'Racial Fusion,' *The Daily Mail*, 1 January 1926, 9. However, sometimes, Scandinavians were spoken about alongside Italians as good agriculturalists and in comparison to the Greeks who were assumed to always settle in urban areas, see: 'Little Italy,' *The Register*, 19 January 1924, 17; 'Settling the Tropics: White Labor Suitable,' *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 12 August 1925, 4. Regarding the settlement of Scandinavians in Queensland, see: Mark Emmerson, 'Too remote, too primitive and too expensive: Scandinavian settlers in colonial Queensland,' Queensland Historical Atlas, <https://www.qhatlas.com.au/too-remote-too-primitive-and-too-expensive-scandinavian-settlers-colonial-queensland>, published in 2015, accessed online 8 March 2021. For Greeks in Queensland, see: Denis Arthur Conomos, *The Greeks in Queensland: A History from 1859-1945* (Brisbane: Copyright Publishing, 2002).

<sup>102</sup> Vance Palmer, 'A Northern Pilgrimage,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 25 August 1924, 5; Vance Palmer, 'Edge of the Tropics,' *The Daily Mail*, 5 January 1925, 8; 'Racial Fusion,' *The Daily Mail*, 1 January 1926, 9.

individualistic.’<sup>103</sup> In this view, the co-operation between Italians was not a sign of their entrepreneurial adaptation to the conditions of capitalism but rather a sign of their resistance to the individualising influence of capitalism. Furthermore, if Italians did show an acceptance of the contaminating influence of capitalism, these were not met with praise but worry. This can be found, for example, in Fr Mambrini’s report from 1923 found that Italians in the Herbert River district worshipped money, a lesson they learnt in Australia, a nation that Mambrini said was ‘becoming more pagan every day on account of the flourishing condition of material things.’ He encapsulates this in a made-up quote: ‘We know you are right in asking us to come to church, but this country is very strange. It gives us money if we sell body and soul to it. And so it is - we have neither time nor wish to go to church while we are here.’ Eventually, he puts this down to the case of ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do’.<sup>104</sup> Other migrant groups in the area were also believed to be susceptible to the corrupting influence of Australian capitalism. For example, Vance Marshall wrote in 1924 about this in relation to the Chinese of Cairns: ‘Evidently in his frenzied desire for western money, the Chinaman of Cairns is content to allow his eastern beliefs to lapse, for the present, at least.’<sup>105</sup> That this was worthy of note, perhaps betrays that some journalists or commentators considered – whether disparagingly or romantically – Italians and other non-British migrants to be backwards.

The cultural baggage that Italians and other non-British migrants supposedly brought with them included things that the Britishers (both in Australia and Britain) were believed to have lost with the progress of history. Like the pioneers of legend, they were nostalgic constructions that hearkened back to a moment in the past that was supposedly free of the problems of the present. The Italian syndicate, by being neither proletarian nor capitalist functioned as a similar nostalgic construction in that it too pointed to an imagined past in which there is no separation between the land owner and the worker and no bitter class rivalries. The Italian became a visitor from the past, kept in the pre-modern era populated by agrarian peasants and since Australia never had a peasantry, they are situated in a point of time before the settlement of Australia. Yet still, they would somehow become the role models for the future of Australia. As Hirst argued, the

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<sup>103</sup> Vance Palmer, ‘Edge of the Tropics,’ *The Daily Mail*, 5 January 1925, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Rev. Fr. Mambrini, ‘Report of a Two Months’ Visit to the Italian Settlement on the Herbert River (Parish of Ingham),’ 1923.

<sup>105</sup> Vance Marshall, ‘Tropic Beauty of Cairns,’ *The Daily Mail*, 26 May 1924, 8.

pioneer legend is a construction of the nation in which, even at the moment of its birth, its best days were already behind it.<sup>106</sup>

### **An Italian Pioneer Legend**

Although the Italians settling in North Queensland were perceived to possess the attributes of the pioneers, it did not necessarily follow that they were pioneers themselves. Especially in the early years of the 1920s, the discourse remained centred on Italians displacing pioneers, never being pioneers themselves. However, a counterargument emerged by 1925 that Italians themselves were pioneers in North Queensland, largely in response to the intensification of the public debate at this time. One of the earliest proponents of this argument was Filippo Sacchi, who, in the second of his articles for the *Corriere della Sera*, wrote: ‘the name of the Italian is by now indissolubly linked to the history of the colonisation and development of these lands. The cultivation of sugar in Queensland is one of the most extraordinary experiences of acclimatization and adaptation that the white race has ever carried out.’<sup>107</sup> He was not, however, the first to link Italians to the histories of pioneering in North Queensland – a few months before his articles were published, the New South Wales premier, Duncan Gillies, had claimed that Italians were amongst the pioneers of the far north. Such claims were given further support when the Ferry Report was published in which it was noted:

It is said that the Italian is not a pioneer, and prefers to take up farms already made. This view is in no doubt due to the fact that in recent years the majority of Italians buying farms have, of necessity, brought farms already improved. However, it is not disputed in the early days on the Herbert River and in the Mulgrave and Mourilyan areas, the Italians did clear dense scrub and cultivate the land.<sup>108</sup>

In contrast, Palmer’s observations of the region suggest that the history of pioneering was not as simple as is implied in the Ferry Report – that is, that pioneering was something confined to

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<sup>106</sup> Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend."

<sup>107</sup> Sacchi, "From Our Archives: Italians in Queensland," 20.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in: 'Italians in Australia,' *Daily Mercury*, 30 December 1925, 8.



an earlier period that by the mid-1920s had passed. Writing in September 1924, Palmer described Queensland's unique geography of development:

Instead of extending from the capital it has thrust tentative, exploring shoots out from all the little ports along the coast, and the railway has come later to link up these small beginnings. Thus one has the continual sensation of running from new pioneer country into old settled country. The distance from the capital does not mark the degree of formal civilisation as it does in the other States.<sup>109</sup>

Palmer found that even in districts further south such as Bundaberg, where there were not nearly as many Italians as there were in the districts between Townsville and Cairns, it was believed that the undeveloped lands of those districts would remain so until Italians began settling there.<sup>110</sup> In the districts further north, where Italians were most concentrated, Palmer observed a similar state of uneven development. In the Hinchinbrook Shire, Palmer found that apart from older towns such as Ingham, most of the area was still in the pioneer stage where tin shack and 'fugitive-looking buildings' suggested that convenience was valued over comfort.<sup>111</sup> The view of Ingham as a town that had passed through the pioneering stage was amended in a later article when Palmer described the town's atmosphere as one of 'violent exuberance' and that the town 'in spite of the first impression of prosperity and comfort, is crude and raw.'<sup>112</sup> Further north, Vance Marshall, found in Innisfail a similar town in which homes were made in corrugated sheds and a general atmosphere which made him feel unsafe – as well as other hallmarks of a frontier town.<sup>113</sup>

Sacchi, Ferry, Palmer and Marshall were all travelling through North Queensland at around the same time. Their attention to the question of whether or not Italians were pioneers of these districts reveals that it was an important part of the broader public debate on Italian immigration and compelled individuals to write letters to local newspapers and local chapters of organisations

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<sup>109</sup> Vance Palmer, 'The Tropics in Spring,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 2 September 1924, 9.

<sup>110</sup> Vance Palmer, 'A Northern Pilgrimage,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 25 August 1924, 5.

<sup>111</sup> Vance Palmer, 'Edge of the Tropics,' *The Daily Mail*, 5 January 1925, 8.

<sup>112</sup> Vance Palmer, 'The Traveller,' *The Australasian*, 4 April 1925, 66.

<sup>113</sup> Vance Marshall, 'Million-Pound Town,' *The Daily Mail*, 29 December 1924, 8.

such as the Australian Native's Association to discuss the issue at their meetings.<sup>114</sup> The question of the role Italians played in the pioneering work of the region remained contested for the rest of the interwar period, as debate flared up each time it was reported that an important figure claimed Italians were pioneers or, at the very least, insinuated that Italians were essential for the sugar industry. In 1928 after the Italian Consul General, Antonio Grossardi, responded to a statement made against Italian immigration by former Prime Minister Billy Hughes at a meeting of the Nationalist Association of New South Wales. In his response, Grossardi stated:

I think it timely to point out that if Italian migration should cease completely, the backblocks of Australia in 20 years' time will be completely deserted. Experience has shown me that the Italian peasant is the only migrant who goes to the land and stays there. The others, sooner or later, drift back to the cities, apparently unable to resist the lure of metropolitan life.<sup>115</sup>

Although Grossardi was not talking explicitly of either pioneering or of the North Queensland sugar districts, the letters to the press that he had his statement provoked spoke explicitly of pioneering the sugar industry. An editorial in *The Australian Worker* argued that the sugar industry had been built by Australians using 'that Australian pluck and perseverance' long before the arrival of large-scale Italian migration.<sup>116</sup> A resident of Innisfail wrote to *The Brisbane Courier* to argue Italians were not pioneers because they had only arrived in the previous five years and to suggest they were pioneers at all would be an insult to the real pioneers.<sup>117</sup> This was further supported by an article published in the same newspaper under a headline that asked 'Are They True Pioneers?', which argued that the pioneering work of the industry was done by Britishers and Australians and arguments that Italians were necessary for this work resulted from 'a sort of queer inferiority complex' that downplayed Australian and British achievements.<sup>118</sup> This article also argued that during the boom period of the early 1920s, in which Italians played a

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<sup>114</sup> 'Onlooker', 'Italians as Pioneers,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 15 April 1925, 12; 'Italian Migration Stream,' *Maryborough Chronicle*, *Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, 1 July 1925, 8; 'The Italian Influx,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 20 July 1925, 6; 'The Italian Invasion of Queensland,' *The Catholic Press*, 6 August 1925, 7.

<sup>115</sup> 'Steady Decrease: Italian Immigrants,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 31 March 1928, 8.

<sup>116</sup> 'Italian Immigration,' *The Australian Worker*, 4 April 1928, 11.

<sup>117</sup> Press Photographer, 'Italian Migrants,' *The Brisbane Courier*, 10 April 1928, 12.

<sup>118</sup> J.E.S., 'Italian Settlers: Are They True Pioneers?' *The Age*, 29 June 1928, 10.

dominant role, finance speculation brought up no new virgin areas, only the ready-made farms where pioneering had already been done.<sup>119</sup>

Another round of debate flared up in July 1937 after the Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, addressed a congregation at Mourilyan in the Johnstone River district saying that ‘the advent of the Italians in North Queensland saved the sugar industry’ and ‘had they not gone to North Queensland it would have been practically deserted.’<sup>120</sup> These comments provoked the same counter-arguments that were made almost a decade earlier in 1928 as letter writers argued that the pioneering work was already done by settlers of British background whose efforts had been belittled by the comments.<sup>121</sup> Weighing in on the debate, the argument made by the secretary of the Queensland Cane Growers’ Council suggests that the findings of the Ferry Report over a decade earlier had not changed attitudes in the industry:

As a matter of fact, the great burden of pioneering in the North has been done by Britishers, the Italians generally going into the industry after the initial work of settlement had been done. At the present time the sugar industry contains a small percentage of foreigners of all nationalities. Certainly there is a greater percentage in some districts, the Mourilyan area particularly being recognised as one in which the majority of farmers are Italians. While we must all respect the Italian for his great desire to become a land settler and for the industrious manner in which he carries on agriculture, we cannot concede to him any greater credit than is due to industrious people of British stock.<sup>122</sup>

Alongside these particular examples, there is evidence to show that in the 1920s and 1930s Italians leaders highlighted the pioneering role played by their fellow Italians in order to defend the right of Italians to migrate to Australia without restriction and assert a sense of belonging. In 1930, the Acting Consul Mario Melana told the Sugar Committee that Italians had pioneered the sugar industry and, furthermore, argued that ‘[n]ot only are the Italians a white race, but also white in character, outlook, and morals.’ Similarly, in 1937, a few months before Duhig’s

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<sup>119</sup> J.E.S., ‘Italian Settlers: Are They True Pioneers?’ *The Age*, 29 June 1928, 10.

<sup>120</sup> ‘Britishers Did Most of the Pioneering Work in the North,’ *The Telegraph*, 13 July 1937, 2.

<sup>121</sup> F.W. Barnard, ‘Sugar Pioneers,’ *The Courier Mail*, 22 July 1937, 23; Second Generation, ‘Italian Settlers,’ *The Courier Mail*, 24 July 1937, 12.

<sup>122</sup> ‘Britishers Did Most of the Pioneering Work in the North,’ *The Telegraph*, 13 July 1937, 2.

comments were debated in the press, Franco Battistessa wrote in *Il Giornale Italiano* – the newspaper that he was the editor of – that Italians are ‘a hard-working, enterprising section of white labourers ... who were the hardy pioneers that helped to make the waste bushland of tropical Queensland into wealth-giving lush green canefields.’<sup>123</sup> In each of these examples, the Italian pioneer legend is tied up with assertions of whiteness. Italians were not just pioneers of the sugar industry but were white pioneers of new white settlements and were therefore contributing to the dispossession and settlement of Aboriginal land.<sup>124</sup> Not only that, but they were also defending white Australia from the external Other of Asia and this was a feature of the construction of the Italian pioneer in North Queensland from much earlier. In the same article that Sacchi asserted that Italians were pioneers in the colonisation of Australia, he also wrote: ‘I maintain that Australians would never have been able to achieve this magnificent redemption of one of the richest and most beautiful parts of their land from the fatal invasion of the coloured races without the cooperation of the Italians.’<sup>125</sup>

The emergence of an Italian pioneer legend after 1925 reveals that, like the pioneer legend identified by Hirst, there was a similar nostalgic and conservative impulse behind the construction of the Italian pioneer. At the end of his third and final article on North Queensland, Sacchi describes a nascent Italian community developing in the region:

It is a healthy colony. We have other healthy colonies, but this is the youngest and has the health of the young: that full and irresistible youthful health which is like the morning smile of Nature. There are no blemishes. The rogue, the ruffian, the libeller, the usual chronic phylloxera of colonial life has not yet made an appearance. They have no political divisions because their opinions are the same. Their relative regional homogeneity contributes to the maintenance of cohesion. It is still a colony at the aristocratic stage, the colonial child of a certain city ... almost like the colonies of ancient Greece.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘The Shadow of the Yellow Peril over White Australia not a Bogey, but a Real Menace,’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 2 August 1933, 1.

<sup>124</sup> Regarding the contribution made by Italian migrants to Australian settler colonialism, see: Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 66–71. See also: Andonis Piperoglou, ‘Migrant-Cum-Settler: Greek Settler Colonialism in Australia,’ *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 2 (2020): 447–71.

<sup>125</sup> Sacchi, ‘From Our Archives: Italians in Queensland,’ 21.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

In fact, it was not so much an Italian community but rather a constellation of Italian communities differentiated by towns or regions of origin of the Italians that settled within them. However, even at the time of writing, cracks had begun to emerge in the cultural homogeneity described by Sacchi. As Sacchi himself admitted, ‘the increase in migration has brought a greater mixture.’<sup>127</sup> Within a few years, the political homogeneity described by Sacchi would make way for bitter political rifts in the Italian communities after anti-fascist exiles began arriving in North Queensland from around 1927 and Mussolini’s Fascist government attempted to exercise greater control over Italian subjects through their consular offices established in Townsville and Innisfail.<sup>128</sup>

Finally, the emergence of an Italian pioneer legend as a nostalgic construction can also be attributed to the economic changes that were having significant impacts on the sugar industry and the Italian communities of North Queensland. Beginning in 1923, the boom that had sustained Italian successes in the sugar industry came to an end and entered a period of crisis. This crisis had in fact begun in 1923 when wages were first reduced and conditions continued to worsen over the next two years as the production of sugar exceeded home demand and growers were facing reduced returns on the global market at lower prices. This was accompanied by increased difficulty absorbing new arrivals into the industry which led to heightened competition on the job market and left many Italians in the districts between Townsville and Cairns unemployed.<sup>129</sup> The young, healthy and peaceful Italian community described by Sacchi just three months later, if it had ever existed at all, could no longer exist as soon as it was described on paper. The material conditions on which the construction of the respectable, economically mobile, and aspirational petit-bourgeois Italian pioneer was built had already been eroded.

For the sugar industry of North Queensland, the second half of the 1920s was characterised by a continued decrease in prices and wages, increased competition on the labour market and the government increasingly regulated production and the expansion of sugar. These conditions were further exacerbated by the Great Depression in the 1930s. For Italians, although the

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>128</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980), 98.

<sup>129</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 140.

Herbert and Johnstone districts remained the main areas of settlement, some Italians who were faced with unemployment moved into other sugar districts, particularly those further south of Townsville, while others left the sugar industry altogether and settling in other parts of the country. The next chapter will examine the increased hostility towards Italian workers that arose from this combination of factors with a focus on the introduction of British Preference quotas that limited the employment of Italian cutters throughout the industry and the Italian opposition to them.



## Chapter 5:

### **British and Local Preference in the Sugar Industry**

In July 1930, representatives of the three main industrial bodies in the sugar industry met in Brisbane and established an informal agreement on the implementation of British preference with regards to the recruitment of labour in the industry. This agreement introduced state-wide quotas that remained a feature of the industry over the decade that followed and contributed to the furthering of antagonisms between Italian and British workers. Italians in the industry resisted the agreement, defending the right of cutters to work where they wished and defending the right of growers to employ the labour that they desired. They did so in alliance with other Southern European workers from countries such as Malta, Yugoslavia, Spain and Greece. As I argue in this chapter, the struggle over British preference was more than just a struggle over employment in a period of economic depression but also a struggle over naturalisation and citizenship in White Australia at a time of diminishing opportunities for non-British migrants.<sup>1</sup>

The main work that has dealt with the issue of British preference is William Douglass's book-length study of Italians in the North Queensland sugar industry.<sup>2</sup> This study has informed parts of this chapter, however I intend to expand on Douglass's by paying closer attention to the Italian response to the issue – in particular, by showing that the resistance to British preference was not united, but fractured along political, ideological and geographical lines. To do this, I use more written sources produced by Italians themselves and pay closer attention to biographies of figures such as the Danesi brothers, Luigi and Costante. Despite being prominent in the Italian community in Innisfail, the history of the Danesi brothers has been inadequately researched by historians who have generally treated them as marginal figures in the history of the anti-fascist movement.<sup>3</sup> However, the importance of the Danesi brothers has been recently acknowledged

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<sup>1</sup> This was a period in which the Australian Government was increasingly regulating immigration from Southern European countries while encouraging further immigration from the United Kingdom. This is discussed in greater depth in the next chapter. See also: Kosmas Tsokhas, "People or Money? Empire Settlement and British Emigration to Australia, 1919-34," *Immigrants & Minorities* 9, no. 1 (1990): 1-20; Andonis Piperoglou, "Favoured 'Nordics' and 'Mediterranean Scum': Transpacific Hierarchies of Desirability and Immigration Restriction," *History Australia* 17, no. 3 (2020): 510-24.

<sup>2</sup> William A. Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> As prominent anti-fascist figures in Australia, it would be expected that the Danesi brothers would be found in Cresciani's comprehensive book-length work on the subject, however they are completely absent:



by Catherine Dewhirst who, in her study of the Brisbane-based newspaper, *L'Italiano*, described Costante Danesi as 'the central anti-Fascist figure in North Queensland ... whose influence across the Italian migrant communities was extensive.'<sup>4</sup>

Apart from Douglass's work, the issue of British preference remains understudied by historians of Italian immigration. General histories of Italian immigration often mention British preference but without depth. Perhaps the least neglectful of these studies is the one produced by Nino Randazzo and Michael Cigler who summarise within a single page many of the main points that are taken up in this chapter but without much detail.<sup>5</sup> Others such as Gianfranco Cresciani misinterpret key parts of the history by conflating the issue as a whole with the British Preference League which, as I will demonstrate, was just one of many organisations involved in this story.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, historians concerned with race and whiteness have yet to deal with British preference in a comprehensive way even though it would seem an important and obvious case study. When British preference has been written about, it has usually been given only a brief mention within broader studies of Italians in the sugar industry or in studies of adjacent cases such as wartime internment.<sup>7</sup> As a result, apart from being insufficient, these studies often reproduce the same mistake made by Cresciani.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, British preference has also remained understudied by labour historians despite being at the centre of labour recruitment, organising and agitation across the entire industry for at least a decade. Once again, British preference is mentioned in some general histories but there are no in-depth studies, despite scholarship on adjacent events such as the South Johnstone strike of 1927 and the strikes of 1933 and 1934 in relation to Wiel's

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Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Dewhirst, "Respectability and Disloyalty: The Competing Obligations of *L'italiano*'s Editors," in *The Transnational Voices of Australia's Migrant and Minority Press*, ed. Catherine Dewhirst and Richard Scully (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 94.

<sup>5</sup> Nino Randazzo and Michael J. Cigler, *The Italians in Australia* (Melbourne: AE Press, 1987), 107.

<sup>6</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68.

<sup>7</sup> Stefanie Affeldt, "A Paroxysm of Whiteness: 'White' Labour, 'White' Nation and 'White' Sugar in Australia," in *Wages of Whiteness & Racist Symbolic Capital*, ed. Wulf D. Hund, Jeremy Krikler, and David Roediger (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2010), 124; Diane Menghetti, "Italians in North Queensland," in *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins*, ed. James Jupp (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1988), 600-03; Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, "Italian Australians and the Australian Catholic Church through War, Internment and Mass Migration," in *The Pastoral Care of Italians in Australia: Memory and Prophecy*, ed. Anthony Paganoni (Ballan: Connor Court, 2007), 49.

<sup>8</sup> See: Affeldt, "A Paroxysm of Whiteness: 'White' Labour, 'White' Nation and 'White' Sugar in Australia."; Menghetti, "Italians in North Queensland."

disease.<sup>9</sup> Such studies – in particular those related to the latter events – emphasise solidarity between British and Italian workers, whereas British preference represented exclusion and antagonism. Additionally, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, British preference offers a useful case study for analysing the struggles within the interwar labour movement following the lead of Sarah Gregson's studies of Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie.<sup>10</sup>

In the first section of this chapter, I give a brief history of British preference from the 1925 crisis until the informal agreement of 1930. In doing so, I focus primarily on the different positions taken on the issue by the major labour movement organisations which reflected deeper divisions within the interwar labour movement with regard to Southern European immigration. In the second section, I provide an overview of the Italian resistance to British preference by introducing the major organisations and leading figures. I pay close attention to the solidarities and antagonisms that emerged within an Italian community fractured along political and geographic lines. British preference became another site of struggle between fascists and antifascists to be the legitimate representatives of Italians in Australia.<sup>11</sup> In the third section, I challenge the claim that, in protesting against British preference, fascists were inclined to appeal to *italianità* while antifascists were more inclined to appeal to ideals of workers' internationalism by arguing that both sides were more likely to appeal to the rights of citizenship and naturalisation. As such, the struggle against British preference was part of a broader struggle over what it meant to be a naturalised British subject.<sup>12</sup> The disaffected cutter or grower was

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<sup>9</sup> K.H. Kennedy, "The South Johnstone Strike and Railway Lockout, 1927," *Labour History*, no. 31 (1976): 1-13; Diane Menghetti, *The Red North: The Popular Front in North Queensland* (Townsville: History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Gregson, "'It All Started on the Mines': The 1934 Kalgoorlie Race Riots Revisited," *Labour History*, no. 80 (2001): 22; "Defending Internationalism in Interwar Broken Hill," *Labour History*, no. 86 (2004): 115-36; "War, Racism and Industrial Relations in an Australian Mining Town, 1916-1935," *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 18, no. 1 (2007): 79-98.

<sup>11</sup> Brown has argued that the Italian fight against employment discrimination 'was reshaped along political lines until it resembled another conflict between Italian anti-Fascist and Fascist supporters.' See: David Brown, "'Before Everything, Remain Italian': Fascism and the Italian Population of Queensland 1910-1945" (University of Queensland, 2008), 154.

<sup>12</sup> Naturalisation is a theme that was taken up by O'Brien in her research on the internment of Italians during World War II, see: Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, "Internments in Australia During World War Two: Life Histories of Citizenship and Inclusion," in *Enemy Aliens: The Internment of Italian Migrants in Australia During the Second World War*, ed. Cate Elkner, et al. (Bacchus Marsh, Victoria: Connor Court, 2005). Naturalisation has also been a theme in the work of historians of other immigrant groups – see, for example, Monsour's work on Syrian/Lebanese migrants and the White Australia Policy: Anne Monsour, *Not Quite White: Lebanese and the White Australia Policy 1880 to 1947* (Teneriffe, Qld.: Post Pressed, 2010).

thus constructed as predominantly a settled and naturalised citizen seeking to recover their basic rights. Finally, I look at 'local preference' as an alternative form of preference proposed by the Danesi brothers. I demonstrate that not only did Italians appeal to their British or Australian identities but also to their identities as members of a local community. According to Italians such as the Danesi brothers, it was through participation in the local community that Italians could properly enjoy the rights, and fulfill the duties, of their citizenship.

### **The 'Gentleman's Agreement'**

In July 1930, a conference was held in Brisbane between representatives of the three main industrial bodies of the North Queensland sugar industry: the Australian Workers Union (AWU), the Australian Sugar Producers' Association and the Queensland Cane Growers' Association. While this conference was taking place, there were ongoing industrial disputes in a number of towns in North Queensland over the issue of British preference in recruiting cutters for the upcoming season. The sign-on at Tully, for example, was postponed for at least a week after farmers refused to uphold an agreement made the previous month between the Tully District Farmers' Association and the AWU which provided for British preference.<sup>13</sup> There were other disputes at Goondi, Kalamia and various mills in the Ingham district – some of which postponed the signing on of cutters and had to be taken to the Industrial Court.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, the meeting in Brisbane was resolved with the drawing up of a 'Gentleman's Agreement' between the three industrial bodies regarding the implementation of British preference. This agreement stipulated that in all mill areas, British cutters had to make up at least 75 per cent of the workforce for the 1931 and subsequent seasons. There were some exceptions to this rule for mill areas close to Ingham, Innisfail and Cairns where Italians and other Southern Europeans constituted the majority of cutters. In the Goondi mill area near Innisfail, at least 25 per cent of cutters had to be British in 1931, increasing to 50 per cent in 1932 and up to 75 per cent for 1933 and subsequent seasons. Similarly, in the Hambledon mill area near Cairns, at least 50 per cent of cutters had to be British in 1931 before increasing to 75 per cent in 1932 and subsequent

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<sup>13</sup> 'A.W.U. Will Insist on Agreement Being Carried Out,' *Daily Standard*, 17 June 1930, 7; 'A.W.U. Holds Key to Situation,' *Daily Standard*, 18 July 1930, 7; 'The Sugar Industry,' *Worker*, 25 June 1930, 10.

<sup>14</sup> 'A.W.U. Will Insist on Agreement Being Carried Out,' *Daily Standard*, 17 June 1930, 7; 'Italian Question,' *The Central Queensland Herald*, 26 June 1930, 37.

seasons. Furthermore, the Mourilyan mill area near Innisfail and the Macknade and Victoria mill areas near Ingham were exempt from any such preference quotas, however in giving these mills special allowance, it was stipulated that ‘every endeavour shall be made to obtain as high a British percentage as possible.’<sup>15</sup> In areas where British labour was higher than 75 per cent, the prevailing percentages were to be maintained. Therefore, in towns south of Townsville, it was expected that approximately 90 per cent of labour would be British.<sup>16</sup>

British preference had been a feature of the sugar industry since the crisis of 1925, when the North Queensland branch of the AWU adopted a resolution that 75 per cent of employment in all sugar districts should go to the British.<sup>17</sup> Following this, workers at the South Johnstone mill near Innisfail – described by Douglass as ‘largely British and the strongest bastion of the AWU within the industry’ – informed local canegrowers that they would not process the upcoming season’s harvest unless 75 per cent of the gangs were British. Following their lead, the AWU branch in Cairns announced that they would be applying the same rule at Babinda.<sup>18</sup> Farmers opposed these demands and the matter was taken to the Arbitration Court in early May, where Justice Webb ruled that a system of preference was to be instituted throughout Queensland for the 1925 season in which ‘first preference was to be given to men who had worked as cutters in the same area the previous season, and second preference to men, regardless of nationality, who had held AWU tickets the previous year.’<sup>19</sup> The millworkers at South Johnstone and Babinda, however, continued with their pro-British stance which led to brief shutdowns before agreements were reached in each of these areas that allowed for the employment of more British cutters in each of these districts.<sup>20</sup>

Before the ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ in 1930, British preference was negotiated at the district level and therefore largely confined to mill areas between Cairns and Townsville that had significant Italian populations. Established Italians were protected by ‘first preference’, however this impeded more recent arrivals from finding work in the areas that it was implemented. As a

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Favour British Cutters,’ *The Telegraph*, 10 January 1933, 2.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Employment of Labour on Canefields,’ *The Evening News*, 24 June 1930, 9; ‘The Sugar Industry,’ *Worker*, 25 June 1930, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 135.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-49.

result, many Italians were pushed out of the areas where Italian communities had been established and were forced to find work or to purchase land in districts to the south of Townsville where Italians had little historical presence. This southward movement caused industrial conflict in the Mackay district in September 1925 and again in June 1926 when mill workers refused to handle cane cut on farms that had been recently bought by Italians. In the latter dispute, growers joined in on the side of the mill workers. This led the Mackay Canegrowers' Association to ask the Minister for Agriculture to prevent farms being purchased by Italians or any other Southern Europeans but this could not be obliged as the minister considered it to be an abuse of his power.<sup>21</sup> The AWU honoured the role played by the growers by stressing that this dispute was not based on the grievances of one class but that both the workers and growers had united in protecting their supposed economic interests from the Italians. For workers it was about protecting working conditions and standards of living, while for the growers and landowners it was about protecting a sense of fairness and competitiveness in the market.<sup>22</sup> In the words of the *Worker*: 'In the industry a system of sale had grown up under which advantage was taken of the economic conditions of the Italians that tended to destroy the whole fabric of economic law.'<sup>23</sup> This dispute was once again resolved with the granting of first preference employment to union members regardless of nationality or race.<sup>24</sup>

Although the Mackay dispute of 1926 was resolved in such a way that protected the rights of Italian workers as members of the union, it did bring to the fore a rift within the AWU with some local branches such as the one in Mackay showing a preference for organising across class lines in order to exclude Italian workers rather than upholding the principle of union solidarity espoused by the union's state leadership. The former view gained strength as unemployment rose in the late 1920s, the British preference movement gathered momentum and more private agreements stipulating employment quotas were made between British-Australian workers and growers. In South Johnstone, for example, despite a long and bitter strike during 1927 in which one of the resolutions was preference for unionists who had worked previous seasons and in

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<sup>21</sup> 'The "Italian Invasion": Trouble at Mackay Settled: The Premier's Comments and Riordan's Rejoinder: Italian Consul Elated,' *Worker*, 11 August 1926, 12.

<sup>22</sup> 'The "Italian Invasion",' *Worker*, 11 August 1926, 12.

<sup>23</sup> 'The "Italian Invasion",' *Worker*, 11 August 1926, 12.

<sup>24</sup> 'Italian Cane Farmers. Mackay Dispute Settled,' *The Australian Worker*, 18 August 1926, 6.

which the Italians showed strong union solidarity in their support of the strike, AWU officials in 1928 successfully negotiated a 70 per cent British quota for the 1929 season.<sup>25</sup>

The movement for British preference was given a boost in 1930 after the establishment of the British Preference League (BPL). By the end of May, branches of the BPL had been set up in Ayr and Innisfail and a meeting had been held for the purpose of setting up another one in Tully. The main concern expressed by the leadership of this new league was that Italians had supposedly taken over the industry in some districts, resulting in a reduction in the Australian standard of living and an increase in the price of land in the sugar districts.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, it was argued, the sugar embargo that had protected the industry and encouraged a white labour force was not supposed to be used for the benefit of 'foreigners'. Now the embargo, and the White Australia Policy, were in danger.<sup>27</sup> To remedy these problems, the BPL's basic demand was to secure greater employment of British cutters and greater British ownership of sugar farms.<sup>28</sup> British preference quotas were one way to achieve this but the BPL also demanded changes to naturalisation laws, the incorporation of British preference into the sugar embargo, and the establishment of an empire-wide preference league that would ensure empire trade reciprocity in the face of recent trade agreements that isolated Britain from the European continent.<sup>29</sup> This last demand was consistent with their grandiose visions of nation and empire – the League's members were delighted with visions of a great and glorious Australia with North Queensland 'the first house to be put in order.'<sup>30</sup> As the BPL continued to expand over the years that followed by establishing new branches throughout North Queensland, it attempted to intervene in other industries. For example, in 1931 the Cairns branch of the league opposed Southern Europeans working on the construction of a new nurses' quarters at the Cairns District Hospital while local British tradesmen and labourers were unemployed; they also supported a move to abolish a fruit stall set up by a foreigner in one of the main streets of the city.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 'Fascism Backs MacCormack: Italian Workers Asked to Scab,' *The Workers' Weekly*, 30 July 1927, 2; Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 158.

<sup>26</sup> 'The Case for the British,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 13 June 1930, 2.

<sup>27</sup> R. Rolls, 'Queensland and British Preference,' *The Age*, 28 June 1930, 22.

<sup>28</sup> 'The Case for the British,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 13 June 1930, 2.

<sup>29</sup> 'Italians in Canefields,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 17 July 1930, 6; 'There is No Risk of "Italianisation of North Queensland,"' says Mr. F. M. Forde,' *The Evening News*, 12 June 1930, 9; 'British Preference League: Cairns Branch,' *Cairns Post*, 18 February 1931, 8.

<sup>30</sup> 'The Case for the British,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 13 June 1930, 2.

<sup>31</sup> 'British Preference League: Cairns Branch,' *Cairns Post*, 18 February 1931, 8.

The BPL's anxious predictions that the continued employment of Italians would bring about the end of the sugar embargo and, even worse, the end of White Australia were countered by politicians and representatives of the parties to the 'Gentleman's Agreement'. When this agreement was announced, statistics were published to show that the sugar industry as a whole was substantially British. Of about 30,000 persons engaged in the industry, 90 per cent were of British nationality, while 85 per cent of the total were born either in Britain or Australia. Mill employees were about 87 per cent British.<sup>32</sup> At around the same time, the Acting Minister for Trade and Customs, Frank Forde, assured the people of southern states that there was no risk of 'Italianisation' and that there was no danger of the sugar bounty being withdrawn.<sup>33</sup> A representative of the Innisfail branch of the BPL was not convinced, arguing that if the proportion of Italians in Far North Queensland (around seven per cent of the total population) was to be generalised over the entire country, 'we smash to a million pieces the very ideals which constitute the fundamentals of our hopes and ambitions to retain Australia with (as at present) about 98 per cent. British population.' Preference, therefore, was meant to consolidate the position of British Australia.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, the BPL preferred to look at the statistics of individual districts to emphasise the number of foreigners in the industry, noting that 57 per cent of growers in the South Johnstone area were foreign, while at Mourilyan that was about 90 per cent and at Goondi between 15 and 20 per cent. As for cutters, Goondi and Mourilyan were 100 per cent foreign, while South Johnstone was 75 per cent British.<sup>35</sup>

Historians of Italian immigration have often treated the BPL as the dominant organisation in the industry at the time – with some going as far as to mistakenly conflate the BPL with the British preference agreement.<sup>36</sup> This might be due to the fact that Italians in some of the sugar districts had been stirred into action in response to the foundation of BPL branches in their area.<sup>37</sup> However, it remains unclear just how much influence the BPL had on this agreement.

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<sup>32</sup> 'Employment of labour on Canefields,' *The Evening News*, 24 June 1930, 9.

<sup>33</sup> 'There is No Risk of "Italianisation of North Queensland,"' says Mr. F. M. Forde,' *The Evening News*, 12 June 1930, 9.

<sup>34</sup> R. Rolls, 'Queensland and British Preference,' *The Age*, 28 June 1930, 22.

<sup>35</sup> 'The Case for the British,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 13 June 1930, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*; Affeldt, "A Paroxysm of Whiteness: 'White' Labour, 'White' Nation and 'White' Sugar in Australia."; Menghetti, "Italians in North Queensland."

<sup>37</sup> 'Sugar Fields Dispute,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1930, 18.

While the BPL may have played a role in escalating the issue through agitation amongst farmers and their provocation of the Italians, the parties to the 'Gentleman's Agreement' refused to recognise the BPL as a legitimate organisation with a stake in the issue. While the Brisbane conference was taking place, the chairman of the Innisfail District Canegrowers' Council stated that the BPL 'consists of irresponsible people'<sup>38</sup> and when members of the Innisfail branch of the BPL later requested an interview with the council, they replied that they only recognised the AWU in the matter.<sup>39</sup> The AWU accused the BPL of exploiting the sentiment of the returned soldiers and considered the presence of the BPL an unwarranted intrusion from people 'at most only spasmodically connected with the union'.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the BPL was ostracised by other bodies that had a stake in the issue but were not a party to the agreement such as the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce who also refused to deal with them, stating that the members of the Chamber had no interest in the subject.<sup>41</sup>

To comprehend how British preference came to create divisions and alliances amongst the various organisations with a stake in the sugar industry it is necessary to examine the issue in relation to the broader history of the interwar labour movement. The British preference issue brought to the fore a three-way struggle within the North Queensland labour movement that Gregson has identified as a feature of the labour movement across all of Australia during the interwar period. In her case studies of mining towns such as Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie, Gregson found that the labour movement was organised around three poles, with each pole representing competing political priorities of exclusion and solidarity in relation to migrants. The RSL-affiliated unions and organisations were for exclusion, the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) for solidarity and the AWU was either somewhere in between or swinging between the two other poles.<sup>42</sup> A week before the 'Gentleman's Agreement' was reached, the AWU maintained that it was on the side of the Italians. An editorial published in the Brisbane *Worker*, in response to a protest meeting held by Italians in Innisfail, affirmed the internationalist commitment of the union when it declared that 'the Australian Workers' Union, as such, knows

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<sup>38</sup> 'A.W.U. Holds Key to Situation,' *Daily Standard*, 18 June 1930, 7.

<sup>39</sup> 'Italians in Canefields,' *The Central Queensland Herald*, 19 June 1930, 32.

<sup>40</sup> 'Commencement of the Sugar Season,' *Worker*, 11 June 1930, 6.

<sup>41</sup> 'British Preference,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 June 1930, 9; 'Italians in Canefields,' *The Central Queensland Herald*, 19 June 1930, 32.

<sup>42</sup> Gregson, "'It All Started on the Mines'? The 1934 Kalgoorlie Race Riots Revisited," 22.



no nationality, and every member who holds his ticket and observes the union rules has equal rights before his fellow men, irrespective of whatever may be the land of his birth.' The *Worker* also stated that the AWU did not differentiate amongst its members on racial or any other grounds and there were a number of good Italians who were solid and staunch unionists. However, they were concerned with those Italians who were not good unionists and worried that some Italian growers exploited their countrymen by encouraging a certain type of cheap and illiterate migrant. In reaffirming the whiteness of Italians, the *Worker* also reminded readers that '[t]he only people who cannot hold tickets in the A.W.U. are Asiatics and American negroes. Many of these are British subjects, but their exclusion is not based on racial grounds but upon the fact that their standard of living is so inferior to the white man that their inclusion would prove to be a serious economic menace to Australia and its industries.'<sup>43</sup> The BPL seized upon the AWU's commitment to its Italian members and pinpointed it as the union's main weakness. The League subsequently claimed itself to be the only organisation that could adequately represent the interests of British workers because the union was compromised by its inability to discriminate amongst its members.<sup>44</sup>

However, despite giving assurance to its Italian members, the union established itself on the side of exclusion by being a party to the 'Gentleman's Agreement' and reaffirmed this position in subsequent years. For example, in 1932 W J Riordan, the secretary of the Queensland AWU, responded to an Italian protest by arguing that British preference was essential to the interests of peace and to give the British a fair share of the work.<sup>45</sup> The Communists saw this as a betrayal of union members and argued that, by adopting a position in favour of British preference, the AWU was aligning itself with the BPL – which the Communists described as a 'typical fascist organisation' – and thus aiding the fascist preparation of pogroms against Italian workers.<sup>46</sup> The conflict between the AWU and the communists within its ranks had a deeper history, having emerged at the very beginning of the AWU's push to exclude Italian migrants and for the adoption of British preference quotas. In April 1925, the national headquarters of the AWU announced that it would no longer issue cards to Italians and other Southern Europeans and issued the following statement: 'The AWU recognises the slogan that the workers of the world

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<sup>43</sup> 'Commencement of the Sugar Season,' *Worker*, 11 June 1930, 6.

<sup>44</sup> 'The Case for the British,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 13 June 1930, 2.

<sup>45</sup> 'Cane-cutting Gangs: Racial Clash Likely in Northern Sugar Areas,' *The Telegraph*, 17 May 1932, 9.

<sup>46</sup> 'Attack on Italians is Drive Against Working Class,' *The Workers' Weekly*, 9 January 1931, 2.

should unite, but it does not shut its eyes to the fact that there is a second world wide working class of such a backward and degenerate character, that will willingly use itself at a paltry price against fellow toilers.<sup>47</sup> The CPA responded directly to this statement, arguing that the Italian was a militant worker and encouraged Italians to organise their own union should the AWU refuse to organise and represent the interests of Italians workers.<sup>48</sup> It was also noted that the AWU was encouraging antagonism between British and Italian workers and refused to investigate the grievances of their Italian members and thus demanded that the AWU organise Italians by appointing an Italian organiser – otherwise, the Communists argued, Italians must organise themselves.<sup>49</sup>

These examples demonstrate fundamental differences in the orientation towards Italian workers. The AWU's newspaper, *Worker*, according to Georgia Shiells, depicted Italians as racially distinct and inferior, as dupes of the capitalist class, and therefore as a threat to the 'white man's standard'.<sup>50</sup> The Communists' *The Workers' Weekly*, on the other hand, recognised militants amongst the Italians and argued that Italians must be treated as intelligent and supported in their own struggles against their countrymen.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Communists across Australia understood Italian immigration as having arisen 'from the contradictions existing in capitalist society'.<sup>52</sup> As more anti-fascist exiles became established in various parts of Australia, including North Queensland, they were seen as 'political exiles ... from the ruthless capitalist dictatorship [of] Fascism'.<sup>53</sup> Communists celebrated Italian workers for bringing with them a revolutionary spirit and having a revitalising effect on a labour movement that had been duped by the experience of arbitration and the 'chicanery and double dealing' of Labor party politicians. In Lithgow, for example, *The Worker's Weekly* argued that 'the despised "dago" has shown [the

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in: Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 135.

<sup>48</sup> 'A Worker Looks at Capitalist Queensland: Italian Workers in North Queensland,' *The Workers' Weekly*, 6 November 1925, 3.

<sup>49</sup> 'A Worker Looks at Capitalist Queensland: Italian Workers in North Queensland,' *The Workers' Weekly*, 6 November 1925, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Georgia Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," in *Historicising Whiteness Conference (2006: Melbourne, Vic.)* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007), 305-18.

<sup>51</sup> 'A Worker Looks at Capitalist Queensland: Italian Workers in North Queensland,' *The Workers' Weekly*, 6 November 1925, 3.

<sup>52</sup> C.N., 'Italian Workers in Lithgow,' *The Workers' Weekly*, 4 February 1927, 1.

<sup>53</sup> C.N., 'Italian Workers in Lithgow,' *The Workers' Weekly*, 4 February 1927, 1.

Miners' Federation] what solidarity really means.<sup>54</sup> As such, the Communists held onto a general perception that Italian workers were mostly militant exiles who brought with them their own healthy tradition of industrial unionism. However, this perception was not always applied to southern Italians as readily as it was to those from the north. In 1925, a Communist writer noted that exploitative conditions prevailed in Mourilyan because most of the Italians there were southerners who were 'notoriously the most backwards sections of the Italian working class.' At Ingham and Halifax, where there were more northerners, the undermining of conditions was considered less of a problem.<sup>55</sup>

As the only major labour movement organisation committed to the inclusion of migrant workers, the CPA involved itself in organising with Italians against the preference agreement. Fred Paterson, a communist leader and lawyer, offered his services to the Italians for the purpose of bringing a case against the agreement to court and, in late 1932, Paterson also acquired his own property in the South Johnstone mill area so that he could be eligible to speak at and vote in meetings of the Canegrowers Association that were held annually to decide whether or not to continue with the preference agreement.<sup>56</sup> While his involvement in the struggle against British preference was not always seen as desirable or useful by the Italians themselves, his preference for legal action was shared by different Italian-led organisations which, as I describe in the next section, oriented their resistance around challenging the 'Gentleman's Agreement' in court.

### **The Italian resistance to British preference**

The Italian resistance to British preference first became publicly organised in June 1930 when a meeting of Italians was held in the shire hall of Innisfail in response to the BPL establishing a branch in the district. Held under the auspices of the Italian Progressive Club based in Mourilyan, 600 Italians had reportedly assembled to protest against British preference.<sup>57</sup> Following this meeting, Costante Danesi, the secretary of the Italian Progressive Club issued a

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<sup>54</sup> 'May Day at Lithgow,' *The Workers' Weekly*, 13 May 1927, 3.

<sup>55</sup> 'A Worker Looks at Capitalist Queensland: Italian Workers in North Queensland,' *The Workers' Weekly*, 6 November 1925, 3.

<sup>56</sup> 'Rejected By Cane Growers: British Preference Agreement,' *The Telegraph*, 13 December 1932, 1.

<sup>57</sup> 'Italians in Queensland,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1930, 12.

statement to the press in which he outlined the position that was taken by Italians in attendance. This statement asserted the rights of Italians, many of whom were naturalised, to work in the industry as well as to benefit from their citizenship.<sup>58</sup> Reporting on these events, some newspapers – particularly those in the southern cities – characterised the debate as a racial conflict, wrote of ‘impending trouble between the two races’ and reported that one of the demands of the Italians was racial equality with Australians.<sup>59</sup>

The Italian Progressive Club was founded in 1924 and considered by its leaders to be the centre of social life for residents of the district, having performed this role by organising dances and other social events as well as fundraising for local causes. The club was significant enough to have the honour of hosting distinguished guests on tours of North Queensland, such as the Governor of Queensland Sir John Goodwin, Premier Ted Theodore, the Archbishop of NSW, and the Italian aviator Francesco De Pinedo.<sup>60</sup> Apart from running social events, the club was also a centre for Italian anti-fascist political action in the district and carved out a role for itself as a defender of Italians by intervening in public debates on various issues that affected Italians of the district. Just a few months before the issue of British preference emerged, Danesi wrote letters to the local newspaper and gave speeches at social events in order to protest against an article published in the *Smith's Weekly* that represented Italians in a negative light.<sup>61</sup> The protest against the BPL was an extension of this role and the Italian Progressive Club remained the major channel for organised protest against British preference over the next couple of seasons. The following year, another mass meeting of Italians was held in a paddock located between Mourilyan and Boogan where hundreds of Italians appointed a delegation to travel to Brisbane, Canberra and potentially Melbourne to assert the Italian right to work. At this meeting, a defence fund was established and it was decided that every Italian farmer pay a preliminary levy of one pound and every Italian cutter must pay ten shillings. Since there were approximately 500 Italian farmers and 1500 cutters in the district, it was estimated that £1500 could be collected for the cause.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> ‘Sugar Fields Dispute,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1930, 18

<sup>59</sup> ‘Sugar Fields Dispute,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1930, 18; ‘Racial Dispute,’ *The Farmer and Settler*, 14 June 1930, 3; ‘Italians in Canefields,’ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 17 June 1930, 6.

<sup>60</sup> C. Danesi, ‘The Italian Progressive Club,’ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 24 September 1929, 11.

<sup>61</sup> C. Danesi, ‘An Italian Protest,’ *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 8 April 1930, 1; ‘Innisfail, Nightmare City of Australia,’ *Smith's Weekly*, 29 March 1930, 12.

<sup>62</sup> ‘The Sugar Industry: Italians Organising,’ *The Central Queensland Herald*, 12 March 1931, 37.

This defence fund was formalised the following year, in the lead up to the 1932 season, after the issue once again reached a head and newspapers once again predicted the eruption of a racial conflict. In May 1932, Costante Danesi's brother, Luigi, wrote a manifesto on behalf of 'The Defence Committee of Innisfail' that declared farmers should have complete freedom employing labour for cutting cane and if any person or organisation intimidated farmers into employing any particular gang or forced them to cancel their contracts would be taken to court.<sup>63</sup> Danesi also announced his intention to take legal action to recover lost wages due to the preference agreement. According to his calculations, these lost wages amounted to £40,000 based on the average income of a cane cutting gang being around £2000 annually.<sup>64</sup> This position was taken after Fred Paterson visited Innisfail to inform the Italians there that the agreement was unlawful and offered his services as a lawyer.<sup>65</sup> A week after the manifesto was circulated throughout Innisfail and surrounding districts, a meeting was held at the Innisfail Shire Hall that had been reportedly well-attended by non-British farmers and cutters from 'as far north as Babinda and as far southward as Ingham'.<sup>66</sup> However, these reports were challenged by a Cairns newspaper that reported a 'poor attendance' of only fifty people, made up predominately of younger Italians, with older Italians conspicuously absent.<sup>67</sup> At this meeting the Foreign Cutters Defence Association (FCDA) was established and Luigi Danesi was elected as its secretary. Membership was open to cutters of all nationalities at a fee of 10 shillings each year, after a special fee of one pound was to be paid in the association's first year, and farmers were also accepted as financial members at the same fee as the cutters.<sup>68</sup>

Although its leadership was predominantly Italian, the FCDA was open to all non-Britishers who were impacted by the British preference agreement such as the Maltese and Yugoslavs.<sup>69</sup> Some Maltese workers made public announcements encouraging their fellow Maltese to join the association, highlighting the common foreigner status they shared with Italians. For example, in

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<sup>63</sup> 'Cane Cutters: Italian Aggression,' *Warwick Daily News*, 16 May 1932, 5.

<sup>64</sup> 'Trouble Brewing,' *Morning Bulletin*, 17 May 1932, 6; 'May Decide to Issue £40,000 Writ,' *Evening News*, 17 May 1932, 12.

<sup>65</sup> 'Cane Cutters: Italian Aggression,' *Warwick Daily News*, 16 May 1932, 5.

<sup>66</sup> 'Labor Controversy: Mass Meeting of Italians: Cane Inspector Threatened,' *Daily Mercury*, 23 May 1932, 4.

<sup>67</sup> 'Innisfail Italians,' *The Northern Herald*, 28 May 1932, 21.

<sup>68</sup> 'Cane-Cutting Gangs: Racial Clash Likely in Northern Sugar Areas,' *The Telegraph*, 17 May 1932, 9.

<sup>69</sup> Danesi wrote about assisting Yugoslav cutters: Luigi Danesi, 'Essere O Non Essere [To be or not to be],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 27 August 1932, 4.

November 1932, Emanuele Cauchi wrote a letter in which he encouraged his fellow Maltese workers to support the FCDA. He wrote that he knew Danesi well and supported the movement to abolish British preference and allow AWU members of any nationality to participate in open competition for cane cutting without discrimination. He pointed out that despite being born as British subjects, the Maltese were considered foreigners by the British preference supporters. He concluded: 'Maltese, it is your fight as much as the Italians'. We are all classed foreigners, so therefore, you must advance your interest by supporting the Foreign Cutters' Defence Fund.<sup>70</sup>

Historians of Italian fascism and antifascism in Australia such as Cresciani and David Faber have identified the Danesi brothers as anarchists.<sup>71</sup> While it is true that the brothers were in contact with anarchist figures such as Francesco Carmagnola, Francesco Fantin and Ernesto Baratto, the political beliefs of both men were debated in the archives created by Australian government departments and allegations that they were anarchist had been dismissed by Australian authorities as unfounded accusations made by younger Italian migrants connected to the Fascist movement and consular authorities who took issue with their anti-fascism.<sup>72</sup> This was especially the case for Costante, whose application for naturalisation had been suspended for over a year on account of a letter sent by the Italian Consul-General advising Australian authorities that he was spreading anarchist and 'extremist propaganda' throughout the Italian community and that he was an 'industrial extremist'. In their investigations, Australian authorities found that Costante Danesi was highly respected by the British community as sober and industrious and was also viewed favourably by older Italian residents. It was only younger Italian residents, with stronger ties to Fascism, that disliked him, leading a police officer to report that he was 'strongly of the opinion that the present and past reports of his countrymen are exaggerations having no foundation in fact.'<sup>73</sup> Cresciani's reliance on Italian sources rather than Australian sources has

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<sup>70</sup> Emanuele Cauchi, 'The British Preference Question,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 2 November 1932, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, "The Proletarian Migrants: Fascism and Italian Anarchists in Australia," *The Australian Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1979): 191; David Faber, "The Life & Times of an Italo-Australian Anarchist 1901-42" (The University of Adelaide, 2008).

<sup>72</sup> For evidence of the Luigi Danesi's connections with Italian anarchists, see: Faber, "The Italian Anarchist Press in Australia between the Wars," *Italian Historical Society Journal* 17 (2009): 8. The Danesi brothers also supported Baratto on his lecture tour of North Queensland following his return from Spain as a member of the International Brigade, see: Extract from General Intelligence Notes on Ernesto Barrato, 11 June 1939, NAA: A367, C68814, Danesi, Costante and Luigi.

<sup>73</sup> Memorandum, Home and Territories Department, 18 October 1928, NAA: A1, 1928/5274, Danesi, Costante – Application for naturalisation.

meant that these accusations have become fact in the historiography. This error has been further compounded by the fact that, despite being leading figures in one of the largest Italian communities in Australia during the interwar period, the Danesi brothers have only been written about as marginal figures in studies that otherwise focus on anarchists such as those mentioned above.<sup>74</sup> In some studies of Italian antifascism in Australia, they are conspicuously absent.<sup>75</sup>

Despite political differences, the Danesi brothers and the various organisations that they represented initially had the full support of some notable fascists in Australia. In 1930, after the meeting held by the Italian Progressive Club, the Consul-General Antonio Grossardi spoke out in support of the steps taken by Italians to protect their rights and interests.<sup>76</sup> In 1932, the Danesi brothers and the FCDA had the full support of *Il Giornale Italiano*, the Sydney-based weekly that was sympathetic to Fascism. In articles for their Italian audience, the newspaper described both Luigi and Costante as brave, valiant, energetic, intelligent, and capable leaders who showed great patriotism in the fight against British preference and any Italians who refused to follow the Danesi brothers were labelled traitors.<sup>77</sup> The newspaper also wrote positively of Paterson's involvement in the cause, endorsed some of his arguments, and addressed allegations made in the mainstream press that the FCDA was a communist group by arguing that Paterson was only hired due to his competence and professionalism as a lawyer.<sup>78</sup> This support did not go unnoticed by Luigi Danesi, who returned *Il Giornale Italiano's* compliments by sending letters of appreciation which were published in the pages of the newspaper as displays of passionate solidarity and encouragement from the newspaper, whose editors humbly replied that they were not deserving of praise, they were just doing their duty and reiterated that it was the Danesi brothers who had done all of the hard work.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See, the work of David Faber: Faber, "The Life & Times of an Italo-Australian Anarchist 1901-42."

<sup>75</sup> For example, the Danesi brothers are completely absent in the most comprehensive work on fascism and anti-fascism in Australia: Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*.

<sup>76</sup> 'Italian Question,' *The Central Queensland Herald*, 26 June 1930, 37.

<sup>77</sup> 'La Riscossa Italiana nel Nord Queensland [The Italian fightback in North Queensland],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 21 May 1932, 1; 'L. Danesi e Noi [L. Danesi and Us],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 4 June 1932, 2; 'L. Danesi Illustra Maggiormente il Punto di Vista Italiano [L. Danesi Illustrates the Italian Point of View],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 8 June 1932, 1.

<sup>78</sup> 'La Riscossa Italiana nel Nord Queensland [The Italian fightback in North Queensland],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 21 May 1932, 1; 'L. Danesi Illustra Maggiormente il Punto di Vista Italiano [L. Danesi Illustrates the Italian Point of View],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 8 June 1932, 1.

<sup>79</sup> 'L. Danesi e Noi [L. Danesi and Us],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 4 June 1932, 2.

The unconditional support shown by *Il Giornale Italiano*, however, began to wane over time, as criticisms that were initially presented as comradely disagreements turned into all out attacks within the space of only a few months. After visiting the sugar districts of North Queensland with a group of journalists, Franco Battistessa, editor of the newspaper, wrote a three-part series of articles in Italian, published in December 1932 and January 1933, that attacked the Danesi brothers and the FCDA. One of the motives for the visit, the first of these articles explained, was to observe and find out for themselves the situation around the association and this introduction prefaced the series as a simple collection of observations and considerations, presented without polemic or ulterior motives, writing in fidelity to their duty as ‘independent publicists’. Having seen the association up close, Battistessa admitted to having previously been caught up in naïve enthusiasm and self-delusion. The acclaim that he and the newspaper had previously had for Danesi was now seen to be regretful hyperbole.<sup>80</sup>

Battistessa’s articles were preoccupied with criticising the Danesi brothers and attacking the legitimacy of their leadership. Both Luigi and Costante were described as swindlers, false shepherds, self-appointed demagogues and papier-mache Duces in opposition to the ‘real leaders’ – that is, the consular officials. The Danesi brothers’ refusal to engage with the Italian Vice-Consul of Townsville, Mario Melano, was seen as particularly offensive and disrespectful as well as constituting a violation of the apolitical stance espoused by the association.<sup>81</sup> Their refusal to engage with the majority of Italian-language newspapers that were published in Australia on similar grounds was also criticised by Battistessa for whom this was a more personal issue as Luigi Danesi had refused recommendations to turn *Il Giornale Italiano* into the association’s official organ.<sup>82</sup> In light of these actions, Battistessa asserted that the Danesi brothers were in fact communists and their choice to appoint Paterson as a defender of the Italian cause, which the newspaper had previously defended, was now considered a problem.

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<sup>80</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘La Verita’ Su La Lega Di Resistenza Straniera [The Truth about the Foreign Resistance League],’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 17 December 1932, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘La Verita’ Su La Lega Di Resistenza Italiana [The Truth about the Italian Resistance League],’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 31 December 1932, 1; Franco Battistessa, ‘La Verita’ Su La Lega Di Resistenza Straniera [The Truth about the Foreign Resistance League],’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 January 1933, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘La Verita’ Su La Lega Di Resistenza Straniera [The Truth about the Foreign Resistance League],’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 January 1933, 1.



Overall, the argument put forward by Battistessa was that the Italian cause could only be made through the representation and leadership of the appointed consular authorities.<sup>83</sup>

Under the leadership of the Danesi brothers, the association was likened to a wobbly boat spinning at great speed towards the final whirlpool of inevitable and sure destruction despite the optimism of the Danesi brothers. What was meant to be the ship of salvation had turned into the shipwreck of high idealism and noble ideas on which the association was founded but had since been subordinated to personal egotism and political ideals to the detriment of the collective interest.<sup>84</sup> In concluding this series of articles, Battistessa declared the FCDA was now defunct and had been succeeded in areas such as Ingham by a non-sectarian united front led by Giuseppe Cantamessa.<sup>85</sup> According to Battistessa, this united front had good connections with the local industrial-commercial class and was agitating 'within the limits of utmost seriousness'.<sup>86</sup> The antagonism between the newspaper and the Danesi brothers continued to develop over the following years and came to be expressed, for example, in Luigi Danesi referring to *Il Giornale Italiano* (the Italian Journal) as 'Il Giornale di Sydney' (the Journal of Sydney) to challenge the newspaper's claim to be the main representative of Italians in the Australian media, and in the newspaper referring to Luigi as 'Teddy Bear Danesi' after a character in a fable who, in attempting to help out, does more harm than good.<sup>87</sup>

In July 1935, a new organisation was formed for the purpose of opposing British preference which *Il Giornale Italiano* quickly threw its support behind, claiming that the new organisation would not repeat the mistakes that had been made by the FCDA a few years earlier. This new organisation was the Australian Right Defence League (ARDL), founded by an alliance of

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<sup>83</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'La Verità Su La Lega Di Resistenza Straniera [The Truth about the Foreign Resistance League],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 17 December 1932, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'La Verità Su La Lega Di Resistenza Straniera [The Truth about the Foreign Resistance League],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 17 December 1932, 1; Franco Battistessa, 'La Verità Su La Lega Di Resistenza Straniera [The Truth about the Foreign Resistance League],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 January 1933, 1.

<sup>85</sup> For a biography of Cantamessa, see: Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, 'Cantamessa, Ettore Giuseppe (1892–1947)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cantamessa-ettore-giuseppe-9686/text17097>, published first in hardcopy 1993, accessed online 9 March 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'La Verità Su La Lega Di Resistenza Straniera [The Truth about the Foreign Resistance League],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 January 1933, 1.

<sup>87</sup> 'Una Sassata [A Stone],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 14 January 1933, 2; 'Spunti e Appunti [Ideas and Notes],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 13 May 1933, 2; Il Frombolieri, 'Frecciate: L'Orsacchiotto Danesi e la Mosca Preferenza [Parting Shots: Teddy Bear Danesi and the Preference Fly],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 30 January 1935, 6.

farmers and cutters of Italian, Spanish and Greek background in the Burdekin district, south of Townsville, in response to a move to enforce more strictly British preference in the area, that led to the exclusion of Southern European cutters and the persecution of farmers who breached the agreement.<sup>88</sup> The mill areas of this district included those such as Kalamia where British preference quotas were set at 86 per cent – a higher percentage compared to other areas due to the smaller population of Southern Europeans there when the ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ was first made.<sup>89</sup>

The new league’s purpose and tactics were very similar to those of the FCDA. In a manifesto signed off by its president, a Spaniard by the name of Tapiolas, the ARDL declared that it was illegal and unjust to deny cutters work and force farmers to employ certain cutters that they did not desire to employ, that naturalised British subjects were illegally and unjustly being denied their rights by industrial organisations, and that the union continued to benefit from membership fees paid by Southern Europeans yet continued to discriminate against them and deny them the ability to work.<sup>90</sup> The struggle, therefore, was predominantly a legal one, and the league, like Danesi’s association before it, was determined to challenge the British Preference agreement by bringing a ‘test case’ to court. In order to bring this lawsuit to court, the ARDL’s initial organising efforts were directed towards raising the necessary funds which they did by organising social events such as lectures, dances and picnics.<sup>91</sup> The organisation of these events were delegated to an organising committee that was made up entirely of Italian and Spanish women.<sup>92</sup> This organising committee was renamed ‘The Ladies Progressive Club’ and declared that it aimed ‘to establish ties of greater harmony between the Anglo-Australians and children of foreigners born in Australia.’<sup>93</sup> Membership of the club was five shillings and although the club was run entirely by women, men were allowed to become financial members.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 191.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Square Deal Sought: The Right to Work Appeal by Naturalised Citizens,’ *The Telegraph*, 6 August 1935, 8.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Datori Lavori e Lavoratori [Employers and Workers],’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 August 1935, 6.

<sup>92</sup> While this committee was made up of women who were the wives of cane growers, radical Spanish women were also active in northern Australia during this period: Robert Mason, “Women on the March: Radical Hispanic Migrants in Northern Australia,” *Labour History*, no. 99 (2010): 149-64.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Il Comitato Signore della ARDL [The Committee of the ARDL],’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 28 August 1935, 6.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Il Comitato Signore della ARDL [The Committee of the ARDL],’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 28 August 1935, 6.

Perhaps due to the similarities in discourse and tactics that the new league shared with the old, the committee of the ARDL actively distanced itself from the Danesi brothers and the FCDA by announcing that it was refraining from all partisan politics in order to avoid the mistakes of the past.<sup>95</sup> This was a position reiterated by *Il Giornale Italiano* when it reported on the foundation of the league. The newspaper congratulated them on their initiative, wished them success and recommend that they remain serious, to fight with dignified firmness, free from noise and political histrionics. The movement was described by the newspaper as being solely concerned with the defence of justice and personal dignity which were presented as universal values above the concerns of politics, class, race and nationality.<sup>96</sup> By being above such concerns, the new league was also described as an unorthodox uprising because, instead of being troublemakers rising up against the established order, they were supposedly honest employers and hard-working, peaceful workers who obey the laws seeking only the defence of their rights.<sup>97</sup> Such descriptions gave the new league a respectability and conservatism that reinforced its break from the noisy radicalism of the past and presented its goals as a modest commitment to restoring justice.<sup>98</sup>

### **British subjecthood and Australian citizenship**

The new league's choice of name was another conscious attempt to avoid the mistakes of the past. As *Il Giornale Italiano* pointed out, the FCDA committed a fatal error by identifying with their foreignness in a country where anti-foreigner prejudice was strong.<sup>99</sup> The new league avoided this mistake by emphasising instead their Australianness and the initial name of 'Australian National Defence League' was amended to 'Australian Right Defence League' in order to make it clearer that the members of the league were primarily concerned with asserting their rights as Australians.<sup>100</sup> This assertion was elaborated in the league's manifesto which

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<sup>95</sup> 'Datori Lavori e Lavoratori [Employers and Workers],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 August 1935, 6. Translation by the author.

<sup>96</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'Sollevazione d'Animi a Kalamia [Uprising of Minds at Kalamia],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 31 July 1935, 6.

<sup>97</sup> 'Datori Lavori e Lavoratori [Employers and Workers],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 August 1935, 6.

<sup>98</sup> 'Datori Lavori e Lavoratori [Employers and Workers],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 August 1935, 6.

<sup>99</sup> 'Datori Lavori e Lavoratori [Employers and Workers],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 August 1935, 6.

<sup>100</sup> 'Datori Lavori e Lavoratori [Employers and Workers],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 7 August 1935, 6.

declared: 'We are upholding our dignity as white men, and our citizenship as law-abiding naturalised British subjects in a British dominion.'<sup>101</sup>

Such assertions of an identification with Australia or Britain in the campaign against British preference have so far been overlooked by historians. Gaetano Rando, for example, has argued that in their campaigns against British preference, fascists utilised discourses of *italianità* while socialists utilised discourses of internationalism.<sup>102</sup> In the writings and speeches of the Danesi brothers, it is difficult to find discourses of internationalism as their appeals were mostly made in reference to rights – that is, the right of cutters to work and the right of farmers to employ who they wished. When dealing with the AWU, the Danesi brothers did not appeal to any broader notions of internationalism but simply demanded that the union refrain from discriminating against its own members. The Danesi brothers asked that the union uphold its duty to its loyal fee-paying members and when they refused to do so, they formed the FCDA as an alternative organisation that would defend the most basic interests of its fee-paying members.<sup>103</sup> As noted above, attempts at articulating the Italian position in relation to a universal set of values was made by the fascists rather than the socialists, however these were the values of liberal individualism rather than of socialist internationalism.

Contrary to Rando's argument, Cresciani has argued that antifascists and socialists such as the Danesi brothers were particularly successful in mobilising Italians, and were also considered threatening to fascist hegemony, because they had successfully appealed to patriotism and a sense of *italianità*.<sup>104</sup> In August 1932, Luigi Danesi wrote an article for the Brisbane-based *L'italiano* in which he quoted inspirational lines from nationalist poets such as Felice Cavallotti and Giuseppe Giusti and placed his association within a lineage of Italians such as Camillo, Mansaniella, Balillia and Garibaldi who 'rebelled against injustice, encouraged the disheartened, spurred the weak, and encouraged the oppressed.' In doing so, he emphasised that this was not

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<sup>101</sup> 'Square Deal Sought: The Right to Work Appeal by Naturalised Citizens,' *The Telegraph*, 6 August 1935, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Gaetano Rando, "Aspects of the History of the Italian Language Press in Australia 1885-1985," in *Italians in Australia: Historical and Social Perspectives*, ed. Gaetano Rando and Michael Arrighi (Wollongong: Department of Modern Languages University of Wollongong and Dante Alighieri Society Wollongong Chapter, 1993), 203.

<sup>103</sup> Luigi Danesi, 'Essere O Non Essere [To be or not to be],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 27 August 1932, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Cresciani, "The Proletarian Migrants: Fascism and Italian Anarchists in Australia," 12.

an issue of politics but another example of Italians standing up to oppression.<sup>105</sup> In his attack on the Danesi brothers, Battistessa argued that Luigi had claimed for himself ‘the right to issue licences of *italianità*’ and as such had designated his supporters as ‘good Italians’ and his opponents as ‘bad Italians’. To Battistessa’s outrage, Danesi had supposedly included within the category of ‘good Italians’ anarchists such as Francesco Carmagnola and within the category of ‘bad Italians’ he had included men such as Aldo Signorini, the leader of the Innisfail *fascio*.<sup>106</sup>

However, the contested discourse of *italianità* was not the primary discourse through which Italian leaders – both socialist and fascist – organised against British preference. As noted above, the argument most often made by both sides – as represented by the FCDA and the ARDL – was that British preference contradicted the rights of naturalised British subjects. As such, the British preference issue was more than just an industrial matter but was also a struggle over what it meant to be Australian and British. In fact, the arguments advanced by both opponents and supporters of British preference reveal a crisis in British subjecthood and Australian citizenship. For the naturalised British subjects of Southern European background, naturalisation had been rendered meaningless by the ability of the industrial organisations to refuse them the right to work. As the manifesto of the FCDA declared: ‘Our country is Australia; our people are Australian people. When we have the same duty we must have the same rights.’<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, supporters of British preference had argued that naturalisation had little real impact because it did not automatically mean that Italians were integrated socially into their local communities. According to a letter published in the Brisbane *Worker*, it was impossible to tell naturalised Italians from unnaturalised ones as they all supposedly congregated in enclaves much the same and refused to integrate.<sup>108</sup>

The BPL was particularly vocal on the issue of naturalisation. W Pulham, the president of the league, complained that naturalisation was no longer taken seriously enough and had been cheapened to the point that it could be bought ‘for a few guineas’ and conferred ‘under conditions which had given them many foreign born Australians whose advent here had been

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<sup>105</sup> Luigi Danesi, ‘Essere O Non Essere [To be or not to be],’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 27 August 1932, 4.

<sup>106</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘La Verità’ Su La Lega Di Resistenza Italiana [The Truth about the Italian Resistance League],’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 31 December 1932, 1.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Foreign Cane Cutters: Defence Association Formed,’ *The Telegraph*, 23 May 1932, 1.

<sup>108</sup> J S White, ‘Preference in Sugar Areas,’ *Worker*, 23 January 1935, 12.

harmful to the economic and industrial welfare of the country.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the BPL argued that a naturalised Australian or British subject would never really become an Australian or Britisher because they supposedly lacked the necessary characteristics that qualified them to participate in Australian democracy and properly enjoy the privileges won by previous generations.<sup>110</sup> Leading on from this, one of the demands of the BPL was for the Federal Government to amend the naturalisation laws by raising the residential qualification to ten years and also to enforce a higher standard in the examination of oral and written English proficiency.<sup>111</sup> At this point in time, Italian migrants could apply for a certificate of naturalisation after residing in Australia for five years provided that they were of 'good character' and had 'an adequate knowledge of the English language'.<sup>112</sup>

Against such arguments, Costante Danesi argued that the British preference agreement was a major impediment to assimilation because it took away the right and liberty to work and confined Italians to areas where the preference quotas were lower, such as Ingham, Halifax and Mourilyan. This argument was made during a speech given at a celebration of the Italian Progressive Club's sixth anniversary that was held in September 1930 and was reported to have been attended by a thousand people. In the same speech, he noted that one of the club's purposes was to foster by all means the assimilation of the Italian people with the Australians.<sup>113</sup> In another speech made a few months earlier during the Babinda Italian Club's May Day celebrations, Costante Danesi told Italians that they 'must do their best to assimilate themselves to the new conditions of life' in order to 'become more and more worthy of the people that give us hospitality.'<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, he spoke of assimilation as a process of 'understanding' that both Italians and Australians had to do: "The Italian community of North Queensland has to do their best to understand and be understood by the Australian people, and so by their united efforts and mutual sympathy help in the development and welfare of this great adopted country."<sup>115</sup> Such

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<sup>109</sup> 'Italians in Canefields,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 17 July 1930, 6.

<sup>110</sup> 'The Case for the British,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 13 June 1930, 2.

<sup>111</sup> 'There is No Risk of "Italianisation of North Queensland,"' says Mr. F. M. Forde,' *The Evening News*, 12 June 1930, 9.

<sup>112</sup> *Nationality Act 1920* (Cth), section 7(1).

<sup>113</sup> 'Anniversary of Italian Progressive Club,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 30 September 1930, 4.

<sup>114</sup> 'The Italian in the Canefield,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 May 1930, 10; "'Adopted Sons of Australia",' *Worker*, 21 May 1930, 20.

<sup>115</sup> 'The Italian in the Canefield,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 May 1930, 10; "'Adopted Sons of Australia",' *Worker*, 21 May 1930, 20.

arguments were supported by the secretary of the Babinda Club who also urged Italians to ‘fall in with the spirit and ideas of the Australian people’ in order to ‘become more loved and more respected.’<sup>116</sup> When the FCDA was established, Luigi Danesi also spoke about impediments to assimilation and integration and suggested that in order to encourage greater understanding between Britishers and Italians working in the sugar industry, each Italian gang should contain at least one Britisher.<sup>117</sup> This suggestion challenged the general practice of segregation in the sugar industry.

Encouraging Italians to assimilate and asserting the rights of naturalised British subjects were not, however, necessarily mutually exclusive from assertions of *italianità*. Luigi Danesi, in particular, was able to combine the multiple identities of Italian, British and Australian through deeper historical connections rooted in the experience of political exile. Both Luigi and Costante Danesi were part of a generation of antifascist exiles who emigrated in the immediate aftermath of the Italian Fascist Party coming to power – the bulk of whom arrived in Australia between 1924 and 1926. These were mainly men who had witnessed first-hand the rise of Fascism in Italy, had been persecuted for their ideals and thus compelled to emigrate.<sup>118</sup> The brothers were typical in this regard – for example, in the process of approving Costante’s application for naturalisation, a police report stated that his anti-fascism was due ‘principally to the harsh treatment meted out to his family in Italy when this form of rule was first introduced there.’<sup>119</sup>

A decade after the campaign against British preference, Luigi Danesi found himself detained at the Gaythorne internment camp. In a letter written in 1942 appealing against his internment, he recounted his exile from Italy:

Since the 9th March 1924 when I embarked at Naples on the S.S. Ormonde flying the British flag I became a British born by my spirit and my soul. Since that day I finish, I cut out my body from Italy. My spirit and my soul already were out since the fascism

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<sup>116</sup> ‘The Italian in the Canefield,’ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 May 1930, 10; “‘Adopted Sons of Australia’,” *Worker*, 21 May 1930, 20.

<sup>117</sup> ‘The Case for the Italians,’ *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 17 May 1932, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Cresciani, “The Proletarian Migrants: Fascism and Italian Anarchists in Australia,” 5.

<sup>119</sup> Memorandum, Home and Territories Department, 18 October 1928, NAA: A1, 1928/5274, Danesi, Costante – Application for naturalisation.

started the reign of terror and of oppression of the liberty in Italy and the slavery of the Italian people, on that day the 9th March 1924 I shook the dust of Italian earth from my boots because it was fascist earth. When on the 1st April 1924 I put my foot on the Australia Soil at Fremantle, I kissed with my mind the earth of Australia like MAZZINI kissed the earth of Great Britain when escaped from Italy and I blessed Australia, earth of liberty, prosperity and well being of all the people that abide on the law and have to work and to produce.<sup>120</sup>

For antifascist exiles such as the Danesi brothers, nationalist figures such as Mazzini and Garibaldi were revered because both of these men were exiles themselves at one point and, since they were among the founding fathers of Italian nationalism, Italy itself was a nation that was made in exile. As Maurizio Isabella points out, political emigration is a classic theme of Risorgimento historiography and the Risorgimento has been evaluated as a successful case of diasporic nationalism. The exiles of the Risorgimento, which included Garibaldi and Mazzini, left Italy between 1799 and 1860 – a period in which exile was experienced by a significant section of the Italian educated classes. Furthermore, the exiles themselves linked exile to freedom and patriotism which then became bound up with notions of martyrdom and sacrifice.<sup>121</sup> By invoking the memory of Mazzini and Garibaldi, antifascist exiles in Australia were able to do two things. Firstly, they could claim that while Italy was being destroyed and ravaged by forces that betrayed the initial vision of Italy, they were the ones that were keeping it alive and were perhaps waiting until the right time to bring it home once again. Secondly, and more relevant to the campaigns against British preference, it gave antifascists an historical example in which Italians were protected by Britain. This was used, for example, by Costante when he released a statement in June 1930 in which he countered the argument for British preference that was founded on a fear that English consumers would boycott Australian sugar if it was produced by Italians by asserting optimistically that it would not be an issue because those consumers were ‘the English sons of those who gave hospitality to Garibaldi and Mazzini and rescued all political outcasts.’<sup>122</sup> Elsewhere, both Luigi and Costante talked about Australia as a

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<sup>120</sup> Letter from Luigi Danesi, Gaythorne internment camp, to the Chairman of the Advisory Appeal Committee, Brisbane, 27 April 1942, NAA: A367, C68814, Danesi, Costante and Luigi.

<sup>121</sup> Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 1-2.

<sup>122</sup> ‘Sugarfields Dispute,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1930, 18.



provider of liberty and opportunity for Italians compelled to migrate.<sup>123</sup> Luigi also gave a more recent historical example of the links between Italy and Britain when he claimed that many Italian cutters were returned soldiers who fought alongside Australian and British soldiers as allies during World War I.<sup>124</sup>

By emphasising historical examples in which Britain provided protection to Italian exiles, the Danesi brothers sought to construct Britain and Australia (as a British-derived society) as protectors of liberty and freedom. This view of Britain can be found, for example, in a letter Luigi wrote in 1935 to his son who was living in the suburb of Lakemba in southwest Sydney, in which he extolled the virtues of British rule by highlighting its history of international diplomacy that was anti-autocratic, anti-totalitarian and extended formal protections on liberty and limits to power in territories beyond the British Isles.<sup>125</sup> The BPL contradicted this construction of Britain and, as a result, Costante argued that the BPL was ‘adopting un-British tactics in pursuit of un-British prejudices.’<sup>126</sup> Similarly, while Luigi was interned during World War II, he maintained this position and told authorities that ‘British preference was not British preference. In my opinion, it was pocket preference.’<sup>127</sup> The idea that British preference was antithetical to Britishness could be found amongst fascists too – for example, in its articles protesting against British preference and other infractions against Italians, *Il Giornale Italiano* often made appeals to a sense of ‘British justice’ or ‘British fairplay’. For example, in a letter to the *Cairns Post* in April 1932, Battistessa wrote:

After over twenty years of close association with Britishers all over the world, I am still one of those diehard optimists – some would give me a less flattering name – in the traditional “fair play” in spite of the ruthless knock on the head that this profound and beautiful faith of mine has suffered at the hands of the self-styled British Preference League.

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<sup>123</sup> ‘The Italian in the Canefield,’ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 May 1930, 10; “‘Adopted Sons of Australia’,” *Worker*, 21 May 1930, 20; ‘The Case for the Italians,’ *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 17 May 1932, 5.

<sup>124</sup> ‘The Case for the Italians,’ *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 17 May 1932, 5.

<sup>125</sup> Letter from Luigi Danesi, Innisfail, to Dino Danesi, Sydney, 15 October 1935, NAA: A367, C68814, Danesi, Costante and Luigi.

<sup>126</sup> ‘Italians in Queensland,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1930, 12.

<sup>127</sup> Report of Sitting of Advisory Committee Appointed Under the National Security (General) Regulations, Appeal Against Detention Order by Luigi Giovanni Danesi, Cowra, 8 December 1942, NAA: A367, C68814, Danesi, Costante and Luigi.

A straight from the shoulder upper cut, of leviathan Carnera, could not have knocked me more silly and groggy than the reading of the most unchristian, unhuman, un-British ideals and antics of the BPL based on selfishness, fanatical intolerance, racial bigotry and bias.<sup>128</sup>

In their protests against British preference, Italian fascists and antifascists were not as different as Rando has suggested. They both relied on a similar set of arguments and tactics that, more than anything else, were based on highlighting their attachments and identifications with Britain and Australia rather than appealing to ideas of *italianità* or workers' internationalism. Although the expression of these attachments and identifications was strategic it was also deeply felt, as is evident in the writing of the Danesi brothers. Furthermore, a constitutive feature of their attachment to Australia was a localism that was expressed through the advocacy of 'local preference'.

### **Local Preference**

In January 1935, Luigi Danesi wrote to the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce in order to advocate for the introduction of 'local preference' in the sugar industry which he argued was a way in which Italians could be allowed the rights they were entitled to by naturalisation.<sup>129</sup> This was not the first occasion he had attempted to bring the issue to the attention of the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce – in January 1933 he requested that the chamber receive a deputation from the FCDA. Although this request was denied, Danesi had the speech he had drafted for the occasion published by a local newspaper in which he put forward his argument for a system of 'local preference' that would give 'the rights of preference to local resident labour in the sugar fields of Innisfail, irrespective of nationality' – a position that had been put forward by his brother Costante in the previous year.<sup>130</sup> By advocating for local preference, Italians such as Luigi and

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<sup>128</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'Between Two Evils British and Local Preference,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 23 April 1932, 3.

<sup>129</sup> 'Local Preference,' *Daily Mercury*, 19 January 1935, 14.

<sup>130</sup> 'Foreigners and Local Preference,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 3 February 1933, 7; C. D., 'Critics Criticised,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 April 1932, 3.

Costante Danesi not only protested against British preference by highlighting Italian attachments to nation and empire, but also by highlighting Italian attachments to the local district.

Prior to Danesi's intervention, local preference was an idea that had already been advocated and debated at the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce. The issue had been raised there in April 1932 and on this occasion, Costante Danesi publicly expressed his support for the proposal.<sup>131</sup> By March 1933, local preference had its advocates in small towns across Queensland engaged in a range of industries and had already been introduced in the wool industry at Barcaldine and Charleville, towns in the Central West and Southwest of Queensland respectively, and in the sugar industry at Childers, a district south of Bundaberg.<sup>132</sup> In addition to local preference in employment, there was also a 'Queensland Preference League' that urged consumers to purchase locally manufactured goods and encouraged neighbourliness and allegiance to the local district.<sup>133</sup> A few months later, local preference was raised in the Chamber of Commerce in Tully, a sugar district closer to Innisfail, where at the sign-on for the upcoming season a prominent grower gave instructions to a cane ganger to employ only men who were residents of the district and the issue escalated when it was found that two men who had been engaged were not residents of the district.<sup>134</sup> When the sugar industry award was brought before the industrial court before the 1934 season, Justice Webb – who had ruled on the introduction of the first preference clause in 1925 – acknowledged that the court had received applications from some AWU representatives to institute local preference but refused to entertain such requests because 'they already had preference to members of the AWU, and if a worker was satisfactory he really established a natural preference without trying to supersede the present preference.'<sup>135</sup> When he wrote his January 1935 letter to the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce, Luigi Danesi was able to point to sugar districts such as Gordonvale near Cairns and Mackay where it had supposedly had successful results.<sup>136</sup> In Innisfail, however, local preference was not introduced although it continued to be debated in the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce up until 1939. However, by then, Danesi and other Italians were no longer part of the debate and, in their absence, the main

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<sup>131</sup> 'Foreigners and Local Preference,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 3 February 1933, 7.

<sup>132</sup> 'Links that Bind,' *The Longreach Leader*, 25 March 1933, 13.

<sup>133</sup> 'Links that Bind,' *The Longreach Leader*, 25 March 1933, 13.

<sup>134</sup> 'Sugar Industry,' *Cairns Post*, 10 June 1933, 8.

<sup>135</sup> 'Sugar Industry Award,' *Worker*, 29 August 1934, 8.

<sup>136</sup> 'Local Preference,' *Daily Mercury*, 19 January 1935, 14.

concern was local preference for local Britishers rather than locals of Southern European background.<sup>137</sup>

Proponents of local preference argued that its introduction was a necessary counter to the detrimental effects that British preference was having on the local district. According to Luigi Danesi, British preference was benefitting a class of nomadic workers who gave little back to the local district while local workers were increasingly reliant on the dole which put further pressure on the resources of the local district.<sup>138</sup> This was something that Danesi noticed when he first arrived in Innisfail in 1929. Although the 'Gentleman's Agreement' was not yet in existence, there was a British preference quota in the area, which gave employment predominantly to non-local men, 'who came ... from several hundreds of miles away, momentarily leaving their occupations, which resumed after the cane cutting work'.<sup>139</sup> Recounting this a few years later, Luigi Danesi wrote: 'my soul rebelled against the height of so much injustice, which deprived many Italians, of earning bread for them and their family.'<sup>140</sup>

These nomadic workers were men who came from parts of southern Queensland or from interstate and supposedly went straight to work and left with their earnings as soon as the cutting season was finished. Costante Danesi had also described these men as consisting mostly of southern proprietors who had never seen sugar cane before in their lives and, unlike Italians, never saved to buy their own farms in the district nor had they consistently contributed to the AWU.<sup>141</sup> During their stay in the district they only bought the bare necessities such as bread, beef and vegetables, while everything else such as butter, eggs and clothing were sent to them from the south.<sup>142</sup> Danesi estimated that as much as sixty per cent – or £200,000 – of the town's 'purchasing power' was taken away on the 'south bound tide' which came in every May and receded every December. This was wealth that the town could have spent on building new homes for workers and created jobs in construction that would lead an expansion in the town's population and would, in turn, lead to development of Innisfail into a 'modern town' with better

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<sup>137</sup> 'Local Preference,' *Cairns Post*, 13 May 1939, 11; 'Local Preference,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 27 June 1939, 5.

<sup>138</sup> 'Foreigners and Local Preference,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 3 February 1933, 7.

<sup>139</sup> Luigi Danesi, 'Essere O Non Essere [To be or not to be],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 27 August 1932, 4.

<sup>140</sup> Luigi Danesi, 'Essere O Non Essere [To be or not to be],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 27 August 1932, 4.

<sup>141</sup> C. D., 'Critics Criticised,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 April 1932, 3.

<sup>142</sup> 'Foreigners and Local Preference,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 3 February 1933, 7.

infrastructure, an increase in the standard of living and a decrease in the cost of living.<sup>143</sup> While looking to the future, there was also a hint of nostalgia in his 1933 speech in which he argued that ‘if the local preference could be got, then we would see Innisfail come back to the goods days again for the business men, such days that existed before this preference “stunt” came about.’<sup>144</sup> Calling local preference ‘one of Innisfail’s most important issues’ he called on a number of bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Shire Council, the AWU and the Canegrowers’ Association to get behind his proposal for local preference in the sugar industry.<sup>145</sup>

As local residents, naturalised British subjects of Italian and other Southern European backgrounds were to also be beneficiaries of these predicted outcomes of local preference. As Danesi explained:

We, the Italian and other peoples who surrendered our citizen rights to Australia and have become permanent residents of the Innisfail district, have in our hearts the greatest respect and desire to see this great fertile area developed as it should. We are sincere and loyal to Innisfail, Queensland, and Australia, rearing families born in Innisfail and having them educated to become great Australians.<sup>146</sup>

Once again, Danesi was arguing a position that highlighted Italian attachments to Australia and the districts in which they settled. Their aspirations were bound up in the aspirations of the local district, the development of the district was also their own development, and it was through the local district that they could fully enjoy the rights of naturalisation.

Other Italians did not think so positively of local preference. For example, in April 1932, before Danesi had taken up local preference as one of his main demands, Battistessa wrote a letter to the *Cairns Post* in which he argued that local preference would only assist the British preference movement in excluding Italians. According to Battistessa, it was not the nomadic British

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<sup>143</sup> ‘Foreigners and Local Preference,’ *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 3 February 1933, 7; ‘Local Preference,’ *Daily Mercury*, 19 January 1935, 14.

<sup>144</sup> ‘Foreigners and Local Preference,’ *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 3 February 1933, 7.

<sup>145</sup> L. Danesi, ‘The Local Preference Issue,’ *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 7 February 1933, 5; ‘Local Preference,’ *Daily Mercury*, 19 January 1935, 14.

<sup>146</sup> ‘Local Preference,’ *Daily Mercury*, 19 January 1935, 14.

southerner who was the typical nomadic worker, but it was in fact the ‘defenceless foreigners’ that formed the bulk of the nomadic workers and, as such, local preference would hurt them most. These ‘defenceless foreigners’ were not nomadic by choice, Battistessa argued, but because the BPL had been ‘making the place too hot for them to live in’ and had successfully turned the district into ‘a sort of an enemy’s concentration camp where they are barely tolerated, jeered and insulted.’<sup>147</sup> However, these claims did not stand up to statistics provided three years later by the Innisfail branch of the Queensland Cane Growers Council that showed 85 per cent of foreign workers were local while 50 per cent of Britishers were local.<sup>148</sup>

Other arguments against the form of local preference that the Danesi brothers advocated were raised in direct response to the letter that Luigi had sent to the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce in January 1935. These responses came from representatives of various industrial organisations who criticised both the proposal for local preference as well as the legitimacy of Luigi Danesi as an appropriate representative of Italian interests. Bill Doherty, the secretary of the Cane Growers Association, for example, challenged Danesi’s use of statistics to argue that there were not as many southern workers as he had claimed and argued that if barriers were raised to southerners finding employment then the sugar industry might lose its privileges as it was reliant on the sugar consumers of the south. Doherty also questioned Danesi’s legitimacy, demanding that he provide ‘the percentage of Italians that he does represent.’<sup>149</sup> Another response came from a British worker named J S White who had experience in Innisfail and wrote a letter to the *Brisbane Worker* in which he challenged Danesi’s argument that southern workers were taking wealth away from the area by arguing that by consuming Australian grown sugar and other Australian goods they were still contributing to the industry even if they were doing so outside of the district. On the other hand, when Italians sent money back to Italy, it constituted ‘a dead loss to Australia’. In White’s opinion, there was no use in separating the local from the national, ‘as the locals have to rely on the people of Australia for a payable price for their product.’<sup>150</sup> Finally, White advised Danesi not to jeopardise his legitimacy as a representative of Italian interests by working closely with the Communist-led Rank and File Movement. According to White, this body was ‘endeavouring to exploit the Italians’ by appealing to their grievances with

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<sup>147</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘Between Two Evils British and Local Preference,’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 23 April 1932, 3.

<sup>148</sup> ‘Italians in Sugar Industry,’ *The Telegraph*, 14 January 1935, 6.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Italians in Sugar Industry,’ *The Telegraph*, 14 January 1935, 6.

<sup>150</sup> J S White, ‘Preference in Sugar Areas,’ *Worker*, 23 January 1935, 12.

British preference and were 'endeavouring to use [Danesi] to gain a little limelight for their mischievous and shady movement, which can only seriously injure the cause of the Italians if they allow themselves to become allied with it.'<sup>151</sup> However, the communists in the Rank and File Movement, were actually critical of Danesi's push for local preference. A member of this movement named C King, wrote a letter in which he argued that Danesi's idea of local preference was an example of "'Economic Nationalism" on a small scale' and that the workers themselves, including a number of Italians who were members of the movement, did not want preference of any kind and instead preferred unity and internationalism.<sup>152</sup> King also criticised Danesi's idealism by arguing that the sugar industry was never developed as a result of a 'utopian' desire to build 'a wonderful north with rich cities and prosperous Chambers of Commerce' but simply because it was a rich source of profit for those who invested money and labour.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, King refuted Danesi's idea that workers took large amounts of wealth with them by pointing out that the industry itself was no longer flourishing enough to provide workers with such wealth and defended the right of workers to spend their meagre earnings wherever they please - many of whom were trying to support families on just three or four months' worth of work each year.<sup>154</sup>

In late 1937, Costante Danesi declared a victory over British preference.<sup>155</sup> This victory has led Cresciani to argue that the Danesi brothers were popular amongst Fascists because they were able to get the British preference deal rescinded.<sup>156</sup> On the other hand, David Brown, has argued that the Danesi brothers were in fact largely unsuccessful in their protest against British preference. Although the proponents of British preference were not able to achieve their desired percentages in some mill areas in Ingham and Mourilyan, the widespread acceptance of British preference meant that the numbers of British cane cutters grew at the expense of the Italians.<sup>157</sup> As noted above, discussions of local preference in the Innisfail area continued until 1939, with the underlying assumption that British preference was still an important feature of the sugar

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<sup>151</sup> J S White, 'Preference in Sugar Areas,' *Worker*, 23 January 1935, 12.

<sup>152</sup> C. King, 'Local Preference,' *Cairns Post*, 17 June 1935, 10.

<sup>153</sup> C. King, 'Local Preference,' *Cairns Post*, 17 June 1935, 10.

<sup>154</sup> C. King, 'Local Preference,' *Cairns Post*, 17 June 1935, 10.

<sup>155</sup> See: Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, 201.

<sup>156</sup> Cresciani, "The Proletarian Migrants: Fascism and Italian Anarchists in Australia," 12.

<sup>157</sup> Brown, "'Before Everything, Remain Italian': Fascism and the Italian Population of Queensland 1910-1945," 152.

industry. Nevertheless, the protest against British preference demonstrated that both antifascists and fascists organised to defend the rights of Italians in Australia as citizens. More than just an industrial dispute, the preference issue opened up a broader debate on naturalisation and belonging in White Australia. It was through defending the right to work that Italians of different political allegiances asserted a sense of belonging that were simultaneously connected to imperial, national, regional and local identities. The next chapter will continue to explore these themes of citizenship and belonging through Fascist appropriation of ‘yellow peril’ discourse to assert the right of Italians to continue to migrate to and settle in the northern parts of Australia.





## Chapter 6:

### ***Il Giornale Italiano*, Italian Fascists and the ‘Yellow Peril’**

In August 1933, *Il Giornale Italiano*, a bilingual newspaper published in Sydney, ran a series of articles under the title ‘The Yellow Peril’. These articles, written in English by Franco Battistessa, one of the newspaper’s founding editors, were placed on the front page of each of the five issues published that month. Across the five articles, Battistessa warned of ‘the coming race war’ between Europe and Asia and the particular danger that it potentially posed to Australia. In this war, Battistessa predicted that Japan, a recently militarised and modernised nation with imperial ambitions, would be the ‘spearhead of Asia’ and Australia would be the ‘shield’ or ‘spearhead of Europe’ due to its geographical proximity to East Asia and the Pacific as the new centre of global geopolitics. He argued that Australia was ill-equipped to deal with this threat and that its small population and incomplete colonisation had failed to secure the continent for the white race. In order to secure Australia, Battistessa proposed an increased intake of desirable migrants, namely Italians and Germans, who were adept at populating and developing rural areas and would be willing defenders of the land in case of invasion.

Battistessa’s articles were written at a time when immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe was increasingly regulated and restricted by the Australian government. At the same time, opportunities for migrants from those regions already in Australia were increasingly limited through the implementation of race-based employment quotas in industries such as the sugar industry of North Queensland. These articles can, therefore, be read firstly as a response to these changes that was channelled into a general critique of Anglocentrism comparable to arguments identified by Catherine Dewhirst in her analysis of earlier Italian-language newspapers edited by Giovanni Pulle, namely *L’Italo-Australiano* and *Oceania*. In these newspapers published between 1905 and 1913, Dewhirst found that the editors developed a ‘counter ideology’ to validate the whiteness of Italians and challenge Australia’s Anglocentric intention to create a homogenous society. Amongst the rhetorical strategies identified was an emphasis on the presence of an aggressive external other to be found in Asia. This chapter will expand on this work by making

it a central theme of my analysis of this particular response to the increased regulation and restriction of Southern European migrants in the interwar period.<sup>1</sup>

These articles provide a useful case study for analysing how Italians drew on a range of transnational racial discourses to articulate a white racial solidarity in Australia. In my analysis, I argue that Battistessa's articles were not only drawing on Australian anxieties of Asia but also on discourses of the 'yellow peril' that were being formed in Italy at around the same time that these articles were written. By 1933, the Fascist regime in Italy had been in power for over ten years and, according to Martin Clark, this year was a turning point at which Mussolini's earlier dynamism gave way to pontification on his big issues such as the demographic crisis, the yellow peril, and the decline of the West.<sup>2</sup> As I will demonstrate, the influence of Mussolini's thinking on these issues can be found in Battistessa's writing. Therefore, in my examination of the Italian mobilisation of 'yellow peril' discourse in Australia, I necessarily take a transnational view by drawing out particular issues adjacent to anxieties of Asia that were not only present in Australian racial thinking but in Italian thinking too. As such, this chapter is building on earlier works, such as that of Lake and Reynolds, who take a transnational approach to writing the history of the development of racial thinking particularly in the development of solidarities between 'white men's countries' against an 'awakening Asia'. However, while Lake and Reynolds limited the scope of their research to Anglophone countries and colonies, this chapter is necessarily broader in scope and treats Italy as another 'white men's country'.<sup>3</sup> In doing so this chapter is heeding calls made by migration historians in Australia to take a transnational and transcultural approach to understanding the development and use of racial discourses.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I first give a brief history of *Il Giornale Italiano* and locate it within the broader histories of the Italian-language press and Fascism in Australia before analysing the interventions

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Dewhurst, "Collaborating on Whiteness: Representing Italians in Early White Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 42-43.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Clark, *Mussolini* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 170.

<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> For examples in histories of Italian and other Southern European immigrations to Australia, see: Francesco Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Andonis Piperoglou, "Favoured 'Nordics' and 'Mediterranean Scum': Transpacific Hierarchies of Desirability and Immigration Restriction," *History Australia* 17, no. 3 (2020): 510-24. For an overview of the 'transnational turn' in Australian migration history, see: Ruth Balint and Zora Simic, "Histories of Migrants and Refugees in Australia," *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018): 382-84.

into Australian and Italian politics that *Il Giornale Italiano* made by publishing these articles. This is followed by a brief history of the changes to immigration policy in Australia during the interwar period which regulated and limited migration from the countries of southern and eastern Europe and encouraged migration from the United Kingdom. I pay particular attention to how Italian authorities understood and responded to these changes. Following on from these two sections, I begin my examination of Battistessa's articles by looking at his warnings of a coming race war between Europe and Asia and place this within the broader history of Australian anxieties of East Asia. This is done with particular attention to the 'reawakening Asia' discourse that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and became primarily associated with Japan's modernisation and military strength. In the next section, I locate Battistessa's writing within a broader transnational context. Both Italy and Japan were experiencing a period of development during the interwar period which brought Italy and Japan into political and economic competition with each other and fostered the development of racial discourses on both sides of this competition which then found their way into the Italian-language press in Australia. After analysing the form and origins of Battistessa's 'yellow peril' thinking, I analyse the critique that Battistessa makes of Anglocentrism. This was a critique that warned that Australia could only remain white if attachments to Britain were dropped in favour of opening up to migrants and capital from all over Europe. These prospective migrants were categorised by Battistessa as 'friendly white people' whose willingness to develop and defend Australia was supported by a combination of arguments that drew on revisionist interpretations of Australian and European history.

### ***Il Giornale Italiano* and the Fascist Press in Australia**

The first issue of *Il Giornale Italiano* was published on 19 March 1932, fifteen months before the series of 'yellow peril' articles appeared. It was published weekly until its final issue on 5 June 1940, five days before Italy entered the war. Not long after, several of its staff in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane were interned. The newspaper was founded by Filippo Maria Bianchi and Franco Battistessa who both arrived in Sydney in 1928 after having previously met in India where they were both members of the Bombay *Fascio*. It was also in Bombay where Bianchi and Battistessa published their first newspaper together and where Battistessa, as the 'Honorary

Political Secretary' of the *Fascio*, was actively engaged in a dialogue with the local Anglophone press.<sup>5</sup> On more than one occasion, Battistessa wrote letters to newspapers such as *The Times of India* to criticise them for publishing articles critical of the Fascist regime and praised them for articles that presented the regime in a positive light.<sup>6</sup>

In Sydney, Battistessa continued his journalistic activities almost immediately after arrival, by contributing articles to *Italo-Australian*, a newspaper that had been established six years earlier by Francesco Lubrano who claimed for the newspaper the right of succession from Giovanni Pulle's earlier newspapers, *L'Italo-Australiano* and *Oceania*.<sup>7</sup> Through his articles published in this newspaper, Battistessa articulated the position of 'dissident Fascism', a protest movement against the 'official Fascism' of the consular authorities, and immediately became a leader of that movement which was made up of about 35 Fascists. These self-proclaimed dissidents wanted Fascist branches to be free from the interference of representatives of the Italian government and to be open in a way that allowed issues to be discussed without the imposition of sanctions on dissenters. However, these demands were at odds with the Statute of the *Fasci* Abroad, first formulated in 1926 and revised in 1928, which ruled that an overseas branch of the Fascist Party could not be independent from the consul-general's authority nor could they discuss problems openly.<sup>8</sup> Battistessa's advocacy of this dissident Fascism eventually led to his expulsion from the Sydney *Fascio* after his involvement in an incident at Paddington Town Hall on 30 May 1928. During a banquet held by the Italian community to celebrate the transfer of the consulate-general from Melbourne to Sydney, Battistessa and two others interrupted the ceremony and accused the Consul-General, Antonio Grossardi, of inadequately defending the interests of Fascism.<sup>9</sup> When *Il Giornale Italiano* was founded four years later, Battistessa was still marginalised by the

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<sup>5</sup> F M Bianchi, Internment Camp No. 9, 4<sup>th</sup> Military District, Adelaide, to The Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, 1 October 1942, NAA: B741, V/16878S, Bianchi, Filippo Mario.

<sup>6</sup> See: Franco Battistessa, 'Fascism,' *The Times of India*, 28 April 1927, 5; Franco Battistessa, 'Fascist Regime,' *The Times of India*, 17 December 1927, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Gaetano Rando, "Aspects of the History of the Italian Language Press in Australia 1885-1985," in *Italians in Australia: Historical and Social Perspectives*, ed. Gaetano Rando and Michael Arrighi (Wollongong: Department of Modern Languages University of Wollongong and Dante Alighieri Society Wollongong Chapter, 1993), 200-01. For more on Pulle's newspapers, see: Catherine Dewhirst, "Giovanni Pullè: Pioneer and Founding Father of Italian Ethnicity," *Spunti e Ricerche*, no. 17 (2003): 26-49.

<sup>8</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980), 58-59.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

official Fascism of the consular authorities and Bianchi had also found himself in trouble with the institutions of official Fascism in Sydney and had not been allowed to join the Sydney *Fascio*.<sup>10</sup>

In its first year of publication, the newspaper counted four other Italian-language newspapers published in Australia as competitors. One was *Italo-Australian*, the newspaper that Battistessa had previously written for and was still broadly Fascist in orientation. Another was *Il Corriere degli Italiani in Australia*, also published in Sydney, which was founded in 1928 by the Consul-General Antonio Grossardi in order to counter the influence of Battistessa and *Italo-Australian*. According to Bianchi, this newspaper had the financial aid of all Italian associations and commercial houses in the Commonwealth; its chairman was Luigi Vitali, Honorary Consul and Managing Director of the Australia-Italia Shipping Company, and its editor was Felice Rando, secretary (and later inspector general) of the Fascist Party in Australia. The consular authorities in Perth also had their own newspaper when they founded *La Stampa Italiana*, in December 1931 but it only lasted nine months, ceasing publication in September 1932. Lastly, in Brisbane there was *L'Italiano* which had initially been supported by communists and communist sympathisers throughout North Queensland before turning towards Fascism from the middle of the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> While these were identified as competitors, they were not the only Italian-language newspapers published in Australia. There were also the newspapers published by Italian anarchists in Australia such as *Il Risveglio* (1927) and *La Riscossa* (1929-1933).<sup>12</sup> Broadly speaking, however, by the middle of the 1930s, all the main Italian-language newspapers in Australia were sympathetic to Fascism.

In its early years, *Il Giornale Italiano* retained elements of its 'dissident Fascism' and preferred to see itself as pro-Fascist but anti-consular and anti-Mussolini.<sup>13</sup> In 1935, for example, *Il Giornale Italiano* responded to *Smith's Weekly's* claims that it was the organ of official Fascism in Australia, by asserting its independence from Mussolini and the Fascist Party of Italy while also arguing that it, more than any other Italian-language newspaper in Australia, had the right to proclaim

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<sup>10</sup> NAA: A367, C18000/871, National Security (General) Regulations, Regulation 26, Objection no. 668 and 669, Filippo Mario Bianchi and Pino Boggio, Advisory Committee Sydney, 17 July 1944.

<sup>11</sup> F M Bianchi, No. 9 Internment Camp, 4<sup>th</sup> Military District SA, to The Commandant of No. 9 Internment Camp, Barmera, 29 September 1943, NAA: B741, V/16878S, Bianchi, Filippo Mario.

<sup>12</sup> See: David Faber, "The Italian Anarchist Press in Australia between the Wars," *Italian Historical Society Journal* 17 (2009): 5-11.

<sup>13</sup> NAA: A367, C18000/871, National Security (General) Regulations, Regulation 26, Objection no. 668 and 669, Filippo Mario Bianchi and Pino Boggio, Advisory Committee Sydney, 17 July 1944,

itself the official organ of Italy in Australia.<sup>14</sup> The 'Yellow Peril' articles of August 1932 were therefore published at a time when *Il Giornale Italiano* had maintained its independence from official Fascism. Yet, as I will discuss below, the articles also reveal that Battistessa was undoubtedly influenced by the racial ideas and imperialist aspirations of Mussolini and the Italian Fascist Party.

By the end of the 1930s, *Il Giornale Italiano*'s relationship to official Fascism in Australia had shifted considerably so that in July 1937 the newspaper amalgamated with *Corriere degli Italiani in Australia*, the newspaper of the consulate and the *Fascio*, which saw the latter absorbed under the banner of the former. No longer independent from consular authorities, the company which printed the newspaper received an annual grant of £500 from the amalgamation until the newspaper was forced to cease publication.<sup>15</sup> The newspaper was also given access to various Fascist events around the country, including an event in Brisbane in 1937 where the Brisbane advertising editor, Cesare Baucia, presented a gift to Archbishop Duhig on behalf of the newspaper.<sup>16</sup> After the amalgamation, Battistessa and Bianchi were also individually allowed into the institutions of official Fascism and received their support. For example, Battistessa was appointed to a committee of Italians which included Felice Rando and received consular support for broadcasting on a Sydney radio station that also lasted from 1937 to 1940.<sup>17</sup> Bianchi, after moving to Melbourne in 1938, finally found himself accepted as a member of the *Fascio*.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout its eight years of publication, *Il Giornale Italiano* claimed for itself some of the major roles that Gaetano Rando has identified were common of the Italian-language press in Australia prior to World War II: defending the Italian community from hostile Australian opinion, determining the relationship of the Italian community with Australian society, and advocating for the rights of Italian workers in Australia.<sup>19</sup> The 'Yellow Peril' articles offer examples of how

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<sup>14</sup> "‘Smith’s,’ the Negro-Loving Digger, and the Venal Editor,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 21 August 1935, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*, 83.

<sup>16</sup> 'Echi del Plebiscito di Riconoscenza Italiana all'Arcivescovo Duhig [Echoes of the Plebiscite of Italian Gratitude to Archbishop Duhig],' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 14 April 1937, 3. See also: Catherine Dewhirst, "Respectability and Disloyalty: The Competing Obligations of L'italiano's Editors," in *The Transnational Voices of Australia's Migrant and Minority Press*, ed. Catherine Dewhirst and Richard Scully (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 88.

<sup>17</sup> Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*, 154.

<sup>18</sup> NAA: A367, C18000/871, National Security (General) Regulations, Regulation 26, Objection no. 668 and 669, Filippo Mario Bianchi and Pino Boggio, Advisory Committee Sydney, 17 July 1944,

<sup>19</sup> Rando, "Aspects of the History of the Italian Language Press in Australia 1885-1985," 197-99.

these roles were taken up by Battistessa. They contain direct replies to attacks on the Italian community that were published in the English-language press, as well as a defence of Italian workers, highlighting their collective achievements in the colonisation of Australia and their potential involvement in future development. The articles also criticised recent developments in immigration and industrial policy. Regarding the latter, Battistessa wrote specifically against the British preference quotas that were introduced throughout the sugar industry of the preceding five years that had the impact of restricting the access of Italian workers to employment (these developments were discussed in depth in the previous chapter). For the purpose of this chapter, it is necessary to summarise the changes in immigration policy over the preceding decade which, like changes in industrial policy, were also restrictive for Italians.

### **Immigration and emigration policy in the interwar period**

Eight months before the publication of the 'Yellow Peril' articles, an amendment to the Immigration Act came into effect in December 1932 which made it a requirement that all Europeans intending to enter Australia had to obtain a landing permit before arrival, costing the migrant one pound. Passed in response to the Great Depression, this was the latest in a series of amendments introduced after the end of World War I which were aimed at regulating and limiting immigration from southern and eastern Europe. After the provisions of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 had successfully reduced the population of migrants from Asia and the Pacific Islands in the two decades after Federation, the increase in immigration from southern and eastern Europe during the same time and the interwar period that followed also brought with it an increase in the perception that these migrants were a threat to the ideals of White Australia. The purpose of the White Australia Policy, in preserving British superiority and the essentially British character of the nation, influenced the administration of immigration policy. In addition to the dictation test which remained the primary means through which non-white immigration was restricted, a collection of administration practices – such as passports, visas, landing money requirements, quotas and landing permits – were introduced to regulate white



immigration from Europe. Of these, Langfield argues that the most important were the quotas and the landing money requirement.<sup>20</sup>

The first quota on European immigration was introduced in 1920 when the wartime ban on arrivals from Malta was lifted. Five years later, the quota system was extended in 1925 to migrants from Greece, Albania, Yugoslavia, Estonia, Poland, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.<sup>21</sup> Although Italians made up the single largest national group of non-British European migrants, they were exempt from these quotas because they were introduced to complement an already existing visa system which Italians had also been exempt from. Their exemption was due to a reciprocal arrangement for the abolition of visa requirements, that Australia had been a party to, made in 1923 between the British government and the governments of France, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Denmark and Belgium.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this treaty, the rights of Italians arriving in Australia were protected by a treaty of commerce signed between Great Britain and Italy in 1883 which laid out the privileges of Italian and British subjects migrating between these two countries.<sup>23</sup> Until the amendment of 1932, these two international agreements made it difficult for the Australian government to control Italian immigration even after arrival numbers reached unprecedented levels in 1924 and 1925 after the introduction of immigration quotas in the US, with 4498 and 5182 in those respective years; much higher than the 963 in 1923.<sup>24</sup>

After Italian arrivals reached a peak of over 7000 in 1927, arrangements were made via an informal agreement between the Australian and Italian governments to significantly reduce the number of Italians entering and in the following years arrivals fell to 3163 in 1928 and 2044 in 1929. According to Langfield, this reduction was more likely the result of strict emigration laws introduced by the Italian government in 1928 rather than the informal agreement.<sup>25</sup> These laws

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<sup>20</sup> Michele Langfield, "White Aliens": The Control of European Immigration to Australia 1920–30," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (1991): 4–5.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Markus, *Australian Race Relations, 1788–1993* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 129.

<sup>22</sup> Secretary, Development and Migration Commission, Melbourne, to Home and Territories Department, Melbourne, 19 May 1927, 'Foreign Immigration,' NAA: A1, 1936/13639, Immigration from Countries other than United Kingdom.

<sup>23</sup> See: Article 13 of this treaty. For more on this treaty, see: Catherine Dewhirst, "The Anglo-Italian Treaty. Australia's Imperial Obligations to Italian Migrants, 1883–1940," in *Italy & Australia: An Asymmetrical Relationship*, ed. Gianfranco Cresciani and Bruno Mascitelli (Ballarat: Connor Court, 2014), 81–114.

<sup>24</sup> William A. Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1995), 125.

<sup>25</sup> Langfield, "White Aliens": The Control of European Immigration to Australia 1920–30," 12.

limited emigration to close relatives of those already resident in Australia and was controlled by a nomination system. Under this system a prospective migrant had to be nominated by a relative living in Australia and obtain a nomination paper called an *Atto di Chiamata* (Act of Call). This process took about three to four months as the application would be sent from Sydney to Rome and then to the provincial offices who had the task of ascertaining the eligibility of the intending migrants.<sup>26</sup>

The 1932 amendment initially did not apply to Italians due to the existing agreements made between Australia, Great Britain and Italy. However, it was extended to Italians after the Australian government decided that the landing permit did not contravene the 1883 treaty as long as it was applied to 'aliens' of all nationalities alike and because it was 'considered very desirable that white nationals of all foreign countries should be treated alike'.<sup>27</sup> The Italian Consulate protested this move and was in a dialogue with the Department of the Interior at around the same time that Battistessa's 'Yellow Peril' articles were published. In a letter sent to the Department in September 1932, Consul-General Ferrante requested that the process continue without the need for landing permits, stressing the cordial relations between the two nations and the fact that no other country had an emigration policy as strict as Italy's.<sup>28</sup> In reply, the Minister for External Affairs told the Consul-General that it needed to impose this requirement on top of the *Atto di Chiamata* to avoid the possibility that other countries may ask to be exempt from the system too.<sup>29</sup>

The 'Yellow Peril' articles written by Battistessa are another example of Italian protest that emerged in response to the increased regulation and restriction of immigration. As Langfield argued, it was the anti-emigration laws of the Italian government rather than the actions of the Australian government that did more to reduce the number of Italian arrivals in Australia.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> Memorandum: Italian Immigration to Australia, Department of the Interior, 20 November 1941, NAA: A434, 1949/3/29453, Immigration of Italians to Australia. See also: Carl Ipsen, "The Organization of Demographic Totalitarianism: Early Population Policy in Fascist Italy," *Social Science History* 17, no. 1 (1993): 83.

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum: Italian Immigrants, Department of the Interior, 4 January 1934, NAA: A434, 1949/3/29453, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

<sup>28</sup> M A Ferrante, Royal Consul-General for Italy, Sydney, to Archdale Parkhill, Minister for the Interior, Canberra, 5 September 1932, NAA: A434, 1949/3/29453, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

<sup>29</sup> Minister for External Affairs to the Royal Consul-General for Italy, NAA: A434, 1949/3/29453, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

<sup>30</sup> Langfield, "White Aliens": The Control of European Immigration to Australia 1920–30," 12.

protests in Australia from both the dissident Fascism of *Il Giornale Italiano* and the official Fascism of the Consulate might therefore seem to be attacking the wrong target. However, the emigration policy of Fascist Italy was not simply about the restriction of emigration as much as it was about submitting emigration to the will of Fascist foreign policy. This needs to be further explained in order to demonstrate that Italian protests against Australian immigration policy were not merely a defence of the Italian migrant but a desire to protect Australia as a potential outlet for Italy's political, cultural and economic expansion. The conflict over immigration policy was over controlling the Australian space as well as the people within it.

Since the beginning of proletarian immigration from Italy to Australia in the 1890s, Australia was often regarded by Italian authorities as an outlet for Italy's surplus population. According to Cresciani, 'at the turn of the century, the Italian government was eager to increase Italian immigration to Australia, because it constituted another *sbocco*, another outlet towards which to direct unemployed people who, if unable to emigrate, would have worsened what was undoubtedly Italy's gravest social question.'<sup>31</sup> This was in line with Italy's emigration policy between 1895 and 1908 which regarded emigration as necessary and even advantageous.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, some nationalists and syndicalists, whilst recognising the need for an outlet for emigration, lamented the misplacement of human resources that could be better exploited for the Italian nation.<sup>33</sup> As a result, from about 1908, Italy's emigration policy sought to gain more control over emigration in order to increase its benefits at home and direct it as an instrument of expansion abroad.<sup>34</sup> This involved bringing Italy's emigration and foreign policy closer together which was a process that was built upon in the Fascist period.<sup>35</sup> Mussolini saw the Italian population as its greatest strength and moved to harness the power of its emigrants through transnational institutions. One example of these institutions was the National Institute of Credit founded in the early 1920s to finance the establishment of Italian industries and settlements abroad.<sup>36</sup> According to Mussolini, the point of such an institution was, 'to substitute

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<sup>31</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 51.

<sup>32</sup> Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 474.

<sup>33</sup> Gerardo Papalia, "Imaginary Colonies: Fascist Views of Australia in Italian Diplomatic Correspondence 1922-1940," *Eras Journal* 6 (2004).

<sup>34</sup> Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*, 474.

<sup>35</sup> Philip V. Cannistraro and Gianfausto Rosoli, "Fascist Emigration Policy in the 1920s: An Interpretive Framework," *The International Migration Review* 13, no. 4 (1979): 676.

<sup>36</sup> Extract from a Report dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1924, on the Development of Trade between Australia and Italy, by Brigadier-General Ramaciotti, NAA: A1, 1926/9494, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

for chaotic migration the memorable migration of old ... , the migration of organised ... bodies of men proud of their pioneer strength, of their labour, of their mission.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, a report by Brigadier-General Ramaciotti noted that 'the Italian Settlement in North Queensland comes within the objects of the Institute and has formed the subject of special investigation by the Department of Migration.'<sup>38</sup>

Mussolini's new emigration policies treated emigrants as an asset to Italy, not just the country to which they migrated. As workers and consumers, Italian emigrants were to 'become the motive force of the peaceful, moral and economic expansion of Italy.'<sup>39</sup> In material terms, Italians as workers were expected to send back remittances while as consumers they were encouraged to live together and consume Italian goods, thus stimulating the Italian export trade. It was for this reason that it was primarily Italian settlements or 'colonies' rather than individuals that were the object of programs such as the National Institute of Credit.<sup>40</sup> Italians in Australia were also called upon in their capacity as consumers, for example, in events such as 'Day of the Italian Product', declared by Fascist authorities on 2 November 1934, which asked Italians to buy exclusively Italian goods in support of the regime's policy of autarchy.<sup>41</sup>

Redefined as a national asset, Italian workers were also increasingly treated as export commodities. This meant being subject to regimes of discipline and regulation with the intention of 'making the Italian the best and most suitable migrant of all nations, thereby securing him preference abroad.'<sup>42</sup> With regards to the disciplining of Italian workers required for making them ready for export, Ramaciotti wrote:

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<sup>37</sup> Extract from a Report dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1924, on the Development of Trade between Australia and Italy, by Brigadier-General Ramaciotti, NAA: A1, 1926/9494, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

<sup>38</sup> Extract from a Report dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1924, on the Development of Trade between Australia and Italy, by Brigadier-General Ramaciotti, NAA: A1, 1926/9494, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

<sup>39</sup> Extract from a Report dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1924, on the Development of Trade between Australia and Italy, by Brigadier-General Ramaciotti, NAA: A1, 1926/9494, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

<sup>40</sup> Extract from a Report dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1924, on the Development of Trade between Australia and Italy, by Brigadier-General Ramaciotti, NAA: A1, 1926/9494, Immigration of Italians to Australia; Letter from R Graham, the British ambassador in Rome, to J Austen Chamberlain, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 13 December 1924, also in NAA: A1, 1926/9494.

<sup>41</sup> Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*, 72.

<sup>42</sup> General-Brigadier Ramaciotti's Fourteenth Quarterly Report on Development of Trade between Australia and Italy, 2 April 1924, NAA: A1, 1926/9494, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

The Director General of Emigration told me that not only the family and medical histories of the person applying for leave to migrate are gone into, but his general conduct, ability, thrift, personal habits, cleanliness, and even his clothing, receive scrupulous attention. It is desired not only that he shall secure admission, but that he shall make good and become a National asset.<sup>43</sup>

After transforming the Italian emigrant into an export commodity, the Italian Government therefore sought to protect their export markets. Much of the Fascists' emigration policy was a response to the introduction of immigration quotas in the US and other countries which were seen as a form of protectionism, not only barriers to the free movement of people but the free movement of commodities. Before the Fascists came to power in Italy, there were already attempts made to organise the economic interests of the 'emigration nations', led by Italy and involving six other nations, mostly from central Europe. Such efforts were continued by Mussolini who worked to develop bonds of solidarity between those that he called 'the countries which participate in the world economy by sending workers abroad.'<sup>44</sup> A significant event was the International Conference on Emigration and Immigration held in May 1924 which had as its objective, 'to secure further outlets for Italian migration ... and incidentally further markets for Italian products.'<sup>45</sup>

In Australia, Italian authorities began to counter restrictions on Italian immigration by the Australian Government by appealing to arguments of international trade. For example, Ramaciotti's fourteenth *Quarterly Report on the Development of Trade between Australia and Italy* published in 1924, argued that:

The country which will not receive our emigrants, impedes their remittances to their Mother Country, or imposes duties on our products which restrict their sale, does not desire to sell its products to Italy. We cannot buy your cotton, your meat, your wool or

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<sup>43</sup> General-Brigadier Ramaciotti's Fourteenth Quarterly Report on Development of Trade between Australia and Italy, 2 April 1924, NAA: A1, 1926/9494, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

<sup>44</sup> Mussolini quoted in Cannistraro and Rosoli, "Fascist Emigration Policy in the 1920s: An Interpretive Framework," 679.

<sup>45</sup> Extracts from Ramaciotti's Thirteenth Quarterly Report on the Development of Trade between Australia and Italy, 3 March 1924, NAA: A1, 1926/9494, Immigration of Italians to Australia. See also *ibid.*, 680-81.

your wheat, if we cannot sell you our goods, or our emigrants' labour. Where we do not sell we do not buy.<sup>46</sup>

By the time Battistessa was writing almost a decade later, Australia's immigration policy had become even stricter. Although the decrease in Italian arrivals could be attributed to the impacts of Italian emigration legislation as much as Australia's immigration policies, Italians in Australia were keen to maintain control over migration flows and keep Australia open as a territory for Italy's economic and cultural expansion. While Italian consular authorities often made arguments in terms of international trade, Battistessa spoke to racial anxieties and used yellow peril discourse to warn of an alternative future, should Australia's markets, industries and land be closed off to Italian exploitation, which would be an even greater threat to the ideal of White Australia.

## **Two awakened empires**

In the first article of the series Battistessa declared that the yellow peril is 'not a bogey, but a real menace' to White Australia. More than just an exaggeration in the minds of a few pessimists, this menace, he contended, 'must be faced and tackled with grim determination and sane wisdom before it is too late.' It was not a product of scaremongering for the purposes of 'political or militaristic propaganda, but a real, appalling menace which threatens this fair land with impending doom, unless we take drastic steps and arm ourselves spiritually and materially to resist it tooth and nail.' The threat posed by this menace would be proven in a coming race war between Europe and Asia, with Australia the spearhead or shield of Europe and Japan the spearhead of Asia.<sup>47</sup>

The Japanese are described by Battistessa as a 'warrior race of modern Spartans, efficient, ruthless, merciless and relentless in their set purpose, like ancient Hun barbarians made

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<sup>46</sup> General-Brigadier Ramaciotti's Fourteenth Quarterly Report on Development of Trade between Australia and Italy, 2 April 1924, NAA: A1, 1926/9494, Immigration of Italians to Australia.

<sup>47</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Shadow of the Yellow Peril Over White Australia Not a Bogey, But a Real Menace,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 2 August 1933, 1.

invincible by fanatical patriotism and modern scientific and mechanical war paraphernalia.<sup>48</sup> Continuing the historical metaphors and similes, Battistessa identified the Japanese as the latest threat in a history of conquest from Asia which included the Persians, the Mongols, the Tartars and the Huns.<sup>49</sup> The 'all-conquering sword of those ... Asiatic warriors' had been passed on to Japan, who after opening up to the west with the Meiji Restoration in 1868, had 'advanced by leaps and bounds', intensified its efficiency as a military power, and industrialised 'to a stage of world supremacy'.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the references to a deeper history, these articles are situated within the discourse of 'the awakening East' that had emerged in the 1870s and consolidated in response to events in the first decade of the twentieth century which saw Japan emerge as an international power.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the most significant of these events was Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 which was received in Australia as a signal that Japan 'was emerging as a strong, martial nation,' and would soon play an important role in the Pacific.<sup>52</sup> Japan's victory was also believed to have repercussions for race relations across the world and was interpreted as a symbol of the decline of the white race and the growing confidence of non-Europeans to challenge white supremacy.<sup>53</sup> Some Italians in Australia at the time of the war recognised the threat Japan's victory posed to white Australia. For example, *L'Italo-Australiano* published an article in which it was argued that Australia needed to open itself to greater immigration from Europe in order to secure itself from the emerging development of Japan, the potential development of China with a far bigger population, and also 'the countless hordes of India, to say nothing of the Malay races'.<sup>54</sup>

The discourse of the 'awakening East' was also connected to a historic shift in the centre of global geopolitics. Battistessa argued that the present 'danger spot' of the world was no longer

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<sup>48</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia's Head,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia's Head,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia's Head,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1.

<sup>51</sup> David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-71.

<sup>54</sup> 'Australia's Necessity,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 16 September 1905, 2.

the Mediterranean or the Atlantic, but the Pacific, which he described as ‘the coming centre of a new world’. Starting with the Russo-Japanese war and continuing with the annexation of Korea in 1910 and the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Pacific was coming under the influence of Japan and, according to Battistessa, ‘to Australia falls the tremendous responsibility of sharing with America the dangerous post of advanced sentinel of the white race in the disputed Pacific.’<sup>55</sup> Even before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, the US President, Theodore Roosevelt identified the Pacific basin as the region most likely to determine which race would come to dominate the globe.<sup>56</sup> Following the war, the US exhibited its power in the Pacific with the sailing of the ‘Great White Fleet’ from December 1907 to 22 February 1909. When the fleet arrived in Australia it was widely interpreted as symbol of white solidarity in the Pacific.<sup>57</sup>

However, Battistessa’s view of the ‘yellow peril’ was not only influenced by Australian and other Anglophone responses to Japan’s military and economic development but also by the development of racial ideas in Italy. Since the 1860s, Italy had also been experiencing an ‘awakening’ in parallel with Japan, beginning with the *Risorgimento* which was interpreted as Italy’s ‘coming of age’ through to the advent of Fascism which endeavoured to restore the original nationalist intent of the *Risorgimento*.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the ascendancy of Fascism was greeted in Australia with a similar change in language used to describe East Asia after Japan’s awakening. This shift can be seen for example in the use of gendered language. Walker found that an earlier ‘passive’ East was more often associated with femininity but the awakened East ‘anticipated the emergence of a newly energised, masculinised East.’<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Fascist Italy sought to create the ‘new Italian Man’ which Australian observers thought might challenge or be raised to the level of the traditional English gentleman.<sup>60</sup> Australian tourists in Italy during the early years of the regime also viewed Mussolini as a messianic figure who had made Italy orderly, clean, efficient

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<sup>55</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia’s Head,’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1.

<sup>56</sup> Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 44.

<sup>57</sup> Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, 2-3.

<sup>58</sup> Papalia, ‘Imaginary Colonies: Fascist Views of Australia in Italian Diplomatic Correspondence 1922-1940.’ Simon Levis Sullam, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Origins of Fascism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Roslyn Pesman Cooper, ‘Australian Tourists in Fascist Italy,’ *Journal of Australian Studies* 14, no. 27 (1990): 27. Regarding the ‘New Man’, see: Jorge Dagnino, ‘The Myth of the New Man in Italian Fascist Ideology,’ *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 130-48.



and therefore closer to the exemplary model of the British nation.<sup>61</sup> Their enthusiasm for the regime matched that of the Australian press who, apart from the unionist and communist sectors, greeted the Fascist coup in 1922 with approval.<sup>62</sup> Italy's and Japan's parallel awakenings, which saw them emerge as new imperialist powers at the same time, brought them into competition with each other in their aspirations for political, economic, and territorial expansion and led to the development of racial antagonisms between the two new empires.

Both Italy and Japan specialised in the export of low-cost textiles and their rivalry encompassed markets in South America, the Balkans, Africa and Asia. In the 1920s, Japan was capturing an increasing share of the world market at the expense of Italian exports.<sup>63</sup> This rivalry was aggravated by the Great Depression of the early 1930s because, although both countries had survived the depression better than most other major powers, they struggled to find markets for their exports as the nations that were hardest hit by the crisis abandoned free trade and brought economic policies under greater state control – policies which they extended to their colonies in Africa and Asia.<sup>64</sup> A solution to these economic problems was imperialist expansion into East Africa and East Asia which became significant sites of antagonism for the two countries.

Italy's imperial ambitions in East Africa were threatened by the growing influence of Japan in the region. From the mid-1920s, Japanese traders established business interests in Ethiopia leading to the signing of a commercial treaty between the two nations.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, a treaty between Japan and the United Kingdom also gave Japanese traders access to British colonies of East Africa.<sup>66</sup> By 1934, Japanese goods were highly competitive in Ethiopia because they were both cheaper and of a better quality than goods from elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> This growing

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<sup>61</sup> Cooper, "Australian Tourists in Fascist Italy," 26-27.

<sup>62</sup> Roslyn Pesman Cooper, "'We Want a Mussolini': Views of Fascist Italy in Australia," *The Australian journal of politics and history* 39, no. 3 (1993): 349.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Bradshaw and Jim Ransdell, "Japan, Britain and the Yellow Peril in Africa in the 1930s," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 9, no. 44 (2011): 8.

<sup>64</sup> David L. Glickman, "The British Imperial Preference System," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 61, no. 3 (1947): 439-70; Ian M. Drummond, "The British Empire Economies in the Great Depression," in *The Great Depression Revisited: Essays on the Economics of the Thirties*, ed. Herman van der Wee (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 212-35; Moses Ochonu, "Conjoined to Empire: The Great Depression and Nigeria," *African Economic History*, no. 34 (2006): 103-45.

<sup>65</sup> S O Agbi, "The Japanese and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-36," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 11, no. 3/4 (1982-1983): 131.

<sup>66</sup> Bradshaw and Ransdell, "Japan, Britain and the Yellow Peril in Africa in the 1930s," 2.

<sup>67</sup> Agbi, "The Japanese and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-36," 134.

economic influence was matched by an emerging Japanese influence on Ethiopian politics. Ethiopia had its own ambitions for expansion and modernisation during this period and found in Japan a model to replicate. Influenced by Japan's successful transformation from a feudal society into an industrial power, Ethiopia modelled its constitution on the Meiji Constitution adopted by Japan in the 1860s. The appeal of the Japanese model was particularly attractive to a set of Ethiopian nationalists known as the 'Japanizers'.<sup>68</sup>

These attempts to modernise under Japanese influence were perceived by Italy as a threat to its influence in the region. The Italian press claimed that Ethiopia was violating the Italo-Ethiopian treaty of 1928 by purposefully favouring Japan and Japanese goods in order to stifle Italian influence in East Africa.<sup>69</sup> Italy blamed Japan for Ethiopia's resistance to these treaties.<sup>70</sup> Sensing its time was running out to establish an empire of its own, Italy wanted to stop Ethiopia's modernisation because a modern Ethiopian Empire could also have become a competitor for colonies in East Africa. Some of the most aggressive Ethiopian nationalists wanted Somalia and Eritrea to be under Ethiopian rule.<sup>71</sup>

On the other side of the world, just as Italy's expansion into Ethiopia potentially threatened Japan's economic and political influence there, Japan's expansion into East Asia threatened Italy's influence in China, especially after the Sino-Japanese conflict reached Shanghai in 1932. Italy's economic interests in Shanghai thus came under threat and, in retaliation, Italy sent a warship to China and offered to manufacture weapons for the Chinese resistance. Italy was also a political influence on the Chinese nationalists – for example, in 1928 Chiang Kai-shek began reorganising the new Chinese nation using Italian Fascism as a model.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, although

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<sup>68</sup> G. Bruce Strang, "'Places in the African Sun': Social Darwinism, Demographics and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia," in *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and Its International Impact*, ed. G. Bruce Strang (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 21-25; J. Calvitt Clarke, "An Alliance of the 'Coloured Peoples: Ethiopia and Japan," *ibid.*, 232.

<sup>69</sup> Bradshaw and Ransdell, "Japan, Britain and the Yellow Peril in Africa in the 1930s," 9.

<sup>70</sup> Clarke, "An Alliance of the 'Coloured Peoples: Ethiopia and Japan," 236.

<sup>71</sup> Strang, "'Places in the African Sun': Social Darwinism, Demographics and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia," 21-25.

<sup>72</sup> For more Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang's connections to Italian Fascism, see: Lloyd Eastman, "Fascism in Kuomintang China: The Blue Shirts," *The China Quarterly* 49 (1972): 1-31; Maria Hsia Chang, "'Fascism' and Modern China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 79 (1979): 553-67; Dooeum Chung, *Elitist Fascism: Chiang Kaishek's Blueshirts in 1930s China* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000); Orazio Coco, "The Penetration of Italian Fascism in Nationalist China: Political Influence and Economic Legacy," *International History Review* 43, no. 2 (2020): 1-17.

Italy was concerned with China's redevelopment, its main objective, according to Sunday Agbi, was to separate Japan from China because Mussolini saw their co-operation as a threat to the white race. Separating the two nations meant stopping the persistent threat that an awakened East posed to European dominance.<sup>73</sup>

Italy and Japan both considered themselves to be the future leaders of their racial domains – Italy for the white people of the world and Japan for the 'coloured' peoples of the world. Whilst Italy wanted to separate China and Japan under the pretence of stopping the 'yellow peril', Japan justified their attack on Manchuria as a mission to expel Western countries from Asia. In Ethiopia, Japan initially saw Italian activities there as being another injustice caused by the white race. In both East Asia and East Africa, Japan justified their imperialist activities as taking a leading role in the non-white world which involved the intention of leading a union of 'coloured peoples' worldwide.<sup>74</sup> This was recognised by Mussolini who warned that Japanese sentiment was not only opposed to Italy but the white race as a whole. By establishing a foothold in Ethiopia, Mussolini argued that Japan would use Africa as 'a bridge which the Yellow race would use to attack the white race of Europe.'<sup>75</sup> A particularly important issue for Italian Fascists was that of economic dumping which they saw as the strategy by which Japan sought to conquer the European, Asian and African markets through an 'industrial invasion'.<sup>76</sup> The Italian press also specifically referred to the practice of dumping as a 'peril to the white race'.<sup>77</sup> These ideas were picked up in Australia not only by the Italian-language press but in the mainstream press as well. For example, *The Courier Mail* in Brisbane published an article written by Mussolini in an issue printed in February 1934. In this article, Mussolini wrote of 'a driving Japanese competition in all the markets of the world, Europe included.'<sup>78</sup>

Blocking Japan's challenge to the white race therefore meant challenging Japan not only in Ethiopia but in East Asia as well – and Mussolini believed that Italy would lead the way.

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<sup>73</sup> Agbi, "The Japanese and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-36," 132.

<sup>74</sup> Clarke, "An Alliance of the 'Coloured Peoples: Ethiopia and Japan,'" 231-60.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Agbi, "The Japanese and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-36," 134-35.

<sup>76</sup> 'La Stampa Italiana Getta L'Allarme Contro il Pericolo Giallo [The Italian Press Raises the Alarm Against the Yellow Peril], *Il Giornale Italiano*, 29 November 1933, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Bradshaw and Ransdell, "Japan, Britain and the Yellow Peril in Africa in the 1930s," 9.

<sup>78</sup> Benito Mussolini, 'Mussolini Looks At The Far East: Peril of Russo-Japanese War,' *The Courier-Mail*, 21 February 1934, 10.

Mussolini's ideas on East Asia and East Africa were similar to Battistessa's warning of a coming war of the races. For example, in the third of the articles, Battistessa warned that Japan would lead a future 'Asiatic League of Nations' made up of 'Japan, Manchukuo, China, Siam, Mongolia, Afghanistan and Burma,' a coalition supposedly more 'homogenous and pugnacious' than the League of Nations in Geneva, 'united in their hate for the dominant white race and in their greed for territorial expansion and conquest.'<sup>79</sup> The racial conflict between Italy and Japan arose from their competition for outlets for their exports and surplus populations. In the five articles published in *Il Giornale Italiano*, Battistessa brings the ideological developments of this political, economic and territorial conflict to Australia and synthesises them with the fears of an 'awakening East' that had developed in Australia over the preceding decades. The next section will draw out the impact of these ideas of race and the influence they had on Battistessa's arguments about the persistence of the 'yellow peril' in Australia.

### **Australia's Unfinished Settlement**

Having described the 'real menace' of the 'yellow peril', Battistessa then argued that Asia's persistence as an existential threat to Australia and a menace to the entire white race was a result of Australia's inability to secure itself against such a threat. Battistessa pointed to Australia's small population, uneven development, and Anglocentrism as the main reasons that Japan posed a threat to Australia. This argument also contained a broader critique of the colonisation and settlement of Australia.

In the first article in the series, Battistessa showed a preoccupation with demographic statistics. According to his figures and calculations, Japan had a yearly surplus of one million births over deaths and if the Japanese population continued to grow at this rate, in ten years it would reach 100 million. Australia, on the other hand, not accounting for immigration and relying only on its present birth rate, would have to wait 500 years just to reach 31 million. Furthermore, during the years of the depression, the marriage rate had fallen and immigration recorded a net loss of

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<sup>79</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: Look To The North From Whence Will Come The Armed Horde,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 16 August 1933, 1.

28,000 departures over arrivals.<sup>80</sup> Battistessa shared this preoccupation with comparative statistics with Fascist leaders such as Mussolini, who saw in such statistics proof that the white race was in decline and predicted a future in which white populations would be 'swamped' by African and Asian races.<sup>81</sup> Metaphors of 'flooding' and 'swamping' can be found throughout Battistessa's writing when he addresses the dangers of 'overpopulation' in countries such as Japan. In the first article he wrote that 'human races, like floods, are bound to overflow when no longer held within narrow beds or national limits' and without an appropriate solution to overpopulation, then invasion and conflict would be an inevitable result. In this sense, Battistessa argues that Japan's imperialism could be understood and even empathised with. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria, he argued, was 'a sharp reminder of the inevitable sequel to overpopulation'. Overpopulation, therefore, is the driving force of expansion and imperialism, 'just as there is a physic law of gravitation for material bodies, there is also a hidden but forceful law of expansion for fecund races crammed into narrow and small territories.'<sup>82</sup> Such an argument was in line with the social Darwinist ideology of the Italian Fascists who believed that the vitality or fecundity of a race would decide which races would expand and dominate others and which would be the ones being dominated and replaced. In the first article of the series, Battistessa proposed: 'If the birth-rate is the thermometer of the sanity of the race, we have a paradox that Australia, the youngest nation in the world, is almost moribund on her death-bed.'<sup>83</sup> This sense of decline was not only numerical but related to ideals of vitality which included the way of life of a people.

In these articles, it is argued that Australia's relatively small population created a culture of decadence which was also related to the unevenness of Australia's development and settlement of the continent. Although Battistessa praised Australia for its high standard of living, provision of public services and its 'marvellous works' such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge, urbanisation had 'crippled the normal growth of the country, both in population and development.' The

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<sup>80</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Shadow of the Yellow Peril Over White Australia Not a Bogey, But a Real Menace,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 2 August 1933, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Strang, "'Places in the African Sun': Social Darwinism, Demographics and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia," 13-14.

<sup>82</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia's Head,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Shadow of the Yellow Peril Over White Australia Not a Bogey, But a Real Menace,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 2 August 1933, 1.

population is said to be clotted in 'over-modern cities' while there is a very small white population and level of development beyond the limits of these cities. The Sydney Harbour Bridge, officially opened less than eighteen months before the publication of these articles, was symbolic of the unevenness of development in Australia, described by Battistessa as 'a piece of magnificent modernism transplanted into the provincialdom of Australia.'<sup>84</sup>

Australia's urbanisation and high standard of living was said to have produced a society that was decadent in a manner comparable to that which brought the demise of historical civilisations such as Greece and Rome. The people of Australian cities are described by Battistessa as playful, easy-going, devil-may-care, unimaginative, self-satisfied people, whose entire energies are spent on two 'paramount materialistic ideals – sport, and a high standard of living'.<sup>85</sup> The Australian penchant for sport had been an object of Italian criticism for decades, as early as 1908, when *L'Italo-Australiano* wrote of the average Australian: 'He does not want population; he wants the country to himself, and he wants football. If he does not alter his methods, he may have a very rough game one day, in which he will play the part of the ball.'<sup>86</sup> Closer to the publication of these articles, a report by Consul-General Grossardi published in 1931 called sport 'an obsession and a disease', and lamented that the Australian public 'does not give foreign policy one thousandth of the attention it reserves for sport.'<sup>87</sup> In this report, Grossardi also criticised Australia's uneven development, presenting a similar argument to Battistessa's. He too had pointed out the absurdity of Australia's high standard of living and material progress when more than half of the country lived in the state capitals and the rest of Australia was 'deserted'.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, whilst this land was 'deserted' or undeveloped and unknown by white men, Battistessa argued that Japanese workers in the tropics already had an in-depth knowledge of

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<sup>84</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: British Sea Power Could Not Protect Australia From the Pacific Peril,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 23 August 1933, 1. The opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge was itself a notable moment in the history of fascism in Australia, see: Richard Evans, "A Menace to This Realm: The New Guard and the New South Wales Police, 1931-32," *History Australia* 5, no. 3 (2008): 76.1-76.20.

<sup>85</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia's Head,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1. The Australian obsession with sport was also criticised by leaders of other immigrant groups during this time. For example, Hans Clausen, editor of *Norden*, a Scandinavian-Australian newspaper, saw assimilation to Australian culture as a process of degeneration into 'sports enthusiasts', see: Mark Emmerson, "'Vi Er Alle Australiere': The Migrant Newspaper Norden and Its Promotion of Pan-Scandinavian Unity within Australia, 1896-1940" (University of Southern Queensland, 2014), 222.

<sup>86</sup> 'Supine Australia,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 18 July 1908, 2.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Papalia, "Imaginary Colonies: Fascist Views of Australia in Italian Diplomatic Correspondence 1922-1940."

<sup>88</sup> See: *ibid.*

every part of the region that was hitherto uncharted by White Australians and as such once the coming war broke out all that knowledge will be lost to the enemy.<sup>89</sup> A similar argument had also been made by *L'Italo-Australiano* twenty-five years earlier when it raised the spectre of Japanese pearlers as a potential threat as they were the ones involved in the charting of reefs.<sup>90</sup>

Fascists in Italy also regarded urbanisation as a threat to the vitality of the race. One particular cause for alarm that they identified was the role of women in the cities who were believed to work in factories, marry later, delay childbirth and have fewer and less healthy babies. Mussolini contrasted the demographic health in rural areas with sickness and decay bred by modern urbanism and introduced policies that promoted ruralism and a return to the countryside.<sup>91</sup> The promotion of ruralism was important in Australia too where anti-urbanisation had long been associated in Australia with the threat of invasion from Asia.<sup>92</sup> However, although Australians had long thought that it was necessary to promote the development of rural areas instead of the cities, Italians in Australia pointed out that Australia's population policies did very little to assist the development of rural areas. Another target for criticism in Grossardi's report was the assisted passage scheme designed to attract more population from Britain, which Grossardi argued had failed due to the type of migrant that was being attracted had been made unfit due to them coming from urban areas – describing British migrants as 'deracinated and sickly industrial human waste.'<sup>93</sup>

Battistessa wrote in his first article that Australians must 'wake up to the fact that possession of such a vast and rich continent must be justified by results.'<sup>94</sup> Such arguments that drew attention

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<sup>89</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia's Head,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1. In reality, it was Italians who the Commonwealth believed constituted a threat as they were all perceived to be potential adherents to an enemy 'Fifth Column', see: Gerardo Papalia, 'The Italian "Fifth Column" in Australia: Fascist Propaganda, Italian-Australians and Internment,' *The Australian journal of politics and history* 66, no. 2 (2020): 214-31.

<sup>90</sup> 'The Invisible Immigrant,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 25 July 1908, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Strang, 'Places in the African Sun': Social Darwinism, Demographics and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia," 15-16.

<sup>92</sup> Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Papalia, 'Imaginary Colonies: Fascist Views of Australia in Italian Diplomatic Correspondence 1922-1940.' For more on assisted passage between Australia and United Kingdom at this time, see: Kosmas Tsokhas, 'People or Money? Empire Settlement and British Emigration to Australia, 1919-34,' *Immigrants & Minorities* 9, no. 1 (1990): 1-20.

<sup>94</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Shadow of the Yellow Peril Over White Australia Not a Bogey, But a Real Menace,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 2 August 1933, 1.

to Australia's underpopulation and uneven development aimed at challenging the moral and ethical foundations of British/Australian possession of the continent. In the last of the articles, Battistessa wrote: 'Sooner or later at the bar of racial competition for expansion and development of the world's empty spaces, Australia will have to show cause to defend her claim to this huge and vast empty Continent of tremendous possibilities, equal only to its neglect in a more radical development and a more reasonable system of defence.'<sup>95</sup> This was an argument that had been prominent in Australian and international opinion since the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>96</sup>

Related to these arguments about the moral basis of Australian possession of the continent was the White Australia policy, particularly the Anglocentric ideal behind it. During the 1930s, one piece of pro-Italian propaganda distributed in Australia was a pamphlet titled *The British Empire and Natural Resources*. This publication, most likely produced during the Italo-Ethiopian war, pointed out that the areas of the world that fell outside of the British Empire were more densely populated than those areas inside the Empire, excluding India. The densely populated areas outside of the Empire included 'that held by peoples of such high civilisation as the Italians, the Germans and the Japanese, who justly aspire to a higher standard of living and desire outlets for their surplus populations.'<sup>97</sup> Indeed, the Italian Government justified its invasion of Ethiopia as an attempt to solve its problems of overpopulation. This argument was put forward, for example, in another propaganda pamphlet distributed at the time titled *Can Italy be denied a Place in the Sun?*, which argued that a solution to Italy's overcrowding was 'finding a territory adapted to receive an ever increasing number of strenuous and capable workers.'<sup>98</sup>

Australia's safety, Battistessa argued, was also put at risk by continued reliance on Britain's navy for protection rather than investing in its own naval power. The third article, for example, includes a graphic which illustrates the reduction of Britain's sea power in the Pacific in order to

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<sup>95</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: Keep Australia White by Opening the Door to People of White Races,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 30 August 1933, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 113. See also: Alison Bashford, "World Population and Australian Land: Demography and Sovereignty in the Twentieth Century," *Australian Historical Studies* 38, no. 130 (2007): 211-27.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Papalia, "Imaginary Colonies: Fascist Views of Australia in Italian Diplomatic Correspondence 1922-1940."

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*



argue that even a minor naval power could be a danger to Australia.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the closest British naval base was in Singapore which could be too far in a moment of crisis and therefore, in the imminent race war that Battistessa predicts, 'Japan, the spearhead of the awakening yellow Asia, would find in Australia, as the shield of the white races, a shield as fragile as glass.'<sup>100</sup> Battistessa pointed out that Britain had made diplomatic agreements with Japan who was demanding naval parity with Britain and the US in the Pacific – therefore, hinting that Britain cannot be trusted or relied upon in a moment of crisis.<sup>101</sup> The purpose of making such an argument could have been to create a rift between Australia and Britain which, as Paplia has argued, was a strategy of Italian Fascist diplomacy during this period.<sup>102</sup>

Battistessa's arguments about Australia's underpopulation and uneven development focused on these phenomena as symptoms of an underlying Anglocentrism that desired to keep the Australian continent exclusively for the British. Battistessa addressed the British preference quotas in the North Queensland sugar industry, calling the idea of British preference inhuman, illegal, contrary to British fair play, and most importantly, detrimental to the interests of the country. In line with his critique of Anglocentrism, Battistessa argued that Australia's safety depends on discarding 'obsolete, outworn racial prejudices and restrictions'. Another example of such outworn prejudices was Australia's decreasing immigration intake from Southern Europe, which Battistessa's final article called a 'suicidal short-sighted policy'.<sup>103</sup> This argument is an echo of Theodore Roosevelt's warnings of 'race suicide' and the repetition of this warning by Battistessa's Italian predecessors.<sup>104</sup> Two years after Roosevelt made this warning in 1903, *L'Italo-Australiano* criticised Labor's position on labour immigration by arguing: 'For a handful of people to wish to keep a great continent to themselves is gross selfishness, and, more than that, to keep out labour which would be likely to develop the resources of the country is simple

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<sup>99</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: British Sea Power Could Not Protect Australia From the Pacific Peril,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 23 August 1933, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia's Head,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia's Head,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1.

<sup>102</sup> Gerardo Papalia, "Mussolini's Australian Campaign of 1935-1936," in *Italy & Australia: An Asymmetrical Relationship*, ed. Gianfranco Cresciani and Bruno Mascitelli (Ballarat: Connor Court, 2014), 145-75.

<sup>103</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: Keep Australia White by Opening the Door to People of White Races,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 30 August 1933, 1.

<sup>104</sup> Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 113-14.

suicide.<sup>105</sup> Another article called immigration restrictions a symptom of ‘suicidal egosim’. Since Italian writers often used the term ‘racial egoism’ rather than ‘racism’, a ‘suicidal egoism’ would imply that the particular form of racism that was Anglocentrism was suicidal and therefore a racism based on a pan-European identity against the Asian other was a necessary antidote to race suicide.

Alongside his appraisal of Australian colonisation and the argument that the persistence of the ‘yellow peril’ was Australia’s failure, there is a vision articulated in Battistessa’s writing of what Australia could be. This vision is based on comparisons to other settler colonies – to the US which had managed to develop into a world power that would be important in the new Pacific-centric world and even to Latin America emerging as an economic competitor to Australia. Battistessa speaks of a future in which Australians ‘must look forward to a strong and powerful White Australia’ and to take steps ‘to put Australia on the map of the world’s powers, as she deserves to be’.<sup>106</sup> Some of these steps were proposed by Battistessa and mostly involved opening Australia to further immigration from overpopulated European nations such as Italy and Germany.

### **Friendly White People**

Battistessa’s solution to overcoming the deficiencies of Australian colonisation and to putting the nation on track for a powerful future was for Australia to increase its intake of migrants. Not just any migrants but those that he called ‘friendly white people’ – a category in which he explicitly placed Italians and Germans. According to Battistessa, both Italy and Germany were countries with a surplus population and few overseas possessions to direct it to. He also believed that the peasant populations (which presumably made up the so-called surplus) of these countries were endowed with certain traits that made them suitable for the development and defence of White Australia. Supposedly efficient, hardworking, and the best agriculturalists and pastoralists in the world, Italians and Germans also provided a solution to the problems arising

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<sup>105</sup> ‘Immigration,’ *L’Italo-Australiano*, 9 September 1905, 2.

<sup>106</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘The Yellow Peril: British Sea Power Could Not Protect Australia From the Pacific Peril,’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 23 August 1933, 1.

from the corrupting influence of urbanisation.<sup>107</sup> In the fourth article of the series, this solution was articulated in a specific proposal for the Northern Territory to be handed over to private interests and developed by a partnership of British capital and Italian labour. He imagined that 'British capital and Australian and Italian labour fraternising in civil competition in the field of work, would bring about the miracle, turning the desert into a veritable Arcadia of plenty.'<sup>108</sup> This proposal aimed to solve one of Australia's greatest problems in terms of developing and defending the continent – that is, the settling of the 'empty north'.<sup>109</sup>

The Northern Territory was described by Battistessa in the introduction to the series as 'that unpopulated expanse of space and waste' and throughout the rest of the series drew attention to the perceived emptiness and wastefulness of Australia's tropical north.<sup>110</sup> This was a sentiment that had emerged in the late-nineteenth century when the Northern Territory was still under the control of South Australia and had grown in importance after Federation in 1901, leading to the transferral of the territory to the Commonwealth in 1911.<sup>111</sup> The years immediately leading up to the transferral were marked by a public debate that was ignited when US President Theodore Roosevelt warned Australians to 'beware of keeping the Far North empty.'<sup>112</sup> He also advised Australia to encourage 'the immigration of Southern Europeans, who will cultivate the rich country and become good Australians.'<sup>113</sup> This was a solution that had its Australian supporters, one of whom was George Edwards, the Free Trade member for Sydney, who told the House of Representatives in September 1906: 'I look forward to the time when the Commonwealth will take over the Northern Territory, and if possible a large slice of the northern part of Queensland, and set to work to develop the country by a stream of immigration from the southern part of Europe.'<sup>114</sup> Edwards singled out Italians from the southern region of Calabria as a source of immigration, to 'get a body of men who would be best suited to take up work in either

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<sup>107</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: Keep Australia White by Opening the Door to People of White Races,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 30 August 1933, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: British Sea Power Could Not Protect Australia From the Pacific Peril,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 23 August 1933, 1.

<sup>109</sup> See: Russell McGregor, *Environment, Race and Nationhood in Australia: Revisiting the Empty North* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>110</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Shadow of the Yellow Peril Over White Australia Not a Bogey, But a Real Menace,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 2 August 1933, 1.

<sup>111</sup> Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 113.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in: McGregor, *Environment, Race and Nationhood in Australia: Revisiting the Empty North*, vii.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in: *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 39, 26 September 1906, 5497.

Queensland or the Northern Territory.<sup>115</sup> A similar view in favour of Calabrians was expressed by the High Commissioner in Great Britain who told the *Pall Mall Gazette* in March 1910 ‘that the prospect of present day Australians settling in the Northern Territory was unpromising. Perhaps Italians from Calabria, and other people from the countries of Southern Europe, who were accustomed to heat, would make homes there’.<sup>116</sup> This preference for Calabrians suggests that when it came to the tropics, concerns of climatic suitability could override the general preference for migrants from the northern regions of Italy.<sup>117</sup>

Not everyone accepted this argument that Italians were better suited to the tropics. For example, James Wilkinson, the member for Moreton in Queensland, told the House of Representatives in 1906: ‘We hear today that it is suggested that Southern Europeans should be brought out to settle the Northern Territory, but I say that there is no spot on the face of the earth which the British people cannot settle as well as any people from Southern Europe.’<sup>118</sup> Wilkinson then backed this up by drawing on the history of pioneers, arguing that it was the British not the Chinese, Japanese, South Sea Islanders or Southern Europeans who did the pioneering work in tropical Australia. The climate argument was also rejected in November 1912 by Will Kelly, the Liberal member for Wentworth, who also questioned a key assumption behind the ‘yellow peril’ anxiety:

I do not think that the White Australia Policy would be greatly served by the proposal to people the Northern Territory with some of the Southern European races, which was the excuse a year or two ago for the circulation of some Labour literature in Southern Europe. It will be better served by settling the temperate portions of Australia with people of our own race. Some persons are under the impression that the Japanese want the Northern Territory, but they forget that they are accustomed to a cold climate, and would prefer New Zealand or Tasmania to the torrid regions about Port Darwin.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 39, 26 September 1906, 5497.

<sup>116</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 45, 11 November 1910, 6035. See also: ‘High Commissioner. The Northern Territory.’ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 4 March 1910, 5.

<sup>117</sup> At around this same time, Greek workers from the island of Castellorizo entered Northern Territory and presented a problem for the politics of immigration restriction, see: Andonis Piperoglou, “Greeks or Turks, ‘White’ or ‘Asiatic’: Historicising Castellorizian Racial-Consciousness, 1916-1920,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 40, no. 4 (2017): 387-402.

<sup>118</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 27, 5 July 1906, 1077.

<sup>119</sup> Cth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, no. 46, 13 November 1912, 5545.

Giovanni Pulle's Italian-language newspapers published in Sydney also weighed in on this debate. In 1908, *L'Italo-Australiano*, warned that '[t]he great northern half of Australia is lying in an empty, defenceless condition' and argued that the future of White Australia would never be certain 'until the North is filled with white people.'<sup>120</sup> Following on from this, the newspaper suggested that, while unable to populate the whole region, 'Italians could go some way towards populating it.'<sup>121</sup> This suggestion was once again supported with claims that Italians were climatically suited to the region. According to *L'Italo-Australiano*: 'One thing is certain, they [Italians] would be more adapted to the climate and to the cultivation of the natural products of the soil than most other nationalities of Europe, and they would prove good defenders of their adopted homes.'<sup>122</sup> This newspaper's successor, *Oceania* continued to make such arguments – for example, in 1913, it welcomed a proposal by Joseph Cook to colonise the Northern Territory with 'Italians, Spaniards, and other members of the subtropic Mediterranean races, who, both by lineage, by physique and by agricultural tradition, seem more fitted to the climatic conditions governing the Territory than the peoples of the colder North of Europe.'<sup>123</sup>

Writing two decades later, Battistessa did not refer to the tropical climate in his argument for further immigration from Italy. This was most likely because the problem of the white race in the tropics had been settled in the previous decade. Although in 1922, David Hastings Young declared that there was little chance of white people settling permanently in northern Australia because the privations of the region were 'inimical to health, happiness and longevity', the issue had been deemed to have been settled three years later by Ralph Cilento.<sup>124</sup> Cilento, who was the son of an Italian migrant from Naples, had published a book in 1925 in which he put his case that the white race would evolve to suit the tropical conditions. At the time of writing, he believed that the race was in a 'transition stage' and was evolving into 'a distinctive tropical

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<sup>120</sup> 'The Empty North,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 9 May 1908, 2.

<sup>121</sup> 'The Empty North,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 9 May 1908, 2.

<sup>122</sup> 'The Empty North,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 9 May 1908, 2. Regarding suitability for the climate, see also: 'Italians as Workers in Tropical Climates,' *L'Italo-Australiano*, 2 May 1908, 2.

<sup>123</sup> 'The Northern Territory Problem,' *Oceania*, 13 December 1913, 5.

<sup>124</sup> David Hastings Young, *A White Australia: Is It Possible? The Problem of the Empty North* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens Limited, 1922).

type.<sup>125</sup> As a result of the work of Cilento and others, Australian health public health scientists no longer considered the tropical climate dangerous for white bodies.<sup>126</sup>

Rather than draw on notions of climate and race to highlight the virtues of Italian migrants, Battistessa highlighted their historical contributions to the development and security of the tropics. When discussing his proposal for the settlement of the Northern Territory, Battistessa argued that ‘what thousands of hard-working and efficient Italian agriculturalists have done in the North of Queensland they could do in the Northern Territory.’<sup>127</sup> In doing so, he constructed Italians as pioneers in the tropics – a construction which the newspaper continued to elaborate over the following years. In an article about relations between Italian migrants and the Australian Workers Union published in 1934, the newspaper argued:

Any student of Australian economic development knows, and the Italians are fully cognisant of it, that the “White Australia Policy” was consolidated through the hard work, the ability, the adaptation of the Italians. They, more than anyone else, have demonstrated the possibility for white men to colonise the vast tropical areas which would have remained otherwise unutilised. They have demonstrated the possibility for the white man of living and living well, prospering in those tropical regions.<sup>128</sup>

Similarly, in 1937 Battistessa argued that Italians were ‘a hard-working, enterprising section of white labourers ... who were the hardy pioneers that helped make the waste bushland of tropical Queensland into wealth-giving lush green canefields’.<sup>129</sup> This construction of the Italian pioneer was examined in chapter four, where it was noted that part of this construction was an

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<sup>125</sup> Raphael Cilento, *Triumph in the Tropics: An Historical Sketch of Queensland* (Brisbane: Smith & Paterson, 1959).

<sup>126</sup> Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2002). Regarding whiteness, public health and the tropics, see also: Alison Bashford, “‘Is White Australia Possible?’ Race, Colonialism and Tropical Medicine,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 2 (2000): 248-71.

<sup>127</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘The Yellow Peril: British Sea Power Could Not Protect Australia From the Pacific Peril,’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 23 August 1933, 1.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Italians and the AWU,’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 12 September 1934, 1.

<sup>129</sup> Franco Battistessa, ‘A Quixotic Crusade Against a Laughable Scarecrow: The Phantomatic Italian Invasion of North Queensland,’ *Il Giornale Italiano*, 10 February 1937, 4.

essentialised connection to the land. Battistessa connected the Italian's love for the land not only to capabilities for development but for defence as well. In the final article of the series, he wrote:

The pastoral-minded Italian peasant has almost a fanatical love for his bit of soil; after his wife and children there is nothing he takes more pride in or loves more than his own land, for the defence of which, if the occasion arises, he would fight unto death with the same reckless fanaticism as a wild Irish Catholic for his Church.<sup>130</sup>

This convergence of the two constructions of the Italian migrant as both pioneer and defender of Australia was perhaps best articulated in a poem that the newspaper had printed on numerous occasions. This poem was titled 'The Italian Farmer' and was attributed to an author who wrote under the pseudonym Pappagallo. This was a poem of four stanzas of eight lines each and emphasised certain qualities of the Italian farmer such as hard work and frugality while connecting them to the development of a White Australia. The final stanza ended by connecting the Italian farmer's pioneering role to the defence of White Australia:

Then side by side with your pride I'll stand  
In the thick of the hardest fight  
To die, if God will, for this lovely land,  
To keep Australia white.<sup>131</sup>

These examples were expressions of Battistessa's assertion that Australia should open its door to white migrants who would co-operate loyally with Australia not just in development but also to form a safe bulwark of defence against possible invasion.<sup>132</sup> Battistessa was not alone in believing that Italians were necessary for the defence of White Australia. In fact, the importance of Southern Europeans for Australia's security was also a reason that an American style quota system on immigration was rejected during the 1920s. F J Quinlan, the Assistant Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, in response to calls from the Combined Sugar Conference to

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<sup>130</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: Keep Australia White by Opening the Door to People of White Races,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 30 August 1933, 1.

<sup>131</sup> Pappagallo, 'The Italian Farmer,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 3 September 1932, 1.

<sup>132</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: Keep Australia White by Opening the Door to People of White Races,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 30 August 1933, 1.

put such an American-style quota on Southern European immigration said: 'It will further be recognised that every European settling in the Far North becomes a factor to help in the preservation of the "White Australia" policy, and a safeguard against possible aggression by people of other races.'<sup>133</sup> Before Battistessa published his series of articles, Italians and Southern Europeans had already been recognised by Australian leaders to be playing an important role in defending Australia from the yellow peril.

In addition to interpreting the recent history of Italian immigration to North Queensland to support his argument, Battistessa also turned to a much longer history of Europe in order to prove the propensity with which the Italian could defend Australia against the yellow peril. In the second article of this series, Battistessa evoked the memory of Prince Eugene of Savoy, who is described as 'the Saviour Knight of White Europe', turning back the Ottoman Army from Vienna in 1683 – the Ottomans being an earlier "invading horde from Asia" and therefore an historical precursor to the present danger.<sup>134</sup> Three years later, Battistessa responded to diplomatic tensions between Italy and Great Britain by pointing out a centuries-long 'fraternity' between England and Italy which 'was cemented by the blood spilled together as allies in three campaigns – Crimea, China and on the Western Front.'<sup>135</sup> Looking to the future, Battistessa argued that it was this historical friendship that would be 'a great factor of peace, and the first step toward the final pacification of Europe and the white race, menaced by the dread peril of an awakened and predatory yellow Asia.'<sup>136</sup> An analysis of Battistessa's articles, therefore, expands upon the work of historians who, in researching the use of historical arguments behind Italian assertions of whiteness, have hitherto referred predominantly to arguments that highlight the Renaissance period of Italian history.<sup>137</sup>

These historical arguments that draw on both a recent local history and a deeper European history are also arguments about whiteness. Taken together, they highlight the role played by Italians in establishing and maintaining a transnational white supremacy through, on the one

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<sup>133</sup> NAA: A1, 1926/14582, Combined Sugar Conference Mackay Queensland, Protest against influx of Southern Europeans.

<sup>134</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'The Yellow Peril: The Mandate Islands are Cocked Pistols Levelled at Australia's Head,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 August 1933, 1.

<sup>135</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'Italy, England and Peace,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 26 January 1938, 3.

<sup>136</sup> Franco Battistessa, 'Italy, England and Peace,' *Il Giornale Italiano*, 26 January 1938, 3.

<sup>137</sup> Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, 64.



hand, providing the labour necessary to facilitate the expansion of settler colonialism in Australia, while on the other hand providing the generative culture on which all European and European-derived societies were built. Whether they were great princes or military leaders of the past or humble (yet legendary) peasant farmers of the present, Battistessa located Italians at the centre of White Australia's past, present and future.

It would soon become clear that Australian leaders did not share Battistessa's views on this. When Italy entered World War II on 10 June 1940, Italians were not considered 'friendly white people' but rather 'enemy aliens'. This led to the internment of approximately 5000 Italians and about twenty per cent of this number were British subjects by birth or naturalisation.<sup>138</sup> Battistessa himself was one of these Italians, having been interned just four days after Italy entered the war and was held at Hay camp in southwest New South Wales until February 1944.<sup>139</sup> Instead of being the primary candidates for the defenders of tropical Australia, Italians became the biggest threat.<sup>140</sup> This is demonstrated in the figures for internment which was not standard across Australia. Internment was most indiscriminate and precautionary in Queensland where forty-three per cent of registered male aliens were interned, whereas in Victoria less than three per cent were interned.<sup>141</sup> Even after they were released from internment, Italians from North Queensland were forbidden from returning to the tropics before the end of the war as they were deemed to be a continuing threat to national security.<sup>142</sup> Amongst those interned in North Queensland were those so-called pioneers who had also become naturalised British subjects. According to Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, the denial of rights to Italians was not just the result of the war crisis but part of a much deeper racist attitude toward Italians. In her view, this racism was rooted structurally in the absence of a separate Australian citizenship which had the effect of encouraging the development of a racialised construction of British subjecthood in some

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<sup>138</sup> Mia Spizzica, "Italian Civilian Internment in South Australia Revisited," *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia* 41 (2013): 74.

<sup>139</sup> NAA MP1103/2, PWN9011, Prisoner of War/Internee, Battistessa, Franco, Year of birth – 1885, Nationality – Italian.

<sup>140</sup> Papalia, "The Italian 'Fifth Column' in Australia: Fascist Propaganda, Italian-Australians and Internment," 214-31.

<sup>141</sup> Cate Elkner, "The Internment of Italian-Australians: A Perspective from Melbourne, Victoria," in *Enemy Aliens: The Internment of Italian Migrants in Australia During the Second World War*, ed. Cate Elkner, et al. (Bacchus Marsh, Victoria: Connor Court, 2005), 4-5.

<sup>142</sup> Jessica Carniel, "Calvary or Limbo? Articulating Identity and Citizenship in Two Italian Australian Autobiographical Narratives of World War II Internment," *Queensland Review* 23, no. 1 (2016): 23.

sections of Australian society.<sup>143</sup> As such, arguments such as Battistessa's that constructed Italians as pioneers who would defend White Australia from the threat of a racialised Other ended up looking like desperate attempts to deflect from one's own racialisation.

Franco Battistessa, therefore, is representative of a wider history of Italians in White Australia who attempted to stake a claim for themselves and their fellow migrants. Through figures such as Francesco Sceusa, Giuseppe Prampolini, Giovanni Pulle, Filippo Sacchi, Costante and Luigi Danesi, and Franco Battistessa, I have charted this history, with particular attention to the themes of race and labour. These men, who came from a variety of backgrounds, responded to the racialisation of Italians by utilising a range of different strategies that drew upon discourses and constructions they encountered in Australia and brought with them from Italy. They also played a role in the production of these discourses and constructions. Moreover, these men asserted a sense of belonging and attachment to Australia through overlapping identities based on notions of race and class or of attachments to nation, empire and the local district. Ultimately, however, their enthusiastic attempts to either challenge or collaborate with White Australia must be seen in the context of this period which, if it was not hostile to Italian migrants, contained and submitted Italian immigration to the goals and agendas of British/Australian settler colonialism.

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<sup>143</sup> Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, "Internments in Australia During World War Two: Life Histories of Citizenship and Inclusion," in *Enemy Aliens: The Internment of Italian Migrants in Australia During the Second World War*, ed. Cate Elkner, et al. (Bacchus Marsh, Victoria: Connor Court, 2005), 17.



## Conclusion

Over a period of roughly fifty years, the Italian-born population in Australia grew from a relatively small minority to become the largest non-British migrant group at the beginning of World War II. This fifty-year period of Italian migration to Australia overlapped with the introduction and development of the White Australia Policy. Consolidating a range of colonial legislation restricting labour and immigration, the White Australia Policy was underpinned by three main agendas: the creation of a racially homogenous white population, securing British/Australian possession of the continent, and the development of a modern industrial capitalist economy.<sup>1</sup> Italian migration complemented yet challenged these key agendas. Italians were allowed to enter Australia, to work, buy land and settle as naturalised citizens if they chose to. They were also sought out as a racially suitable alternative to Melanesian and Asian labour in key industries such as sugar, yet once these non-Europeans were successfully excluded, Italians became the primary target of racist and xenophobic speech, campaigns and movements.

In bringing together the histories of Italian migration to Australia between 1888 and 1940, with the White Australia Policy and its antecedents, this thesis has offered a substantially new historical narrative organised around the main themes of race and labour. I have presented this history through an analysis of discourses that emerged in newspapers, parliamentary debates, trade union meetings, communal gatherings and other sources surrounding the place of Italians in White Australia. Public debate and action openly questioned whether or not Italians should be allowed to benefit from the legislative framework that had been developed to encourage white settlement, white industry and the employment of white labour. Italians were not just the subject of these debates but involved themselves too by drawing on a number of discourses, racial or otherwise, depending on their social, cultural, political or economic backgrounds. They appealed to notions of white European racial solidarity, socialist internationalism and the rights of citizenship, and protested against displays of Anglocentrism, proletarian nationalism and 'racial egotism'.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Griffiths, "The Making of White Australia: Ruling Class Agendas, 1876-1888" (Australian National University, 2006), xv.

This thesis began in 1888, the year that the first continent-wide restrictions on Chinese immigration had been introduced. In the following year, the colonial government of Queensland announced the end of Melanesian labour in the sugar industry and two years later over 300 Italians arrived in Queensland to work in that industry. Italians began arriving in significant numbers at a time when the Australian population was becoming more homogenous and hence more white and more British. Despite being the largest non-British migrant group at the time, the Italians only made up 0.4 per cent of the total population counted in the 1933. By comparison, the total number of Italians in 1933 was smaller than the number of both the Germans and the Chinese counted in 1891. At a time when Australia had a population only half the 1933 total, Germans made 1.4 per cent of the total non-indigenous population in 1891 while the Chinese made up 1.1 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

The period covered in this thesis has therefore offered a counter narrative of Italian migration to Australia than that advanced by Eric Richards who, in reference to the period of post-war migration, called Italians ‘the effective pioneers of the first diversification of British Australia’ who had successfully ‘eroded the narrow Anglocentric monoculture of Australia’.<sup>3</sup> In this earlier period, Italians arrived, settled and their number grew to its numerically significant position at a time in which diversity was shrinking as a result of White Australia’s goal of homogenisation. Their presence in Australia was sometimes encouraged by this goal – for example, when they were recruited under contract to replace the South Sea Islanders who had been employed in the sugar industry for most of the nineteenth century. Even when they were not explicitly sought as migrants, Italians found opportunities to arrive, work and settle in Australia that had been denied non-white migrant groups. By the 1920s, Italians were considered to be amongst the pioneers of homogenisation rather than diversification. However, their presence forced an examination of the homogenising goals of White Australia. Public debates, for instance, were concerned with figuring out whether the goal of the White Australia Policy was to create an homogenous European population or an homogenous British population.

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<sup>2</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2-3 April 1911, Section II, Part II – Birthplaces (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1911), 127.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008), 249.

Such concerns were exacerbated by the fact that Italians settled in significant concentrations in regions that were key to developing White Australia. Despite making up only 0.4 per cent of the total non-indigenous Australian population in 1933, Italians made up twenty-five and twelve per cent of the Hinchinbrook and Johnstone Shires in North Queensland respectively, and accounted for significant percentages of the population in neighbouring districts.<sup>4</sup> In earlier decades, Italians made up significant sections of the male population in some districts of Western Australia. In 1911, Italians made up eleven per cent of the male population of Margaret and around seven percent of the male population in East Murchison, Magnet and Yilgarn.<sup>5</sup> These were all mining districts except for Yilgarn which was in the wheatbelt region. Ten years later in 1921, Italian men made up seventeen per cent of the total male population of Coolgardie, another mining district.<sup>6</sup>

British-Australians in both Western Australia and North Queensland expressed anxieties that they were being displaced by Italians and that these areas would eventually become Italian colonies. Such anxieties were expressed by Australians of various backgrounds, with working-class Australians often blaming employers for preferring Italian workers while middle-class Australians often blamed any such preference on the supposed faults of Australian workers. From this class conflict, two divergent constructions of Italian migrants emerged in the press. Labour newspapers generally constructed the Italians as racially inferior workers who were willingly subservient to capital and often characterised by a moral degeneracy, laziness, or criminality. This has been a construction found throughout much of the historiography on racism towards Italian migrants in Australia which has largely focused on the attitudes of the working class as articulated through the trade union movement. As such, this thesis has highlighted another construction of the Italian migrant that was articulated through newspapers of the moderate-to-conservative press in which Italians were supposedly hard-working, co-operative, and the rightful custodians of White Australia's future. In such constructions, middle-

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<sup>4</sup> Lyn Henderson, "Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939: Motives for Migration," in *Lectures on North Queensland History: Third Series*, ed. B. J. Dalton (Townsville: History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1979), 203.

<sup>5</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2-3 April 1911, Section II, Part II – Birthplaces (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1911), 364.

<sup>6</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 3-4 April 1921, Part XIV Western Australia – Population of Local Government Areas (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1921), 1032.

class Australians, while lamenting a loss for the British race, abandoned ethnic allegiances in favour of economic development and stability.

The concentration of Italians in these areas of Queensland and Western Australia also meant that they were associated with key industries that were important in the development and protection of White Australia. Both the gold mining industry of Western Australia and the sugar industry of North Queensland were examples of what Philip Griffiths has called 'levers of colonisation'. These were industries that attracted population and stimulated economic development without the need for state expenditure. These were 'exceptional industries' that required 'exceptional laws' to protect and preserve these industries for white people. In the late-nineteenth century, resentment against Chinese miners was fuelled by the perception that they were plundering a special resource to attract British miners without cost.<sup>7</sup> In the early-twentieth century the same could be said about Italians in the sugar industry. One point of public debate was the question over whether or not it was acceptable for Italians to prosper and succeed as a result of protective tariffs and levies. These policies also imposed costs on the rest of the Australian population who had to pay a higher price for white sugar and whose taxes provided subsidies for the industry and it was feared by some in the industry that the southern populations would refuse to fund an industry if it was run by Italians with Italian labour.

Moreover, North Queensland's sugar industry had the added importance of being considered the only industry that could sustain white settlement in the tropics. In an otherwise 'empty north', the sugar industry was important not only for development but also the defence of the entire nation. The industry was believed to be a strategic bulwark against larger nations in the Asia-Pacific region, especially a rapidly developing Japan. While Italians recognised this and argued that they were necessary for the defence of white possession of the continent, British-Australian anxieties of displacement also turned Italians into a defensive threat. This perceived threat became increasingly heightened in the 1930s and was behind the internment of many of Queensland's Italians after Italy entered World War II in June 1940.

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<sup>7</sup> Griffiths, "The Making of White Australia: Ruling Class Agendas, 1876-1888," 105-07.

Italians had begun to arrive in these industries during important periods of transition. In North Queensland, Italians were recruited in order to assist the industry's transition from a plantation-based system based on indentured Melanesian and Asian labour to an industry based on a network of small farms and centralised mills that were all owned and worked by free white men. In Western Australia, Italians began arriving in significant numbers when the industry was transitioning from an earlier alluvial phase to one dominated by deep-mining.<sup>8</sup> In this transition, Italians were recruited by large mining firms to cut costs and maximise profits during this phase which saw ownership of mines become concentrated in a smaller number of larger companies.<sup>9</sup> These moments of transition were also part of a broader transition to industrial capitalism which opened up the labour market as a free market of employers and wage labourers. In this transition, wage labour became associated with whiteness and unfree systems of labour that had been previously important in industries such as the sugar industry became associated with racial inferiority. Within this context, the Italians' struggle against prejudice was predominately one of resisting being racialised through recruitment in unfree relations of labour. Historians have often argued that Italians were recruited for field work in the sugar industry under contract because they were already racialised.<sup>10</sup> However, by paying attention to the Italian campaign against these schemes, this thesis has identified a opposite relation: that it was the work that racialised. Their resistance also reveals that the primary issue was not factors such as the wages or conditions of labour but it was the underlying relation between labour and capital.

In resisting racialisation, Italian migrants showed an awareness of their proximity to non-white migrant groups, such as the South Sea Islanders and the Chinese. It was their proximity to the latter group that seems to have been most concerning for Italians such as Francesco Sceusa who protested against claims that Italians were the 'Chinese of Europe' and against what he called the 'Chinesisation' of the Italian worker. Historians such as Francesco Ricatti have noted that Italians, learning of their proximity to non-white migrant groups in Australia such as the Chinese,

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Pascoe and Patrick Bertola, "Italian Miners and the Second-Generation 'Britishers' at Kalgoorlie, Australia," *Social History* 10, no. 1 (1985): 14.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Hartley, "Bewick Moreing in Western Australian Gold Mining 1897-1904: Management Policies & Goldfields Responses," *Labour History*, no. 65 (1993): 1-18.

<sup>10</sup> For a recent example, see: Marianna Piantavigna, "'Cement, Guide and Representative for the Exile and the Emigrant': Ideological Discourse and Italianità in L'italo-Australiano," in *The Transnational Voices of Australia's Migrant and Minority Press*, ed. Catherine Dewhirst and Richard Scully (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 42.



sought to differentiate themselves from these ‘more subaltern people’.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, Italians engaged in strategies of ‘whitening’ and asserted that their role in White Australia was to provide a buffer against darker people.<sup>12</sup> A related argument has been advanced by a number of historians who have argued that migrant groups such as Italians, Greeks and the Syrian/Lebanese did not oppose the White Australia Policy but just that their particular group was, either actually or potentially, subject to it.<sup>13</sup> While this was definitely the case for some Italians responding to the racism they faced in Australia, I demonstrate that some Italians drew on another set of discourses that also involved protesting against the White Australia Policy and its racist, nationalist and parochial foundations. Differentiating themselves from ‘more subaltern people’ could have also involved resisting the processes that produced and reinforced the more subaltern position of those groups. When Italian socialists resisted what they called ‘Chinesisation’ they also resisted labour relations that were fundamental to racialisation and exclusion.

Supporters of the schemes to recruit Italians under contract argued from a different position that emphasised wages and conditions instead of labour relations. These were the same Italians who defended street vendors and musicians from the charge that they were ‘the Chinese of Europe’ by highlighting the respectable qualities of hard work and industriousness. This is not to say that the socialist Italians did not speak about labour in relation to the moral discourses of respectability. Sceusa, for example, differentiated between what he called ‘Italian workers’ and ‘vagrant loafers’ – a distinction that drew on both ideas of labour and of nationality or race. In terms of labour, it was the Italians who were engaged in proletarian work – that is, free waged labour – who were the respectable workers and it was Italians engaged in itinerant self-employed occupations such as hawking fruit and busking who were the unrespectable vagrants. Clearly, discourses of respectability were utilised differently by migrants of different social, cultural or economic backgrounds. Historians of non-British migration to Australia have hitherto only researched how middle-class or conservative migrants identified with certain notions of respectability such as self-sufficiency and independence in order to assert claims of belonging in

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<sup>11</sup> Francesco Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 64.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Monsour, "Becoming White: How Early Syrian/Lebanese in Australia Recognised the Value of Whiteness," in *Historicising Whiteness Conference (2006: Melbourne, Vic.)* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007), 127.

colonial and post-Federation Australia.<sup>14</sup> As such, migration historians have not made full use of the concept of respectability as it has been used by other historians who have a more nuanced or complex conception of respectability that allows for distinctly proletarian forms of respectability.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, my research advances some possibilities for applying other concerns from historical research on respectability such as the place of children in discourses of respectability.<sup>16</sup>

The themes of respectability, labour and race were taken up in the second half of this thesis, however with different emphases that were influenced by the context of the interwar years. In this period, the issue of unfree labour was no longer as pertinent as it was in the years immediately following Federation. Instead, the connection between race and labour was often understood and articulated as a form of white masculine working class culture based on union membership, adherence to award wages and conditions, a respect for the institutions of arbitration and conciliation and a commitment to certain displays of solidarity such as participating in union-approved industrial action. No longer defined in direct contrast to the unfree labour systems of the nineteenth century, the new 'white man's standard' did not have the bipartisan support of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The latter class used the figure of the respectable Italian migrant to critique those hallmarks of white labour.

It was in this context that the complimentary constructions of Italian and Australian workers described above were articulated in the moderate-to-conservative press. These constructions were then appropriated by Italians of various social, political and economic backgrounds. Italians on the left such as Luigi Danesi drew on the moderate-to-conservative press's constructions of the nomadic 'southerner' in order to defend Italian field workers in the sugar industry and his proposal for local preference as an alternative to British preference. On the other hand, Italians on the right of politics, such as Franco Battistessa and Consul-General Antonio Grossardi drew

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<sup>14</sup> John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007), 82; Andonis Piperoglou, "Greek Settlers: Race, Labour, and the Making of White Australia, 1890s-1920s" (La Trobe University, 2016), 53.

<sup>15</sup> Janet McCalman, "Class and Respectability in a Working-Class Suburb: Richmond, Victoria, before the Great War," *Australian Historical Studies* 20, no. 78 (1982).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Lynette Finch's work which identifies the centrality of sexuality in constructions of respectability, in particular the sexuality of women and children: Lynette Finch, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 70-85.

on constructions of Italians as pioneers who had an essential connection to the land in contrast to the British migrants who came from the urban industrial centres of the United Kingdom.

Rather than resisting labour recruitment schemes that would lead to their racialisation as non-white, the main struggle of Italians in the interwar period was concerned with asserting their rights as settlers and citizens. This included the right to migrate without restriction, to live and work wherever they wanted, to purchase property, and to employ whoever they wished. Despite there being very few formal barriers, non-legislative or non-policy barriers were erected that restricted the opportunities of Italian migrants. The British preference quotas in Queensland's sugar industry that were examined in chapter five were an example of such non-legislative barriers.

The Italian struggle to have their rights as workers, settlers and citizens recognised was a struggle that was conscious of its own history. By the early 1930s, Italians had a presence in Australia that stretched back a number of decades that could be drawn upon for asserting a sense of belonging to White Australia. Through interpreting this history Italians constructed themselves as pioneers that were responsible for the development of agriculture in Australia and as defenders of white possession of the continent. This use of recent history was combined with other histories such as the history of Anglo-Italian relations to assert a sense of solidarity between Australian and Italian peoples as well as a deeper history of European civilisation that portrayed Italians as playing an important historical role in that civilisation's defence. Such interpretations of history extended earlier uses of history, such as those advanced by Francesco Sceusa in which he protested against Anglocentrism by arguing that Italy had throughout history provided the generative culture out of which modern Britain had developed.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated a number of ways in which the experience of migration challenged the thinking of both Italians and Australians on issues such as race, labour and nation. Some of the challenges that Italians posed for White Australia have already been mentioned above. In the years immediately following Federation, Italian migration prompted Australians to debate how whiteness was to be defined, how the category was to incorporate non-British Europeans, and how immigration restriction legislation should protect this category. It also raised the possibility that unfree labour systems could continue even when non-white

populations were excluded. In the interwar period, as numbers of Italians arrived at an unprecedented level, Italian migration prompted Australians to debate whether or not it was desirable for non-British migrants to become dominant in certain industries or geographical regions. When confronting such questions, different goals and loyalties were at stake, which sometimes led to Australians with competing class interests uniting in racial solidarity against Italians and on other occasions led to Australians establishing class-based solidarities with Italians against their Australian opponents. Italian migration also prompted changes to immigration policy and industry awards which introduced various restrictions and regulations on white European populations.

If Italians tested the limits of White Australia, they also had the limits of their own thinking challenged by White Australia. Early Italian socialists, for example, had their commitment to internationalism tested with figures such as Pietro Munari agreeing with racial exclusionary policies and Francesco Sceusa found himself having to become more nationalistic or patriotic than he would have felt comfortable with as he was compelled to defend the Italian community in the face of the nationalism and parochialism of the Australian labour movement. Furthermore, Italian migrants throughout this period had their ideal image of Australia tested by their everyday experiences. In the first two chapters I looked at how Italian socialist exiles had imagined Australia to be a workingman's paradise or an 'all men's nation' that was free from the prejudices of Europe and, in chapter five, how another generation of exiles had imagined Australia to be a protector of liberty that was free from the tyranny of Fascist Italy. Even Fascists such as Franco Battistessa had their view of British fairness and justice challenged by the treatment of Italians in Australia.

The need to defend themselves in a hostile White Australia did not mean that Italians always presented a united front. Their internal conflicts which developed across political and class lines often played out in public and I have paid attention to them wherever such conflicts arose. My concern with conflict amongst Italian migrants is by no means unique. Conflict has been a common theme in writing the history of Italian migration to Australia, however it has usually been confined to political conflicts in the interwar period. This thesis has been attentive to conflicts in the analysis of other periods and events, as well as conflicts that were not simply

political differences, and in doing so has sought to give more nuance to the interpretation of events examined.

My attentiveness to the conflict that exists within racial or national groups has also guided my analysis of the discourses that emerged from British-Australians. I have therefore sought to account for the way that groups with differing political and economic interests responded differently to the presence of Italians. This has opened up potentially different ways of understanding the racism that Italians faced in Australia. For example, research has hitherto been primarily focused on the attitudes of the working class articulated through the trade union movement and the Australian Labor Party.<sup>17</sup> This has meant that historians have identified and critiqued a set of assumptions that Australians held with regards to Italian migrants such as the perception that they were the dupes of the capitalists, that they were strike breakers, they worked too hard or not hard enough. However, looking only at the working-class and trade union response, misses out on a broader story of class conflict and capitalist development that I have sought to include in this thesis.

By opening up the other half of the story, the Australian workers' claims that Italians were used in the service of capital can be understood against the capitalists' assumptions that Italians were more hardworking and more subservient. Italians themselves often recognised this and protested against schemes organised by both Italian and Australian capitalists to recruit Italian workers under conditions that would be detrimental to the interests of the working class as a whole. Socialists such as Francesco Sceusa and Giuseppe Prampolini, in the years immediately before and after Federation, warned Italian workers not to involve themselves in such schemes and spoke out against any Italian who exploited his compatriots as an employer or a labour agent. In the interwar period, Italians affiliated with the Communist Party of Australia called on the Australian Workers Union not to ignore the grievances that Italian workers brought forward about their employers who were usually Italian themselves. Furthermore, in recognising the potential for Italians to be exploited by Australian capitalists, the labour movement had always

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example: Georgia Shiells, "Beyond Black and White Caricatures: Depictions of British and Non-British 'Whites' in the Brisbane 'Worker', 1924-26," in *Historicising Whiteness Conference (2006: Melbourne, Vic.)* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007).

been in conflict with itself over how best to deal with the issue. Calls for exclusion were always countered with calls for solidarity.

This thesis has covered a range of events, places, industries, individuals and groups across a broad period of time. As a result, numerous lines of inquiry have been opened up without being fully utilised or followed through. The role of children, for example, in the history of Italian migration to Australia was addressed in only one of the chapters, as was the role of figures such as the itinerant worker or the labour agent. Even the themes or figures that were analysed across a number of chapters could be further researched and expanded upon – for instance, the discursive comparisons between Italian and Chinese migrants could be expanded upon and be complemented with a social history of relations between these two groups. This is something that could be said of many of this thesis's arguments; my primary attention to discursive constructions should be complemented or counterbalanced with social history.

In addition to these limitations there are surely a number of things that I have almost overlooked completely. The main oversight being the presence and role of Italian women in White Australia. Although the vast majority of migrants throughout this period were men, after 1928 migration was limited to the wives and children of migrants already established in Australia. Furthermore, further analysis of Italians as settlers and citizens necessarily requires accounting for the assumption that women would migrate with Italian men and take on the reproductive labour necessary for establishing the family unit as the basic unit of settlement and for giving birth to and raising a future generation of Australian citizens. A broader conceptualisation of labour is therefore necessary than that utilised in this thesis to account for this reproduction labour as well as the labour that women were expected to do in the sugar industry. For example, as Vanda Moraes-Gorecki has pointed out, once an Italian man had worked and saved to buy his own farm, it was assumed that Italian women and children would become unpaid workers on the farm.<sup>18</sup> Such research could enhance or challenge the narrative of the syndicate as the main agent of land acquisition amongst Italian migrants in North Queensland. There were also the women

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<sup>18</sup> Vanda Moraes-Gorecki, "'Black Italians' in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland: A Reflection on Labour Inclusion and Cultural Exclusion in Tropical Australia," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 5, no. 3 (1994): 311.

who broke the conditions of the sugar award by working as a cook employed in cane cutting gangs.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, this thesis has analysed newspaper articles in both English and Italian, the parliamentary Hansard and a variety of government archives, to examine a number of discourses about Italian migrants that emerged out of the political and class conflicts of White Australia. It also examined the role Italians played in the creation and propagation of these constructions and how this was informed by their own ideas about race and labour that were influenced by a variety of political ideologies and class positions that divided the body of Italian immigrants in Australia during this period. In doing so, I have demonstrated that Italians challenged and complemented the goals of White Australia and have offered a new interpretation of Italian migration in the peak period of White Australia.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example: 'Women Cooks: Employed by Cane Gangs: Breaches of Award,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 3 September 1928, 7; 'The Sugar Award: Fines for Breaches,' *Daily Mercury*, 24 December 1928, 10; 'Industrial Prosecution Fails,' *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 27 January 1933, 6.

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