

“Everybody loved me”
The creation of an Italian immigrant legacy



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Abstract

This thesis uses oral histories of post-Second World War Italian immigrants of Griffith in NSW, Australia, to examine questions of memory, nostalgia and how the relationship between interviewer and narrator shapes narratives of the past. Griffith boasts the highest population of people with Italian heritage per capita in Australia. Yet historians have largely overlooked this community, being rural and isolated from other Italian strongholds in Australia. Most who immigrated to Griffith traded a rural Italian lifestyle for a rural Australian lifestyle. By turning to oral histories, therefore, this thesis presents fresh insights on an otherwise neglected rural migrant experience.

Prejudice, fear of the other, fear of what was not understood, and racial vilification were experienced by Italians in Griffith at the time. Yet the surprising finding of this thesis is that interviewees did not report memories of racism. Explaining this apparent anomaly, this thesis argues that 'insider' relationships shared between narrator and oral historian as well as the narrators' desire to impart life lessons affected the telling of history. This relational dynamic shaped the life-story such that it did more than recount the past. The life story became a vehicle to establish narrators' legacy (that is, an appreciation of the narrator's life story and contribution to the community by future generations). The thesis further argues that the crafting of a legacy in oral histories occurred through the construction of redemptive narratives about the past as well as the formulaic narratives and tropes which might limit discussion of uncomfortable memories about the past. This thesis concludes, therefore, that when it comes to oral history, history is constructed relationally.

Figure 1 - Mr Vecchio getting of the boat that had docked in Sydney, taken by a cabin mate, 1960, donated from personal collection.

I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my own original work. All versions of the submitted thesis (regardless of submission type) are identical. Research for this thesis followed ANU Human Ethics Protocol; 2018/785.

Signed:

Date:

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Illustrations

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Terminology and Translation

Nonna - Grandmother

Nonno - Grandfather

Nonni - Grandparent

Sorella - sister

Sorelle - sisters

Fratello - brother

Fratelli - brothers

Mamma - mother

Papa - father

Zia - aunt

Zio -uncle

Zii - aunts/uncles

Nipoti - grandchildren

Cugini - cousins

Cugino - cousin

Genitori - parents

Parenti - family

Razza - race

Solitaria - solitary, alone

Sugo - Sauce

Pane - Bread

Australiani -Australians

Gelosia - jealousy

Veneto - dialect of Veneto which is a Northern region of Italy

Siciliano/a- dialect of Sicily which is a Southern region of Italy

Calabrese- dialect of Calabria which is a Southern region of Italy

Lazio - dialect of Lazio which is a Central region of Italy

Abruzzese- dialect of Abruzzo which is a Central region of Italy

Milanese- dialect of Milan which is a Northern region of Italy

Pugliese - dialect of Puglia which is a Southern region of Italy

Anglo Australians - Australians of English-speaking descent

Preface

As I hit the Griffith shire on the outskirts of Yenda the dirt dramatically changes colour from dull brown to the red bush dirt iconic in Australia. Canals begin to appear on the sides of the road reaching off into far distance, a reminder of the Italians who irrigated the Australian desert. The moment I drive into Griffith and see the Casella Wines signposting I know that I am now only five minutes from my *Nonna's* front door and, without doubt, a pot of *sugo* and homemade *pane* ready for me with a side dish of guilt, nostalgia and memory to overwhelm, for a place and people with whom I have spent so much of life.

The air smells sweet along the canals driving with the windows down, it is April and the last remnants of summer fruits and grapes are still clinging to the trees and rotting in the dirt. The canals are running low after a summer of little rain and much irrigation, no wild asparagus has grown this year. The main street cannot be more different to any country town in Australia, the shop fronts with 'hard' to pronounce Latin names; *Il Corso*, *La Scala*, *Giuseppe's*, menus in both Italian and English. Shops dedicated to Italian dietary needs at the forefront on the main street; *La Piccola Groceria*, *Bertoldo's*, whilst Coles and Woolworths are out of the way a few blocks from the centre of town. Fashion boutiques for both men and women with European brands at cost discount that allow for a fashionable youth culture in the middle of the bush whose parents predominantly work the land. I am only a two-hour drive from where I grew up in Wagga Wagga, but it would appear like I had crossed into a small rural Italian town or at the very least a hybrid country.

I make a stop first before my *Nonna*'s and head to the cemetery to say hello to my fellow history and oral story lover *Nonno*. I let him know what I am here to do and tell him not to worry I've been writing his story since I was twelve, I will remember it. Pulling in to my *Nonna*'s, the garage door is up signalling that I can walk straight in. I sit in the car taking a few deep breaths, I know I am here to give her a listening and record her oral stories. But this is the first time I have been back since my *Nonno* died and the idea of turning the car back around to Canberra is overwhelming. Then I remember that is why I am doing this, before I run out of time again. Griffith has the highest population per capita of Italian immigrants in Australia and yet in the landscape of historical discussion and debate feature only as once off mentions as rural statistics in a book about Melbourne or Sydney or heavily in the area of organised crime, worryingly sensationalized in Australian television drama. The stories of these ageing Italian Australians have not been written or recorded and as a key part of the rural, immigrant and farming fabric of Australia deserve to tell their story and for their words to find a place among the historical memory.

Figure 2- Mr Vincenzo Schiripa circa 1950s, donated from personal collection



Introduction: Memory, Migrants and Interpretations

Oral history is vital for understanding migrant history, especially the experiences of post-Second World War migrants. In many parts of Europe, those who became migrants had not received the opportunity to obtain an education.¹ No more so is this true than in Italy due to years of poor social policy. While great academic works have continued to be produced,² the education of Italy's middle to lower class citizens, in the post-war years was neglected. Entire generations went without formal education or education past the lower years of primary school.³ With advanced reading and writing being the exception for those born just before and during the Second World War, particularly in rural and southern regions, it is no wonder that, while we the descendants of migrants hear around the dinner table the rousing exploits of our forbearers, we have not read them. The primary way to access the past of post-war Italian immigrants, and in fact, post-war immigrants from all over Europe is to sit down, ask questions and record them for posterity. Though these stories come in the form of personal narrative, they have much to tell us about Australian society as seen by those who 'belong' in the Australia of today, but in the past, did not. Oral history, then, is at times the only way to access a past that has not been written down and filed into a

¹ Francesco Ricatti, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 102.; Florinda Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio, 13 April 2019; Maria Zappacosta and Ignazio Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio, 17 April 2019; Maria Vecchio and Carmelo Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio, 15 April 2019.

² As can be seen evident from historians Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Paserini's famed works, who were both born during the war and educated in the aftermath. Keep in mind both were born and raised in Upper Central and Northern Italy.

³ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio; Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio; Vincenzo Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio, 16 April 2019; Rosa Daltorio, Interview with Rosa Daltorio by Bianca Vecchio, 15 April 2019.

neat archive and the best way of understanding the experiences of these ‘new Australians’.

The perennial questions raised by oral history have to do with historical reliability and its frequent deviations from the ‘known’ story, or at least from the narratives told by academic historians. Questions of reliability are increasingly a concern in the field of migrant studies; post-war migrants are now entering the later stages of life, where memory is not only corrupted through old age but medical conditions which oftentimes makes it unusable. They are now far enough removed from the immediacy and pain of immigration that their memories might seem caught in the ‘nostalgic trap’ that oral historians must carefully navigate.

The issues of how to interpret apparently nostalgic and possibly unreliable memories has been experienced globally and beyond the field of migrant history. In the USA, Shircliffe was hesitant to express the ‘romantic’ memories associated with segregated schools expressed by black families during the Jim Crow era, for fear of the damage these oral histories may cause under the present political climate.⁴ Laura Rademaker uncovered positive memories of mission life and rations when interviewing Indigenous Australians and Jacob Dlamini recalls a fondness for a language use to subjugate and segregate his people during the era of apartheid.⁵ Nostalgia in migrant memories is also a key theme particularly seen in Eastern Europeans and Soviet/USSR migrant/refugees who despite fleeing

⁴ Barbara Shircliffe, “‘We Got the Best of That World’: A Case for the Study of Nostalgia in the Oral History of School Segregation”, *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 2 (2001). 62

⁵ Laura Rademaker, “‘We Want a Good Mission Not Rubbish Please’: Aboriginal Petitions and Mission Nostalgia”, *Aboriginal History Journal* 40 (2016). 119-120; Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Melville: Jacana Media, 2010). 136

their homeland remember it fondly.⁶ Svetlana Boym argues that what they are nostalgic of is a reconstructed past.⁷ Nostalgia then, in oral history, might tell us as much about the past as it does for the desires of the future. This would suggest that nostalgic memories should not be dismissed but might be key to understanding desires of the individual.

Nostalgia is particularly present in migrant histories. The desire of migrants, too, to conform to ideals of the successful immigrant is a central theme of this thesis. This thesis, therefore, investigates how positive memories of hard times expressed in oral histories are to be understood by historians.⁸ It further asks how the individual's desire to construct a personal legacy, that is, an appreciation of their life by the next generation, affects their narration of the life story. In doing so, it aims to shed new light on the dilemmas of interpretation faced by oral historians.

The Italian migration stories

In the wake of the Second World War, Australia, by governmental decree, was flooded with European Immigrants and Displaced Peoples (DP's) from International Refugees Organization (IRO) camps. These people were to fulfil Arthur Calwell's ambition of 75,000 immigrants a year to allow Australia to stay

⁶ Rory Archer, "It Was Better When It Was Worse": Blue-Collar Narratives of the Recent Past in Belgrade', *Social History* 43, no. 1 (2018). 32; Svetlana Boym, 'From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia', *Representations*, no. 49 (1995). 143

⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). 351

⁸ There are over twenty-four hours of interview time in my oral histories and not every story has the ability or scope to be presented in this thesis. Some however merit further research such as the Catholic Church's institutionalisation and assistance in the removal of female infants and children in overcrowded immigrant families to orphanages. Which was a central point to the Zappacosta Interviews.

a float and competitive in the wake of the war.⁹ Immigration at first was confined to the British, but by 1947 IROs and DPs who fit the criterion of being ethnically 'white' enough were being carefully selected for migration to Australia.¹⁰ By 1951, these quotas filled, and Australia's borders became open to Southern Europeans. Of these, a high percentage were Italian, with the Assisted Migration Agreement being signed in 1951, and more specifically Southern Italian.¹¹ The boundaries of "whiteness" were being expanded.

In the aftermath of both world wars, failed fascism and the great depression, Italy, particularly the south was in turmoil and poverty. To the point that its own government was advising learning a second language and assisting in migration respectively to North America, South America and, eventually, Australia.¹² Yet in 1921, both the United States and Canada had curtailed their immigration intake from Italy.¹³ Many Italians looked, instead, to Australia. The two ways to come to Australia were as an immigrant in the assisted passage scheme or being sponsored by a family member already in Australia.¹⁴ Migration agreements between Australia and Italy firstly assisted in the migration of men to Australia, with the guarantee of jobs and accommodation.¹⁵ This was followed by the ability to provide sponsorship to bring over wives and families.¹⁶ Between 1950 -1951

⁹ Charles A. Price, 'Post-War Immigration: 1947-98', *Journal of the Australian Population Association* 15, no. 2 (1998). 116

¹⁰ Jayne Persian, *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2017). 38; Price, 'Post-War Immigration: 1947-98'. 116

¹¹ Gianfranco Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, Rev. ed (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 125-126; Price, 'Post-War Immigration: 1947-98'. 116

¹² Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*. 125

¹³ Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2002). 267

¹⁴ Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*. 125-126

¹⁵ Cresciani. 125-126

¹⁶ Cresciani. 125-128.; Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901* (Sydney: Manchester University Press, 2009). 217

20,000 Italians arrived and by 1971 300,000 arrived under the 'assisted passage' agreement between Australia and Italy.¹⁷ While many settled in the capital cities of Australia, many more still immigrated to the cane fields of North Queensland, the mines of Western Australia and the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) of Griffith in New South Wales.¹⁸

Griffith has the highest per capita population of people of Italian descent in Australia, yet does not feature highly in work on Italian immigration outside a few factoids in seminal works like Francesco Cresciani's *Italians in Australia* (2009).¹⁹ There is the respected journalistic and novelist investigatory work around the historical and transgenerational links to the 'Ndrangheta in Australia by Keith Moore (2009) Tom Gilling and Clive Small (2017) in which Griffith features as a central component.²⁰ While these contribute to the story of Italians in Griffith, their focus on the criminality of a small group, means that the broader experience of Italian migrants remains to be investigated.²¹

Argument and Structure

This thesis is the result of oral histories recorded in early April of 2019 in Griffith, NSW. It will explore how the individual's desire to construct a personal legacy affects the narration of their life story through the examination of their oral

¹⁷ Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*. 125.; Richards, *Destination Australia*. 217

¹⁸ Ricatti, *Italians in Australia*. 26

¹⁹ Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*. 65., Gianfranco Cresciani and Italy Ministero degli affari esteri, *Migrants or Mates: Italian Life in Australia = Emigranti o Compari: Vita Italiana in Australia* (Sydney: Knockmore Enterprises, 1988). 93

²⁰ Keith Moor, *Crims in Grass Castles* (Apollo Bay: Pascoe Publishing, 1989).; Clive Small and Tom Gilling, *Evil Life: The True Story of the Calabrian Mafia in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2016).

²¹ James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 27

histories. By legacy I mean an appreciation of the narrator's life story and their contribution to the community in future generations. They denied experiences of racism or prejudice, as exemplified by the thesis' title quote "everybody loved me".²² In these narratives, experiences such as hard times in business, family or the farm were nearly always interpreted as redemptive and used to demonstrate their success as migrants. This positivity is striking. It cuts against most historical research that suggests that they were in fact victims of racism and so is the central interest of this thesis.²³

The idea of the successful immigrant is ingrained in migrant culture, success, however, is no guarantee nor is it the reality of all immigrants, as demonstrated in the classic immigrant memoirs *Romulus, my Father* (1998), *Sasha and Olga: a true tale of survival* (2006) and in the cult narrative classic *Looking for Alibrandi* (1992).²⁴

What is interesting then, is how all the oral histories whether or not they admit to

²² Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio. This title is also a play on the popular American sitcom, "*Everybody Loves Raymond*" (1996-2005) which focuses on the family dynamics of second and third generation Italian immigrants to America.

²³ See, for example; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia*, 53-75; Helen Andreoni, 'Olive or White? The Colour of Italians in Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 77 (1 January 2003).; Catherine Dewhurst, 'Collaborating on Whiteness: Representing Italians in Early White Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008).; '60pc Students Racist against Asians: Study', *Canberra Times* (ACT: 1926 - 1995), 26 February 1993; Brent Staples, 'Opinion | How Italians Became "White"', *The New York Times*, 12 October 2019, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/12/opinion/columbus-day-italian-american-racism.html>; J.B Marshall, 'Immigrants in Ghettoes', *Canberra Times* (ACT: 1926 - 1995), 13 May 1988; Luke Vitale, "'They're Just as Good as White People' Locating Italians in the Australian Field of Whiteness, 1891-1996' (Honours, University of New South Wales, 2013); Francesco Ricatti, 'Elodia and Franca: Oral Histories of Migration and Hope', *History Australia* 7, no. 2 (2010); Tim Soutphommasane, *I'm Not Racist But ... 40 Years of the Racial Discrimination Act* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2015); Francesco Ricatti, 'The Emotion of Truth and the Racial Uncanny: Aborigines and Sicilians in Australia', *Cultural Studies Review; Carleton* 19, no. 2 (2013).

²⁴ Raimond Gaita, *Romulus, My Father* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999).; Eva Maria Chapman, *Sasha & Olga: A True Tale of Survival* (South Melbourne: Lothian Books, 2006).; Melina Marchetta, *Looking for Alibrandi*, 3rd ed. (Victoria: Penguin Books, 2000).

racism and prejudice, follow a similar structure and narrative arc that details success in the face of hardship but never a failure.

The opening chapter of this thesis will argue that the insider relational dynamic of the interviews shapes the life story through the desire to construct a legacy. It adopts the approach of Christa Wirth by considering the insider/outsider status of me and the narrator, to understand how this relationship affected the shape of narratives told in oral histories. I refer to interviewees as ‘narrators’ to emphasise the way that an oral history is a construction of a life-story, not simply a process of responding to answers in a survey.²⁵ Paying attention to my relationships with narrators reveals that narrators’ desire to impart life lessons and philosophies to me, an ‘insider’ they considered under their protection, shaped the content and framing of their life stories. In the oral history encounter, I became the bearer of the legacy to be relayed to future generations.

Chapter two will argue that the narrators accommodated negative memories that fell within their personal experience through placing them within a redemptive narrative. It does this by considering anecdotal stories of everyday life that show by historical and academic standards show clear indication racism, but they are explained away through other factors. These redemptive narratives allowed for a personal and collective history of Griffith to be constructed to exemplify Italian immigration as a success story both in terms of personal achievement of becoming Australians and providing a new life for their families.

²⁵ Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Viii, 4, 15

Chapter three will argue that the narrators accommodated negative memories of their history which they experienced as beyond their control through common tropes of a collective memory. It will examine how, in the oral histories, conversation around race and crime was avoided, denied or diverted during the process of creating a lasting legacy. It will do this by observing oral history and memory around racism and the Donald Mackay assassination assessing the similar speech patterns and formulaic sets of evidence given when asked to discuss these events.

A Settlement history of Griffith

Griffith is a small regional town in North-West of the Riverina in country NSW, on the land of the Wiradjuri people of Australia. Griffith, including the adjoining villages, has a population of 25,641 as of 2016.²⁶ Wiradjuri land was first invaded by European settlement near Bathurst in 1813.²⁷ The first wave of European habitation was the 'Squatters' who took up vast parcels of land then, in the 1880s, many farming families came to the area following John Robertson's 1861 Land Act.²⁸

²⁶ '2016 Census QuickStats: Griffith (C)', accessed 12 October 2019, https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA13450?opendocument; Jim Hagan and Ken Turner, 'The Italian Influence on Political Change in the Murrumbidgee NSW 1941-2007', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 93, no. 2 (2007). 172. It is situated in an area also commonly known as the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area.

²⁷ Marcia Langton (2010). *"They Made a Solitude and Called it Peace"* in Rachel Perkins and Marcia Langton, *First Australians* (Carlton: The Miegunyah Press, 2010). 32

²⁸ Government of New South Wales., 'Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1861' (AustLII, 1861), http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/num_act/claa1861n26270; Bruce Scates and Melanie Oppenheimer, *The Last Battle: Soldier Settlement in Australia 1916-1939* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2016). 6 This act allowed crown land to be removed from squatters and purchased.

The first Italians who came to the area in 1913 were mainly *Veneto*, that is, coming from the north-eastern region of Italy. By 1921 the Italian population of Griffith numbered only 33.²⁹ The first significant influx of Italians occurred in the post-First World War years, between 1920-1930, primarily from the mid to northern regions. During this time returned Australian soldiers were given parcels of land in the area.³⁰ Despite hard work, their inability to pay their liabilities saw that the majority of them did not flourish.³¹ So began the gradual procurement of the farms by the Italian community. With a background of small acreage farming, agricultural skill and their willingness to work hard, most were very successful. By 1954 nearly half of all farms were Italian owned.³² The second wave of Italian immigration to Griffith was the largest and occurred in the years' after the Second World War. The establishment of chain migration allowed for a considerable number of Italian immigrants to join the Griffith community.

Oral history and migrant histories

My interest in the oral histories of Italian immigrants in Griffith follows the work of Alessandro Portelli, Mark Peel and Wirth. Portelli and Peel open narrations with poor and underprivileged communities who have been overlooked or forgotten. Portelli primarily investigating in industrial towns of Italy and Harlan USA, exploring transnational connections and the construction and subjectivity of

²⁹ Cresciani and esteri, *Migrants or Mates*. 93

³⁰ George Pich, 'Italian Land Settlement in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas; 1915-1972' (PhD, The Australian National University, 1975). 22

³¹ Scates and Oppenheimer, *The Last Battle*. 106

³² Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*. 63

memory.³³ Peel explores the ‘disadvantaged’ towns of Australia, highlighting the fear and hope of impoverished communities in the face of failing egalitarianism in Australia.³⁴ Wirth's (2002) oral history of Italian immigrants in America spans three generations from a single-family.³⁵ Wirth exemplifies how the migrant experience continued to influence the construction of memory in consecutive generations.³⁶

The continual movement of immigrants and refugees ensures that this intersectional genre of history is continuously evolving, being re-worked and written to reflect and keep pace with the latest theories, political and social shifts, not only in the Australian context but internationally. Since the 1970s in Australia there has been a dramatic shift in the discipline of history which has seen a rise in history from below, labour and oral history.³⁷ Within these lenses of history has also seen the growth the migrant studies, with ground-breaking contributions from Francesco Cresciani and Charles Price who set the tone specifically for Italian studies.³⁸ There has been a significant increase in the use of feminist frameworks to understand migrant history as seen by contributions from Ellie

³³ Jesse Buckwalter et al., ““Their Words Still Haunt Me”: An Interview with Alessandro Portelli’, *Appalachian Journal* 40, no. 1/2 (2012).; Betsy Brinson and Alessandro Portelli, ‘Crossing Cultures: An Interview with Alessandro Portelli’, *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (2001).

³⁴ Mark Peel, *The Lowest Rung: Voices of Australian Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). i

³⁵ Christa Wirth, *Memories of Belonging: Descendants of Italian Migrants to the United States, 1884-Present* (Leiden: BRILL, 2015). 14

³⁶ Wirth. 14

³⁷ Please see; Simone Battiston, *Immigrants Turned Activists : Italians in 1970s Melbourne* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2012).; Andonis Piperoglou, ‘Greeks or Turks, “White” or “Asiatic”: Historicising Castellorizian Racial-Consciousness, 1916–1920’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 40, no. 4 (2016).; Roslyn Pesman, ‘Italian Women and Work in Post–Second World War Australia: Representation and Experience’, in *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives*, by Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Michelle Arrow and Angela Woollacott, ‘Introduction—How the Personal Became Political: The Gender and Sexuality Revolutions in 1970s Australia’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 33, no. 95 (2018).

³⁸ Cresciani and esteri, *Migrants or Mates*; Charles Archibald Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963).

Vasta and Helen Andreoni alongside an increase in family structures to include the perspectives of child migrants as exemplified in Joy Damousi's work.³⁹ Within migrant studies, Joseph Pugliese has opened the doors to cross-examining ethnic cultures in relation to each other by looking at the trans-Mediterranean connections of Mediterranean cultures and how these continued through migrants.⁴⁰ The examination of transnational memories and experiences, meanwhile, has been the successful endeavour of others.⁴¹ Significant works on refugees continued to be produced, while not central to this thesis are essential dialogues in the immigration field, particularly on where they fit in the settler-colonial and decolonisation contexts, which have become enormous areas for debate in migrant studies.⁴²

³⁹ Ellie Vasta, 'Gender, Class and Ethnic Relations - the Domestic and Work Experiences of Italian Migrant Women in Australia', in *Intersections - Gender/Class/Culture/Ethnicity*, by Jeannie A Martin, Gillian Bottomley, and De Lepervanche Marie M (Allen & Unwin, 1991); Ellie Vasta, 'Italian Migrant Women', in *Australia's Italians - Culture and Community in a Changing Society*, by Stephen Castles (Allen & Unwin, 1992); Ellie Vasta, 'Italy's Many Diasporas', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*; London 24, no. 6 (2001); Andreoni, 'Olive or White?'; Helen Andreoni, 'Italian Women in Rural Australia: The Diversity of Experience, Language and Narrative', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 16 (1994). Joy Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War: Australia's Greek Immigrants after World War II and the Greek Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁴⁰ Joseph Pugliese, *Transmediterranean: Diasporas, Histories, Geopolitical Spaces* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2010).

⁴¹ Effy Alexakis and Leonard Janiszewski, *Greek Cafés and Milk Bars of Australia* (Braddon: Halstead Press, 2016); Gabaccia and Iacovetta, *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives*; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia*. Penny Russell, Desley Deacon, and Angela Woollacott, *Transnational Ties* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2008); Marilyn Lake and Ann Curthoys, *Connected Worlds* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2006).

⁴² Francesco Ricatti is a leading expert in the renegotiation of migrant history to be perused from settler-colonial angle. In his work *Italians in Australia* (2018) argues that scholarship needs to shift beyond examining Italian racialisation through the traditional viewings. Instead, examinations through a colonial context will highlight the contradicting and evolving factors of the complex issue that see the Italian migrants fluctuate between the spheres of perpetrator and victim. Griffith with such a dominate grouping of Anglo Australian, Italian/Italian-Australians and the proximity of the Indigenous reserve "Three Ways" is an exceptional situational locality for the type of future scholarship Ricatti's as calls for. To enable Australian scholars to understand the complexity of Italian racial identity beyond the American contexts.

Where migrant studies fall with Australian history is hard to determine. Can we successfully carve it its own chapter in time, or is it so entangled in Australian history under that mantra “we are all migrants here” (except Indigenous Australians) that there is an unwavering continuity?⁴³ This thesis, however, considers the Post War Era as a turning point in Australian migrant history. Both in terms of migrant influxes and the subsequent scholarship dedicated it, which demonstrate how drastically changed Australia’s social, political, physical and culinary landscapes become.⁴⁴ History about migrants comes in many forms: big

⁴³ Ruth Balint and Zora Simic, ‘Histories of Migrants and Refugees in Australia’, *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018). 379

⁴⁴ Alexakis and Janiszewski, *Greek Cafés and Milk Bars of Australia*; Andreoni, ‘Italian Women in Rural Australia’; Andreoni, ‘Olive or White?’; Balint and Simic, ‘Histories of Migrants and Refugees in Australia’; Battiston, *Immigrants Turned Activists*; Jessica Carniel, ‘A Cultural Affair to Remember: Nostalgia, Whiteness and Migration in “Love’s Brother”’, *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 3, no. 1 (2009); Alessandro Cavalli, ‘Reflections on Political Culture and the “Italian National Character”’, *Daedalus* 130, no. 3 (2001); Jennifer Cornwall, *Fruits of Our Labour: The History of Griffith’s Italian Community* (Griffith: Griffith City Council, 2007); Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*; Cresciani and Esteri, *Migrants or Mates*; Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War*; Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994); Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, *Remembering Migration: Oral Histories and Heritage in Australia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2019); Dewhirst, ‘Collaborating on Whiteness’; Gabaccia and Iacovetta, *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives*; Gaita, *Romulus, My Father*; Anna Haebich, *Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia 1950-1970* (North Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2008); James Hagan, ‘From Bicycles to Mercedes. Italians in Rural NSW and Political Choice: Griffith 1947-1984’, in *La Diaspora Italiana Dopo La Seconda Guerra Mondiale = the Italian Diaspora after the Second World War*, by James Hagan et al. (Bivongi: AM International, 2007); Hagan and Turner, ‘The Italian Influence on Political Change in the Murrumbidgee NSW 1941-2007’; Rina Huber, *From Pasta to Pavlova: A Comparative Study of Italian Settlers in Sydney and Griffith* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1977); Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*; 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 (1969); Marchetta, *Looking for Alibrandi*; Luca Marin, ‘Migrant Activism in Australia: The Case of the Italian Federation of Migrant Workers and Their Families (FILEF)’ (Swinburne University of Technology, 2016); Persian, *Beautiful Balts*; Ros Pesman and Catherine Kevin, *A History of Italian Settlement in New South Wales* (Sydney: NSW Heritage Office, 1999); Pesman, ‘Italian Women and Work in Post-Second World War Australia: Representation and Experience’; D.E Phillips, ‘Wade Shire Council Griffith Community Profile: A Guide to Community Welfare Needs in the Griffith Area.’ (Department of Youth and Community Services, 1981); Daphne Eunice Phillips, ‘Italians and Australians in the Ovens Valley Area: A Sociological Study of Interaction between Migrants and the Host Population in a Rural Area of Victoria’ (PhD, Australian National University, 1970); Pich, ‘Italian Land Settlement in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas; 1915-1972’; Piperoglou, ‘Greeks or Turks, “White” or “Asiatic”?’; Price, ‘Post-War Immigration: 1947-98’; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia*; Georgia Shiells, ‘Immigration History and Whiteness Studies: American and Australian Approaches Compared’, *History Compass* 8, no. 8 (2010); Soutphommasane, *I’m Not Racist But ... 40 Years of the Racial Discrimination Act*; Paolo Totaro and Frank Pangallo, *Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales: Visit to Griffith and Leeton*,

history, national history, family histories, history from below, oral history and political history. There have also been a rise in government-funded and commissioned community projects such as *Fruits of our labour* (2007).⁴⁵ These, coupled with Rina Huber's, *From Pasta to Pavlova* (1977) are the sole academic works on Griffith.⁴⁶ Both are primarily focused on northern Italians in the area and leave little mention to the rest of the regionally varying Italian cultures and peoples. Inadvertently, perhaps, they reflect the painful situation of the north versus south conflict still socially present in Italy and Italian peoples globally today.⁴⁷

Works highlighting the unjust persecution and resentment toward Italian immigrants in the face of multicultural Australia have also been published. These have made a contribution to whiteness studies and have been highly influenced by the 'white on arrival' debate in America.⁴⁸ Key American academics being Thomas Guglielmo (2004), Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (2003) and David Roediger (2005).⁴⁹ The 'white on arrival' debate explores how southern Europeans

24-26 September, 1979 (Sydney: Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales, 1979); Vasta, 'Gender, Class and Ethnic Relations - the Domestic and Work Experiences of Italian Migrant Women in Australia'; Vitale, "'They're Just as Good as White People' Locating Italians in the Australian Field of Whiteness, 1891-1996'; Chapman, *Sasha & Olga*.

⁴⁵ The NSW Migration Heritage Centre and the Griffith City Council commissioned and funded; Cornwall, *Fruits of Our Labour*.

⁴⁶ Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Cary: Oxford University Press USA, 2003).

⁴⁷ Gaia Giuliani, 'Whose Whiteness? Cultural Dis-Locations Between Italy and Australia', in *Transmediterranean: Diasporas, Histories, Geopolitical Spaces*, by Joseph Pugliese (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2010), 128; Maria Zappacosta and Ignazio Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio, 17 April 2019; Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

⁴⁸ Staples, 'Opinion | How Italians Became "White"'.

⁴⁹ Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Cary: Oxford University Press USA, 2003).; Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, *Are Italians White?: How Race Is Made in America* (London: Routledge, 2003).; David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness How America's Immigrants Become White. The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

exposed the fluidity of categories of race and colour. They reveal that the colour line is transient and relies on social, political and other contexts, to move it, disrupting the hard-set categories in the USA.⁵⁰ Prominent among Australian historians are Catharine Dewhirst and Andreoni.⁵¹ Looking at the post-war period, Andreoni has given voice not only to matters of motherhood and isolation but also to ideas of belonging, examining the shifting line of inclusion as ‘attained’ through race humour.⁵²

However, since the 1970s in Australia, these studies focused primarily on immigrants who settled in the capital cities of Australia. In the case of Italians, the historical literature is particularly centred on Melbourne and Sydney.⁵³ The rural experience has been largely overlooked in New South Wales. Some notable works have been done on the Italians in the Ovens Valley region in Victoria and Greek migrants in the transnational “Greek Café bar project”, which highlighted the international and national links between the Greek diasporic communities, including those in rural Australia.⁵⁴

Therefore, while the history of Italian migration to Australia has been considered in various ways and from various angles such as race, gender, trauma and urban societies there remains considerable scope to understand the regional/rural experience as this was an essential part of the (Italian) migrant experience in

⁵⁰ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness How America's Immigrants Become White. The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*. 134-136

⁵¹ Dewhirst, ‘Collaborating on Whiteness’, Andreoni, ‘Olive or White?’

⁵² Andreoni, ‘Olive or White?’. 90-92

⁵³ See Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*.; Ricatti, *Italians in Australia*.; Richards, *Destination Australia*. Along with minimal rural studies there has been minimal research into migrant LGBTQIA’s which is an avenue that needs better representation.

⁵⁴ Phillips, ‘Italians and Australians in the Ovens Valley Area’.; Alexakis and Janiszewski, *Greek Cafés and Milk Bars of Australia*.

Australia. In the last decade, histories written by the insider generation have been on the rise as seen by Piperoglou, Andreoni, Wirth and Jayne Persian.⁵⁵ With such a rise, one must then consider the relational impact on what type or form history is constructed and the amount of functioning objectivity and subjectivity available. This thesis makes a new contribution by its close attention to how oral history shapes the telling of migrant-life stories. It sheds important new light both on migrant experiences in the past and the ways these are retold and remembered in migrant communities today.

Methods and approach

This insider/outsider model as used by Christa Wirth is the theoretical basis for the following chapter. I share a common kinship with some of the interviewees, either agnatic, affinal and ritual, and ethnicity with all of them.⁵⁶ I am a second-generation offspring of Giovanni Mario and Maria (nee. Cerrito) Vecchio and, therefore, a member of two direct lines of Italian, (*Lazio and Sicilian*) ancestry and immigration to Australia. A phone call then, asking for permission for an interview was no concern, and everyone readily agreed to assist in my project regardless of the precise kinship between us. On the phone, I explained who I was and our common kinship, but I assured them this common kinship and shared ancestry in no way meant they were required to give the interviews. It was

⁵⁵ Piperoglou, 'Greeks or Turks, "White" or "Asiatic"'; Andreoni, 'Olive or White?'; Wirth, *Memories of Belonging*; Persian, *Beautiful Balts*.

⁵⁶ These are criminological and sociological terms for describing different insider categories that are best used in the context of this thesis to describe my insider positions as a whole, highlighting the intersectionality and multidiscipline subject oral history and memory studies are. Please see Frank K Salter, *Risky Transactions: Trust, Kinship, and Ethnicity* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002). 109-111 for a more in-depth understanding.

merely a starting point of familiarity with which we shared that made everyone feel comfortable.

The interviewing process began in April 2019 and was spread over two weeks in Griffith, NSW. I interviewed twelve people, with the interviews lasting for roughly two hours. This is where I spent my school holidays as a child, Christmas, Easters, New Years, birthdays, a weekend every second month plus weddings, baptisms, funerals, Catholic rites of passage, harvests and festivals. The insider/outsider perspective that I had to my advantage (to be discussed in detail in chapter one) is key in the material that is expressed and withheld in my interviews. This, the interview methodology and my insider perspective will be explored deeper in chapter one when discussing relational aspects to creating legacies to live by

Figure 3- Mr and Mrs Cerrito, myself and Mr and Mrs Vecchio, my Nonni, at my 21st August 2016, donated from personal collection



Chapter One: Legacy and Life Lessons

During the interview process the construction of memory emerged as a linking theme between the interviews. Particularly surprising was how quickly a narrative could transition from a discussion of people and events to an instructional life lesson. These memories covered a range of varying topics, each event held personal resonance, and each could be turned into a teachable moment. For instance, if we discussed early jobs, the dole and today's attitudes to handouts would be brought up. Memories of early romantic relationships and the joys of young love would be followed by inquiries about my lack of a boyfriend or husband and remedies for this provided.

The two major themes which will be discussed in this chapter are the ways in which narrators used memories of the past to impart the morals and values. A huge range of moral and practical advice was given across a scope of topics such as when discussing family environments, the importance of calling or coming home is infused “and the [next] generation plants no more here....it's not growing because there is nothing here anymore...the young people [shooing action] but for growing family Griffith is the best place” or sometimes it simply instructional on how to work hard and achieve success in the face of difficulty;

You call people for the interpreter, you never learn! You never learn and that's the way, I tried to remember I tried to do, you know 46 years I do business, I know a couple of words but you gotta know the business you have to know the businesses in your mind.¹

¹ Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio; Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

In this chapter, however, I focus on the examples of welfare and the practical advice on dating and qualities to look for in a man, and how these topics were directed at protecting and helping my future.

This chapter will explore how my approach, methods and the relational dynamic between interviewer and interviewees shaped the telling of life stories due to interviewees' desire to construct a legacy. I will discuss the insider/outsider relationships I rotated between and the effect these had on how information was presented to me, especially as a philosophy or guidance. This chapter will argue that these messages of relational guidance that were expressed through the life story reflected the legacy the narrators both believed they have built and wished to express. This resulted in the presentation of memories that seamlessly moved from between memories that typify the immigration story to life lessons.

Oral History and the Interview

Oral history sources, as put by Alessandro Portelli are “dialogic narratives created in the encounter between the historian and the narrator”.² My approach to oral history follows Portelli. This means that while parts of this story may have existed before in shared memory or an individual retelling, I am interested in the way it is told in the particular instance of the engagement with me, the historian.³ The interaction and open dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee are contextually crucial in shaping the content. Portelli functions under the

² Alessandro Portelli, ‘A Dialogical Relationship: An Approach to Oral History’ (Expressions Annual, 2005). 1

³ Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*. 4-5

understating that, unlike conventional historical sources, oral sources are not 'found' but 'co-created', arising out of an entirely unique interpersonal experience.⁴ He further explains that the agenda of the historian will be shaped by the agenda of the interviewee and subsequently the exchange that takes place is an exchange of stories. Appreciating this dynamic means that "the entire agenda of the research may be radically revised" in light of the historian's encounter with their interviewees, as mine was.⁵

Each interview ran for an average of two hours, with the same set of questions being presented to each interviewee. Followed by the option for open dialogue and anecdotal stories if they considered them to be important or simply wanted to share.⁶ These open-ended questions, that is, the ones that did not lend themselves to a familiar narrative or explanation, caused the most anxiety and were often met with silence.

Portelli interprets this as a fear of the interviewee of being dismissed as irrelevant by the historian.⁷ He postulates that even the most confident of subjects and naturally loquacious will be worried that their "precious narrative" that they have spent a lifetime curating "may not be recognised, may not be history, as they have been taught to define it."⁸ I countered this anxiety by sharing my own anecdotal

⁴ Portelli, 'A Dialogical Relationship: An Approach to Oral History'. 1

⁵ Portelli. 1

⁶ Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio. Zappacosta and Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio. This was far too long for my *Nonno* who stopped the interview twice to ask if we had talked enough because he was hungry and Ignazio Zappacosta who insisted we take two coffee breaks, morning tea, pre-lunch snacks and lunch. I did not complain, Italian cooking is the best.

⁷ Portelli, 'A Dialogical Relationship: An Approach to Oral History'. 4

⁸ Portelli. 4

stories about my experiences of being Italian and relatable family humour, this opened up the dialogue when veering off the set questions. While being thoroughly entertaining, emotional, stirring and inspiring, much of it was a personal narrative that was aimed at guiding me over the stricter interpretations of history “an entry to the historical narrative founded on the significance and singularity of an individual’s contribution to history” which are so binary and confining.⁹ I set a recognisable format by discussing particular aspects that were understood as a shared narrative; the boat to Australia, the early years in Griffith, working lives and the assassination of Donald MacKay. I followed this with discussion around government assistance in assimilation, treatment in hospital after births, housing and ideas about marriage. This approach allowed for themes that related to familiar stories or fit into a well-rehearsed narrative to be discussed and then the anecdotes to be expressed.

Insider vs. Outsider Status

As highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, I had the unique opportunity of being both an outsider and insider to Griffith’s Italian community. My understanding of my positionality draws on the work of Wirth who interviewed Italians in America.¹⁰ The insider/outsider approach recognises that different memories will be revealed in a narration depending on the degree of insider or outsider connections the interviewee and interview subject have.¹¹ A key example

⁹ Jill Lepore, ‘Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography’, *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (2001). 141

¹⁰ Wirth, *Memories of Belonging*.

¹¹ For individual categorisation of my kinship bonds to each narrator please see their specific profile in appendices.

of outsider positionality is expressed by Portelli who, when interviewing Julia Cowans, found she refused to talk to Portelli about the designated topics and questions because he was a white man, and she was a black woman. She spent the next two hours informing him on why this was her decision, and Portelli was able to extrapolate influential importance from this in the way he approached differences and how they create spaces to form in-depth conversation that would never usually occur.¹² In contrast, Wirth approached her interviewees with much in common. For one she is a family member of her interview subjects and second she holds the same ethnicity.¹³

The question is whether a researcher of any genre of history who shares biographical experiences and social categories such as race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation or ancestry with a group—the so-called ‘insider’—gains more trustworthy knowledge about the studied people. Would these relationships invalidate her or his results?¹⁴ Issues of emotion and anxiety about community expectations and pressure have the potential to colour the memories presented and the way they are analysed.¹⁵ This is explored in Robert Innes’ interviews with Native Americans to whom he was related. He argues that his “‘closeness’ to the research participants aided [his] gaining both their trust in [him] and their interest in the project”.¹⁶ He follows this with an explanation of innovative questions he

¹² Buckwalter et al., “‘Their Words Still Haunt Me’: An Interview With Alessandro Portelli”. 90

¹³ Wirth, *Memories of Belonging*. 49-50

¹⁴ Wirth. 49

¹⁵ Lorina Barker, “‘Hangin’ Out” and “Yarnin””: Reflecting on the Experience of Collecting Oral Histories’, *History Australia* 5, no. 1 (January 2008). 3-5

¹⁶ Barker. 3-5; Wirth, *Memories of Belonging*. 28

doubt outsiders would come up with or even get answers to.¹⁷ The outsider position is the traditional objectivist approach to social truth in academia: the person who does not have any contact to the group is less easily influenced, and hence their acquired knowledge is supposedly unbiased.¹⁸ The critical and aware approach needed by insiders to combat this is highlighted by historian Richard White who found when interviewing his mother he played the roles of child, historian and adult and could not take his own mother at her word.¹⁹

Robert K. Merton's critique of the framework still shapes the debate over insider and outsider statuses. He criticises the insider doctrine for giving automatic credibility based only on the fact of membership to a specific group and points out how every human being has several group affiliations.²⁰ Merton's conclusion, however, ends up supporting the insider perspective as he points out that everyone is an insider as well as an outsider to some degree, depending on the situation, and that knowledge can be gained from both positions.²¹ For instance, despite sharing no ancestry, one may be considered an insider simply by being of the same gender as their interview subject and, therefore, falling under both categories.

My insider/outsider perspectives reflect Wirth's own as discussed in the introduction with a certain degree of familiarity, but it differs in a few key aspects.

¹⁷ Robert Alexander Innes, "Wait a Second. Who Are You Anyways?" The Insider/Outsider Debate and American Indian Studies', *American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2009). 457, He however does not discourage them for trying to do so.

¹⁸ Wirth, *Memories of Belonging*. 50

¹⁹ Wirth. 28

²⁰ Wirth. 50

²¹ Wirth. 50. In my experience, based on these interviews, the interviewer almost always holds a position in both camps with the degree changing depending on the interviewee.

I have stronger bonds of kinship with my interviewees, and I hold the same citizenship: Australian. Wirth by citizenship is Swiss while her interviewees are American, with both holding a shared Italian ancestry.²² My connection to my Italian heritage is also two degrees stronger than her own as she is a fourth-generation descendant with mixed heritage.²³ Her phone calls existed to establish relationships with her subjects, most of whom she had no memory of while mine spent the first ten minutes catching up on our daily lives or that of my parents'.²⁴

However, as an insider, I was privy to information that I know for a fact would not have been shared with others outside of the community because I was told as such. One interviewee who I shared only third-degree ritual bonds of kinship with only agreed to the interview because of the deep respect he has for my parents.²⁵ Another who I share affinal bonds with agreed because he knew I would have the patience to sit there and work through the mix of his Italian and broken English without making judgments or undermining the way he spoke.²⁶ For those who shared immediate blood relation, *Nonni*, I was cautious about being overly critical/naïve of the memories presented. It became obvious very early on, much like White, that the extreme of multiple interplaying insider aspects were just too many to get an objectively accurate story. What instead I received was an extra watered-down life story intent on creating a positive legacy that I could pass on with fondness but little historical accuracy. I suspect this was done to shield me. I

²² Wirth, *Memories of Belonging*, 51

²³ Wirth, 51

²⁴ Wirth, 51. My gender as an insider also played a significant role. The women talked to me of their experiences raising children, giving birth and experiences as immigrant women. This information would not have been freely given were I a man interviewing them.

²⁵ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

²⁶ Leonarda D'Aquino and Sebastiano D'Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D'Aquino with Bianca Vecchio, 13 April 2019.

was and always have been theirs to protect, but it was this very relationship which led them to want to participate and help with this project, as they have always helped me my whole life.

Even if I did not have a close relationship with the narrator in a town as small as Griffith, they had one with various members of my family who or my *Nonni* who were among either agnatic, affinal, ritual or workplace social circles. There was no need, as Wirth experienced, for me to be ‘initiated and generously taken into the nuclear of the families of the interviewees’, I was automatically assumed in said position whether I knew them or not.²⁷ I had access to intimate family memories because I was family, and in some cases, there were attempts to truly make me family in the affinal sense.²⁸ Portelli explains that “it would be a mistake to assume that only similarity allows interviewees to express themselves, that similarity establishes the trust on which dialogue is founded”.²⁹ No doubt this is only a starting block for the process, but it was one that was essential in this case.

Despite our differences in agnatic and affinal connections with our interviewees, I draw upon Wirth’s model in that we are both familial members of any of our subjects and trained historians. However rather than simply using insider/outsider to explain the subjectivity of topics in the past I am using it in a new way. That is to reveal how the insider/outsider status transforms oral history into more than a vehicle for telling information about the past, it becomes an instrument for interviewees to impart life advice to someone they feel they have an obligation to instruct and mentor.

²⁷ Wirth. 51

²⁸ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

²⁹ Buckwalter et al., ‘Their Words Still Haunt Me’. 90

Jørgen Carling, Marta Bivand Erdal and Rojan Ezzati argue the dangers of insider/outsider that are posed to the informant and fears of betrayal that could come from the interviewers.³⁰ These being based mainly in political spheres of interpretation, politics played little if at all actively in these interviews. My innate relational connections negated any and all of these fears of betrayal and as Portelli put allowed trust to build, from which inmate life stories were told. My ancestry of both southern and central descent connected me in a far more identifiable and meaningful way to my interviewees than simply being Italian.

On the one hand, I presented as an insider through common ties of kinship, and on the other hand, I presented as an outsider because I am a historian and I did not grow up in Griffith as all my *cugini* (*cousins*) did. This has always been something evident that has set myself and my siblings apart from our *cugini*, we have always held an air of difference and degree of separation because we did not go to our grandparents' care after school. I have no ties of friendship in Griffith that exist outside of kinship bonds. Therefore, outside of kinship bonds, I do not know the rest of the Italian community well, often hearing things second-hand through my parents and grandparents. This made for exasperated conversation when I would pause in an interview and ask them to explain how exactly they knew someone when I did not recognise the name. It was knowledge they assumed I had and found it tedious when they discovered I did not. This did, however, make for a more thorough dialogue, "common ground makes communication possible, but difference makes it meaningful".³¹

³⁰ Jørgen Carling, Marta Bivand Erdal, and Rojan Ezzati, 'Beyond the Insider–Outsider Divide in Migration Research', *Migration Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014). 42

³¹ Buckwalter et al., 'Their Words Still Haunt Me'. 90

My outsider status as a historian also manifested itself through the presence of my recording device and words that required simplification i.e. assimilation, integration and White Australia Policy. I expected the recording device as Wirth found to create distance as it “turned what could have been a private situation where two people in the living room of the interviewee talk to each other into a semi-public one”.³² However, everyone was extremely excited to tell their story and happy at the prospect of others knowing it. Only in one instance were somethings discussed and then asked to be withheld from the project. My outsider perspective as a historian did not create the distance I anticipated, but instead gave me legitimacy in the eyes of my interviewee subjects. This was an indication of how strong my insider ties to the community and narrators where, they countered any apparent outsider tie that presented.

Life lessons and the insider/outsider status in Oral history

Portelli examines objectivity and subjectivity with oral histories as a fluctuating mess. What is fact and what is meaning; how to the two mix and separate from each other on a constant basis is his interest. What I came across in these interviews was the way that history became a vehicle to impart moral values around hard work and to give practical advice. Often when the interviews take place, the historical fact given is then bolstered by an anecdote or opinion. Moral guidance and values came through the historical memories of hard work and access to welfare. This was commonplace among my interviews “did you ever

³² Wirth, *Memories of Belonging*. 51

receive any monetary assistance from the government?” followed by the fact “no, never”³³ then bolstered by an opinion of why this was;

There was no government assistance at the time, the dole came in about ten years later, around the 60's I'm not sure when the 60's when the dole came in, we didn't get no dole.³⁴

Despite Vincenzo Schirripa's certainty in recounting his story, the dole in fact came into use in the Australian welfare system in 1945 after being announced in 1943.³⁵ It is possible there was limited, or no information or guidance given in how to access these funds for immigrants in rural areas. Alternatively, a teachable moment on welfare now and a philosophy on the dole at the time was presented;

When I first came to Australia, and we went to pick canes Queensland had two weeks of flood, we had signed an agreement to pick cane because you had to sign to show you had work which was meant to protect us. So, we went to go collect the dole, we went for the dole, and they didn't give it us, instead they sent us to the roads [to do something unclear] with shovels load up the big truck instead of using the machines. They did not give us the dole, like that like how they give it to you [my generation]. They sent us to work on the roads around, see I remember that – that was a good direction! Because if you don't give the dole, they go pinch things [now], but that time there it was a good direction. I remember that it was very, very clear.³⁶

When reflecting this above philosophy with Sebastiano D'Aquino, I perceive this lack of follow-through on a written agreement, was the company taking advantage

³³ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

³⁴ Schirripa.

³⁵ 'National Museum of Australia - Unemployment Insurance', accessed 22 September 2019, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/unemployment-insurance>.

³⁶ D'Aquino and D'Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D'Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

of the vulnerable Italian immigrants and a display of xenophobic racist behaviour or action that would have occurred by the 'Anglo' population in Queensland regardless of racial category. The idea that there was a lack of an advocate for the rights of the Italian workers can be seen to affect Sebastiano and those he worked with adversely. There was no protection of rights against loss of income and no safety net to which they were entitled. Instead, they were sent to work on other projects which was not the pre-disclosed agreement.

Hard times, painful experiences and those that, to my understating, display racist, xenophobic or exploitative behaviour were often then underlined in his life-story with this redemptive narratives or pride. Here instead of a despondent response to the lack of government assistance, Sebastiano expressed his appreciation for the lesson learned, when times are hard do not go looking for a handout, work harder. He expresses this as "good direction".³⁷ What is also clear when comparing the two opinions of the dole is the varying degrees of information, Sebastiano knew the dole is available in the 1950s and was trying to access it in times of hardship whereas Vincenzo was not aware it was an avenue he could have navigated to help relieve financial stress. Exemplifying the clear miscommunication of information that is rampant among immigrants in Australia. Highlighting the faults in the immigration schemes that were quickly overwhelmed and not set up to deal with so many immigrants, in such a capacity across such vast piece of land.

³⁷ D'Aquino and D'Aquino.

It is also key how the end of the story was presented as an educational tool for moral guidance, for me to adopt. Sebastiano was critical of the current uses of the dole, as well as of those today who are denied welfare assistance (when he stated they just 'go around pinching things'). Welfare assistance, or the desire for assistance, clearly for Sebastiano has an element of criminality attached to it which he distances himself from and is keen also for future generations to do so. This memory began in the past and is yet bought into the present with the comparison how of young people are unwilling to work and the types of people looking for welfare. It is understandable from an insider and relation lens why these types of morals and values are seen as so key to impart on to me from Sebastiano as my *Zio* and the informal patriarch of our family he would view it as his responsibility and his privilege to impart these types of wisdoms as part of his legacy. In these oral histories, the past has a relational and educational dynamic that is also valuable for constructing a lasting legacy for young people like me to emulate. In play is my insider category not only as an Italian but as a great niece, the familial obligation to ensure my life is as perfect as possible by taking on board the history and philosophies of an elder. It is an attempt at an assurance their life's work and meaning will carry on.

Philosophies, practical advice and the insider/outsider relationship in Oral History

Life-philosophies themselves were not isolated to a single interview; they were an overarching theme, particularly when discussing money and dating, philosophies were in no short supply. By ‘philosophies’ I am working from Portelli’s definition that sees philosophies as the subjectivity and interpretation of a fact and often the desire to create a philosophy is the motivation for telling life stories.³⁸ Immigrants with life lessons that can only be experienced not taught have so many philosophies about life in general to share.

In the interviewees, the narrators used history to instruct the types of values I should look for in romantic relationships. Whereas historical experiences with welfare was used to convey morals and values about hard work, my dating life was used to express practical concern and guidance. For example, at one stage, Vincenzo’s interview lapsed into Italian for 20 minutes. While translating the interview, I was anxious to determine what precisely was being said. It ended up being opinions and philosophies on dating, dating in general, specific familial experience and then personalised on how it may apply to me. Dating advice which was often coupled with nostalgic and romantic stories of first loves in Italy and Australia were almost always followed up with the question “*Hai un fidanzato? Sei sposato?*” (Do you have a boyfriend? Are you married?).³⁹ Helpfully his wife Francesca dropped in for this part of the interview and together they gave their advice, “Women have long hair and short memories”, “*Vai a scuola, si sposano*

³⁸ Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*. 79-80

³⁹ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio. Lucia Dei’Agnoli, Interview with Lucia Dei’Agnoli by Bianca Vecchio, 16 April 2019.

buono” (go to school, and you will marry well) and from Vincenzo “even the ugly girl in Italy, the *bruta* (brute), is better than an Australian girl”.⁴⁰ This was followed by a few moments of going through eligible men in their family for whom I could possibly be a good match: “what about my grandkids, you like? You like one of them?... you not twenty-four?! You look a fifteen, ma you not have a boyfriend (tutting) geeze, ma you beautiful!...you should getta, you find someone”.⁴¹ The tone of my marriage status changed very quickly from a thoughtful suggestion when Vincenzo thought me to be fifteen to insistent that I should actively be on the lookout for someone suitable when it was revealed I was in my mid-twenties.

The theme of dating was a topic in most interviews, even those I was closer to who knew of my personal life. Memories of how couples met their loves and philosophies how I should do the same were not subtle.⁴² Differences both good and bad were given between Italian and Australian men, as my *Nonna* highlighted;

Nonno is very good man, very good, ma still soma time you know all men the same, the man come from Italy, Bianca, itsa different idea [points at her head to imply different mentality], soma time this one too [Australians], cos a drink Australiana people drink lots, but the Australiana people no drink a little bit the better, ma the man come a from Italy “ompfh, omofh ompfh” [mimics hard headedness and ordering around] “or here or there!” [loud sad sigh] ahhh. All the same. Some a time come good some time come cranky...The best thing [about Australia] is the people more different than in Italy, the people more *calma* [calm], more I don’t know it’s a different, different way of life. Italian too much *superbia* [pride] too much, “ah who do that who do this [yells and points]”...yeh, English talk to you [calmly]

⁴⁰ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

⁴¹ Schirripa.

⁴² Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio; Dei’Agnoli, Interview with Lucia Dei’Agnoli by Bianca Vecchio; Zappacosta and Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio; Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio.

and slow] “Bianca you want this, you see this?” more calm, in Italy
[yelling again] “come on, come here, blah blah blah”.⁴³

They are not only trying to construct legacy through the narrative of their life story but also through my future in attempting to have me conform to community morals and values. This is also visible as they impose their own community standards on me assuming I identify as heterosexual. No other option is even considered. It is not only the content of the historical memory but what history does in guiding me. The idea that choosing a partner who does not drink was reinforced again with advice from Vincenzo who detailed his own limited engagement with alcohol and smoking in his youth and promotes water and healthy eating, and how his own sons are a testament to this attitude, should I be interested. The idea of marrying a man who drinks anything more than a small glass of alcohol is discouraged “No touch! No touch! No touch!”.⁴⁴

This highlights a small microcosm of stereotypical ideas of binge drinking culture that is attached to ‘Anglo’ Australian cultures. These memories, of the experiences of Italian men and women engaging with Australian men permeated through, enough that I am subsequently warned away from Australian men who drink. This reveals that during the early years of settlement in Griffith, drinking culture must have been high enough among Anglo Australians for Italians to have taken note. Similarly, bad behaviour such as ordering people about and being loud must have been noticed regularly from these consumers for it pervade enough that Florinda Cerrito is able to make comparative statements about the attributes of

⁴³ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio.

⁴⁴ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

Italian and Australian men based on this idea. The lesson here if I am not going to marry an Italian man, find an Australian who does not drink, he would be nearly as good as an Italian.

Memories of the past here are always told through the lens of advice and only secondarily for concern of the historicity. Yet an understanding of the migrant social experience in the past can be drawn from these life lessons. How they remember young Australian bachelors and how they apply that to the present as potential candidate. They also illuminate how relationships were handled in the past, though clearly with this much interest in my romantic future, they reveal that there was likely similar family meddling in romantic relationships in the past. This may have occurred through agreements between families as was suggested by Vincenzo as a possible avenue for myself, my family and his.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Schirripa.

Conclusions

The insider/outsider relationships I had during the interview process opened up avenues of nostalgic remembrance and how they were brought into the present to have meaning and action through philosophies and advice. These stories are not simply recounting harsh beginnings in a new country but instructions of how to get through life and become successful. These are carefully crafted legacies that, as an insider to the culture and immigrant heritage, are perceived as important lessons that I will culturally understand the context of and therefore be able to reflexively apply to my own life. This is evident by the cross exchange of dialogue, when narrators gave an example, then posing questions back to me trying to find similar experiences in my own life, as seen when discussing leaving home.⁴⁶ These stories tell us far more about where the narrators perceive themselves in the present and their relationship to me. That is, their memories have become success stories by which they can now advise today's youth rather than primarily factual accounts of the past.

While this chapter has explored the methods and approach of the interviewing process through the framework of Insider and Outsider positionality and how this shapes the stories told in terms of advice given to me to help future generations, the following chapters will turn in more detail to the content produced, specifically about race and the denial of racism. In this chapter, the memories discussed related to events over which the narrators felt they have some degree of control. The following chapter will be examining anecdotes that point at hard

⁴⁶ Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio.

times and racist behaviour that lay inside of one's personal experience. That is, private memories which readily fitted to a redemptive narrative and nostalgic remembrance.

Figure 4- Mr and Mrs Zappacosta circa 1960s, donated from personal collection



Chapter Two: Success through Nostalgia

Growing up, the literature available to me and the visual media I consumed through movies and television, along with conversation around the family dinner table, provided me with preconceptions of what life was like in Griffith for a newly arrived Italian immigrant. I gained a memory of a time that I had never visited or experienced, and yet it was so viscerally re-enforced over the years I felt like I had part ownership of the struggles my forebears had witnessed. Michael Schudson would call this “vicarious trauma” and “lessons” handed down to the next generation.¹ Among these struggles was the disharmony between ‘Anglo’ Australians and newly arrived immigrants from Europe, in this case, those of Italian and southern Italian heritage and the intensity of farm life.

In research for this thesis, these ideas were further reinforced by the works of Ricatti.² While I do not suggest there was a universally ‘shared migrant experience’, there are some experiences that were similar across cultural barriers that create shared memories among almost post-war immigrants, racism being one of them. This is exemplified in Persian’s work in which she denotes Calwell’s decree to take in DPs mainly from Baltic areas who would be selected on an individual “selection basis”.³ She highlights the autonomy Calwell had in choosing DPs who he saw as good fits for the Australia he wanted to build, based largely

¹ Michael Schudson, ‘The Past in the Present vs the Present in the Past’, in *The Collective Memory Reader*, by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 289

² Ricatti, *Italians in Australia*. 53-74, Ricatti, ‘The Emotion of Truth and the Racial Uncanny’. 131-133; Ricatti, ‘Elodia and Franca’. 18-19

³ Persian, *Beautiful Balts*. 46

upon racialized profiling.⁴ Similarly in an interview with Faye Nitsuo, Damousi highlights the visceral impact of visually profiling race on the immigrant Greek community. Nitsuo does not deny instances of racism but points out that, as she was blonde and did not look like a Greek, she did not suffer racist vitriol to the same degree as other Greeks around her.⁵ I found this to be a similar to the case of Maria Vecchio who narrated in an interview that;

Everybody thought ima born in here, in Australia, everybody speak a me English, I say look I know but I don't know exactly what you say. They say "what you mean you no speak English? You born here!" I say "ima *no* born here".⁶

Despite being of Sicilian heritage, Maria does not look the stereotypical part. She has pale skin, light brown hair and hazel eyes. These features contributed to the assumption that she was Australian born, not Italian, similar to Nitsou's racial experiences.

Perceptions of racism applied to Australia's post war immigrants has also exposed the moral profiling of immigrant communities. The prevalence of the belief that European immigrants, particularly southern Italians were criminals is raised by James Jupp. Jupp points out this tradition of casting Italian immigration in a criminal light is not supported statistically.⁷ Newspaper articles from the late 1980s and 1990s reveal the entrenched nature of these racist ideas and stereotypes in the Australian public's mindset. For example, two articles from the *Canberra Times* in 1988 and 1993, state that "to say that they [Italian and Greeks] have now

⁴ Persian. 42

⁵ Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War*. 195

⁶ Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio.

⁷ Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*. 27

been accepted is a bit overstated” and “the Italian community was too heavily involved in organised crime in Australia”.⁸ Criminality became dogma that has been dogging Italian immigrants since the 1920s in Australia, based on the actions of only a few select families in Melbourne, Sydney and Griffith that were highly condemned by the rest of the Italian Australian community.⁹

Given that the question of racism has received so much attention from historians of migration and given the evidence that Italian migrants were subject to racialized stereotypes of criminality, it might be expected, that my interviewees would steadily report experiences of racism.¹⁰ Yet I found they did not. How nearly all the participants from one town, with such a high density of Italian population, independently agreed there was no racism or individually ascertain they have never experienced any was uncanny.

This chapter will explore the ways in which negative memories of racism and hard times have been accommodated in the process of narrating oral histories. I argue that nostalgia and erasure have allowed hard times and negative memories to be reshaped and redeemed through a positive lens that always emits the message of pride or success. Using these devices of nostalgia, forgetting and differing explanation, the narrators curate a legacy that has space for negative encounters. This is most often the case when the experiences took place within the private

⁸ Marshall, ‘Immigrants in Ghettoes’; ‘60pc Students Racist against Asians’.

⁹ Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*. 27

¹⁰ Soutphommasane, *I’m Not Racist But ... 40 Years of the Racial Discrimination Act*. 156, 160; “In 2010, economists at the Australian National University found substantial racial discrimination in hiring by Australian employers...The researchers found that in order to get as many interviews as an applicant with an Anglo-Saxon name, someone with a Chinese name needed to submit 68 per cent more applications. Those with a Middle Eastern name would need 64 per cent more. By comparison, those with an Italian name needed to put in 12 per cent more applications.”

sphere as it means the narrator has total control over the chronicle of the memory. This chapter will also discuss the theme of nostalgia, which has recurred throughout the thesis. By nostalgia, I mean positive feelings about the past which perhaps do not fully reflect the reality of the experience. The narrators, conveniently, are oblivious to or smooth over aspects of stories that might suggest racism.

I argue that the narrators have been able to accommodate negative memories about events in their personal lives through framing them within a redemptive narrative. I do this by considering anecdotal stories of everyday life that show indications of racism and hardship that narrators have explained away or even made into positive stories. These redemptive oral narratives allowed for a personal and collective history of Italians in Griffith to be constructed in ways that exemplify success stories both in terms of personal and group achievement.

Nostalgia for the Past and Future

Nostalgia is an emotional response, present when discussing memories and an often-prevalent part of oral histories. Academics have identified that nostalgia has largely been viewed with suspicion by past scholars and regarded as a sentimental idealisation that present “erroneous representations”.¹¹ Nostalgia historically in academia has critically been associated with homesickness, futile longing for lost causes, places, peoples and time, a physiological disorder, akin to the common

¹¹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*. 3

cold and perhaps most shockingly in the 18th century fatal misdiagnoses of tuberculous.¹²

It has since escaped its medical and negative discourse and become acknowledged as an emotion that is present among the everyday lives of people. Freiztche argues that it was nostalgia from the 19th century immigrants to America that allowed for the growth of historical consensus emerging in people who were not scholars.¹³ Hutton expounds on this “herein ordinary people became personally aware of larger historical forces at play, as change beyond their control forever altered their private lives”.¹⁴ Nostalgia does not erase the entire memory just alters it.¹⁵ This is often seen in the reflective nostalgia of Svetlana Boym’s works when interviewing people who fled the USSR yet remember it with great passion for its “futurists speculations”.¹⁶

Nostalgia, particularly reflective nostalgia which can be ironic and humorous demonstrates that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another within a narration.¹⁷ This was revealed most obviously when talking about the interviewees’ first decades in Australia.¹⁸ Nostalgia for the early years in Australia, however, differs greatly to the nostalgia expressed when discussing Italy before, during and post-war, which takes the shape of restorative nostalgia.¹⁹ Nostalgia for the first decades in Australia often overlaps with foregrounding positivity and

¹² Boym. 11

¹³ Patrick H. Hutton, ‘Preface: Reconsiderations of the Idea of Nostalgia in Contemporary Historical Writing’, *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 39, no. 3 (2013). 3

¹⁴ Hutton. 4

¹⁵ Svetlana Boym, ‘Nostalgia and Its Discontents’, in *The Collective Memory Reader*, by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 455

¹⁶ Hutton, ‘Preface’. 5

¹⁷ Boym, ‘Nostalgia and Its Discontents’. 455

¹⁸ Boym. 455

¹⁹ Boym. 455

love in the face of hardship “it’s a very very harda time Bianca, harda harda time, but ima happy”.²⁰ As expressed by Svetlana Boym, nostalgia is not a longing for place but for time.²¹ In my interviews, it should be understood as an expression of longing for time. That is, a longing for a time when children were young and had not moved to Melbourne, Sydney or Wagga Wagga for their careers, partners and opportunities for their own children as highlighted by Maria;

Ma not angry, I’m upset, very upset...no we upset, because your father go to, in February as soon as 21 and *Zia* Sarina go a first of March to Bathurst university, in one months we two kids go away so we feel the house empty...so *Zia* Sarina call all the time because she’s not got the phone, so she call a me and ahhh reverse the call, and I call your father every single day, ima cry every day.²²

There was longing for a time when everyone spoke Italian/dialect and communication was open, filled with laughter and love, “In the home there was Italian, Sicilian and English?” “No mostly Sicilian, no Italian”.²³ Not the stilted and frustrating conversations between *Nonni* who learnt no English and *Nipoti* who learnt no Italian;

But I say to them I am a bit worries when the grandchildren comin’ up, and Sonia she says “aww mamma no worries if I get married I teach my children speakin Italian”, after the children coming around I tell her “why you no tell her to speak Italian?” “Aww mum it’s more easy [to speak in English].”²⁴

²⁰ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio.

²¹ Boym, ‘Nostalgia and Its Discontents’. 452

²² Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio.

²³ D’Aquino and D’Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D’Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

²⁴ Nelsa Andrighetta, Interview with Nelsa Andrighetta by Bianca Vecchio, 14 April 2019.

The nostalgia is for a loss of a time when precious relationships were at their height, which were so vital having already once left every relationship behind in Italy.

It never got easier leaving everything and everyone behind. Time and distance made every change, every gain and every loss more painful than the last. The insularity of such a large Italian population and remoteness of Griffith ensured that the pressure to assimilate, as understood by Joy Damousi as a denial of a migrant's past, was not active to the same degree in Griffith.²⁵ This is because the 'suppression of individual and collective memory', as recorded in her work, of the past never took.²⁶ The oral histories all start with war stories and memories of Italy before moving on to life in Australia, despite me not directly asking anything about the war or life in Italy. In the early years transnational relationships could be maintained, letters could be answered, and phone calls made at Christmas. Now on both sides of the hemispheres, all families are feeling the keening losses of *parenti* (family) and the events and lives missed. Bringing up Italy causes anguish but also love and laughter for a time when everyone was together and a desire of what could have been.²⁷ The horrible consequences of war that forced them from their homes are never forgotten or belittled, but it pales in remembrance of family.²⁸ As Boym explains "One is nostalgic not for the past the way it was," she remarks, "but for the past the way it could have been. It is the past perfect that

²⁵ Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War*. 203

²⁶ Damousi. 203

²⁷ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

²⁸ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio.

one strives to realise in the future.”²⁹ This kind of nostalgia is evidenced in the following narration from Florinda;

Nonno like Australia a lot, ma hes a remember in Italy sometime...I toldya him if you stay in Italy the same a here, it's a hard there too...it's a better quiet [be quiet, stop talking] that's all stay here, worka here eh you no it's alright I'm happy here.³⁰

This is the nostalgia that is hard to relinquish when discussing Italy: an idyllic scenario in an ideal world, in a utopia. Boym refers often to the idea of nostalgic utopias “nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future”.³¹ Utopia here is an imagined Italy had there been no wars, there was a functioning government and no major anthropological racial divided that came out of the great European diaspora of the 19th century (to be discussed in chapter three). As demonstrated by the above narration, Salvatore Cerrito missed Italy more than his wife, thinking about the family and what family life could be there. Florinda was more firmly rooted in reality, and even though life is hard in Australia, she was aware that life is no better in Italy and neither is family. Choosing to be happy here is, for her, a conscious choice over than continuing to be reminiscent of an imagined Italy. This is a concurrent gendered theme running through the interviews, as Rosa Daltorio comments;

My father thought about going back to Italy, he went just a holiday and he saw a pub and said “sell the house in Melbourne and we go back to Italy” and my mum said “No! I’m not going to do that it’s not good because yeh my kids can speak a little Italian but no writing or reading so we just moved here [from Costa Rica] with the disability of

²⁹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*. 351

³⁰ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio.

³¹ Svetlana Boym, ‘Nostalgia’, *Atlas of Transformation*, 2011, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/n/nostalgia/nostalgia-svetlana-boym.html>.

the language and it's going to happen again, so these kids what's going to happen to them?!".³²

The men tended to live in a projected desire of what was or what could have been while the women are firm in reality of what was and is. Salvatore and Giuseppe Gioia had little to no familial or regional (*Lazio* and *Puglia*) connections in Australia. They were so focused on remembering good times in Italy they glossed over the realities of life there. Boym proposes that nostalgic love can only exist in a long-distance relationship, this suggests that nostalgia for a home that no longer exists or never did could be a particular branch of nostalgia that immigrants experience in a way that those who remained never will.³³

Nostalgia and Hard Times

The avoidance of discussing racism (see chapter three) was not because my narrators did not care or remember hard times. Rather, to them, the hard times are not as important as the good times and joy they bring, much like how Giuseppe and Salvatore remembered Italy. The experience of bullying, racism and prejudice did arise in different ways, in little comments made in comparisons made between the two cultures. I suggest that is not that nostalgia allows these memories to be erased. Instead, my narrators associated victimhood with memories attached to the war, death and poverty in Italy, rather than experiences in Australia. These are a people who have persevered and suffered under hardships for the entire first forty years of their life in both Italy and Australia.

³² Daltorio, Interview with Rosa Daltorio by Bianca Vecchio.

³³ Boym, 'Nostalgia'.

The nostalgia for the early years of settlement could easily have been a message of victimisation and suffering, but this does not fit with the intended goal of presenting a successful immigrant legacy, nor is it comparable to the vestiges of a war.

Joseph Dlamini, in his work *Native Nostalgia* (2010), expresses an appreciation for the language Afrikaans despite it being the enforced language of the oppressor.³⁴ So much of his childhood and colloquial sayings revolve around the memory and use of this language that despite the adverse history it contains he has a fondness for it.³⁵ I make a similar argument here in the case of nostalgia for the early years of settlement, particularly when the memories are personal and so more easily shaped by individuals' idealised narratives. There is a particular pride that is apparent when discussing hard times in the first decades, a positivity and fondness attached to hard and painful memories. As narrated by Sebastiano when discussing cane cutting in Queensland;

18 years [old], and you know because there in Italy I haven't done any work go to school, so here when I come here in Australia go straight through there on the, on the, on the sugar cane and I remember on the hardest one all my hands blist, blist [blistered] for about two weeks and after two week, that time there was nearly discouraged nearly leave and said maybe why I come here in Australia? I can't handling the fork for eat, can't handle the knife for eat you know it was all blist, in there you know with the knife, but then after two week I was a champion! Beautiful! After two weeks go there easy, you know, you know usually you say maybe seven hours to have you know the load, that time there you know even five, five and half hours we do the load you know quick. Yeh that time there was the hardest time.³⁶

³⁴ Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*. 13, 155, 163

³⁵ Dlamini. 13, 155, 163

³⁶ D'Aquino and D'Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D'Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

The bad is never ignored in this memory presented by Sebastiano, what is important is the conveying of hard times. What is key is the pride and achievement at overcoming a hardship and the mastering the art of cane cutting, with minimal complaint. The guiding message is clear; work through hard times, and you will be successful. This is particularly clear as much of Sebastiano's narration was a back and forth highlighting hard work in the past and the unwillingness of the current youths will to work hard like he had too. These nostalgic memories of hard times redeemed, whilst building his legacy as a success story, were also relational and instructional (see chapter one). Sebastiano instead of focusing on the negativity of this memory and the despair felt at this time, "perhaps I got back to Italy", focuses on how he overcame adversity.³⁷ He redeems negative experiences through the end attainment of success, he was the best cane cutter, the sacrifice was worth it.

Overcoming hard times on the farm was a consistent theme across the interviews. Farming is an extremely dangerous endeavour. Years when the canneries closed, the crop would flood, or salt would rise from the water table meant little to no profit was made. As narrated by Carmelo Vecchio:

When is the first couple years buy the farm, very very hard,
very...very very hard the first few years because nothing for pick,
gotta few trees apple... peaches apricot but then after ten years
[nothing]...because the cannery a Leeton closed, the fruit no want no
more.³⁸

Carmelo and his brother Orazio, who worked the farm together mitigated this risk

³⁷ D'Aquino and D'Aquino.

³⁸ Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio.

by planting grapes and selling to the wineries, a fast growing industry in Griffith at the time.³⁹ The Vecchio's had to overcome poor harvests with a growing family and the closure of outside business, so even when there was a harvest, there was not necessarily an income for their years' work.⁴⁰ This story about pulling out the fruit trees is redeemed through the lens of success moments later when Maria and Carmelo proudly explain they were then planted grapes and were the first to sell grapes to 'Sergi Wines', displaying the elaborate thankyou gift.⁴¹ These nostalgic memories of hard times on the farm have a traditional narrative literary construct; set up, problem (blistered hand, cannery closing), resolution with it always being a resolution indicating success.

³⁹ Vecchio and Vecchio.

⁴⁰ Vecchio and Vecchio.

⁴¹ Vecchio and Vecchio.

Figure 5 - Mr Vecchio picking peaches on their farm, with his in-laws Nonna Carmela, Nonno Nino visiting from Sicily and son Antonino 1973, donated from personal collection



Nostalgia for the past when families were still together in Australia went beyond simple remembering but highlighting areas where unavoidable faults as parents were made. Perceived parenting failures were the only time where true regrets were voiced in the interview process, other than the regret over leaving family behind in Italy. Women were happy to identify the struggles and hardships of motherhood versus working full-time and men happy to discuss the flooding of farms or closure of canneries. As narrated by Maria Zappacosta “That was my job, pack, pick, box and I had one box spare for the baby in the middle”.⁴² Maria worked while she had a newborn and kept one of the packing boxes spare for the baby to sleep in while she worked. Childcare was not an option financially, but neither was maternity leave as it did not exist. Exemplifying that farm life was equally as draining on women and the family as it was the men, primarily being because the Italian women of Griffith worked equally as hard alongside men on the farms and still ran households.

In complete disparity with recent revelations in *Remembering Migration* (2019) and the Donna Kelisiss 1990-1991 oral histories which found women were unwilling to discuss gendered aspects of migration, my female narrators were in no way ‘reticent’ to discuss with me the gendered challenges of migration, childbirth.⁴³ As Leonarda D’Aquino commented, “well in those days you stayed in hospital for 12 days so by the time I got home I was ready to do what I had to do”.⁴⁴ Likewise,

⁴² Zappacosta and Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio.

⁴³ Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, *Remembering Migration: Oral Histories and Heritage in Australia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2019).111

⁴⁴ D’Aquino and D’Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D’Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

on the topic of motherhood, Florinda remembered, “I stay one month no job, after go pick carrots and parsnip with *Zio* Damiano behind, behind me. I pick carrots, he is a there and that’s all”.⁴⁵ Often painful memories for instance were given and expanded on with emotion and self-reflective insight on their perceived failings as mothers but also their situational setting of their financial placement which made their actions a necessity.

Your mother sometime take my hat and a my gloves and hide under the [bed] because she no wanna me to go town or work the farm, and when I remember that I come cry, but still I couldn’t do nothing...Must go to work all day behind us. Mum go pick the peaches in the farm with us, poora mamma go a “argh argh” [mimics a baby crying] itchy, itchy the peaches, you know it’s enough this.⁴⁶

There is regret. For example, as Nelsa Andrighetta remembered;

Now I always regret that time because I reckon, I didn’t spend enough time with my children, because you need help and working out. The children were always there even when little always with mum. But ahh even when go in at night, warm up the water, doing the tea, I haven’t got time, time cuddling and talking with my children.⁴⁷

Even Rosa, who worked in restaurants, held struggles and regrets over working fulltime and motherhood;

I worked full time [after *Zia* Connie was six months] seven days a week, my sister looked after my baby...I was so busy that I didn’t have time for my kids, because I work all the time.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio.

⁴⁶ Cerrito.

⁴⁷ Andrighetta, Interview with Nelsa Andrighetta by Bianca Vecchio.

⁴⁸ Daltorio, Interview with Rosa Daltorio by Bianca Vecchio.

Perhaps these women's openness was due to my insider identity, being a woman and of Italian heritage. From my interviews, such hardships seem to have been a universal experience of the working female immigrant in Griffith. Yet there was also pride at the accomplishments of their children in the face emotionally or physically absent parenting. Whether or not their revelations are part of the shared collective and social memory that many of the working mothers displayed, a relational lesson relayed to me or just an explanation of regret is unclear. However, what is clear is that these still painful in the present memories are within the personal sphere of control and the achievements of their children make the messages redemptive. As Florinda and Nelsa commented, "she [Maria, her daughter] gotta anything, she gotta the university...in Sydney!" and "he [Ernes, her son] studied through correspondence and built up a business".⁴⁹ These comments indicate that in the face of this hardship, narrators are curating a redemptive of success through the success of their children to validate their own parenting faults/achievements. This highlights that even regrets and perceived failures had elements of positivity that could enable a narrative to end in success.

⁴⁹ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio; Andrighetta, Interview with Nelsa Andrighetta by Bianca Vecchio.



Figure 6 - Mr Zappacosta on the farm with his daughters Patricia and Manuela circa early 1970s, donated from private collection



Figure 7 - Mrs Zappacosta working the farm with her four children circa 1970s, donated from private collection

Nostalgia and Racism

The following narrations occurred after we had discussed the presence racism in Griffith, which was vehemently denied. Anecdotes about life on the farm and for a few the schoolyard were being relayed, with much comedic re-enactment occurring. However often memories were narrated that, by academic standards, indicated racist and destructive behaviour. Yet these were held in a nostalgic light of fond remembrances or success with malefic points explained away.

To erase is to not only forget but to alter and smooth back a surface as though to conceal something that may or may not have been there. Marc Auge sees this as ‘oblivion’ an attempt to survive the memory and escape from the incommunicable experience, this is often used to describe returned soldiers reluctances/refusals to discuss experiences.⁵⁰ Either passively or actively this was done often when what academically I would identify racist occurrences but they are explained/obliviated away as something else, an action of ignorance or differing emotion.

An occurrence of this was the dishonourable conduct surrounding a contract expressed in the interview with Vincenzo. We were discussing hard years on the farm and the economic hardship this placed on a large and growing family. Vincenzo brought up the year they sold all their tomatoes, ten acres, to a cannery in Griffith and made no money. I was confused over the idea they made no money. Why was the price of tomatoes so incredibly low that year?

⁵⁰ Marc Auge, ‘Oblivion’, in *The Collective Memory Reader*, by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 473

The year I marry we have a bad year, but, we had ten acres of tomatoes, and my brother-in-law, but they I don't, they know we talk together with in Sydney, say "we gotta ten acres of tomatoes", "oh we gotta ten acres of tomato too!" We no sell one a tomato! Not one tomato! Because the cannery, we was stupid, we haven't got training, the cannery had a, the big cannery make the contract but we don't know any contract, we don't reada nothing, just a there contract [mimes slapping a piece of paper down on the table in front of him], we gotta nothing! say that's your tomatoes and we havea got nothing! And then we lose ten acres! But we ourselves you know what we did, we disc the tomato, disc the tomato and plant all peas, and then with peas the peas in the winter here they grown up...then we make money, we makea good money, that the money when I marry! I had fifty pounds when I marry. And fifty pounds in that days was good money.⁵¹

I interpreted this story to be evidence for exploitative behaviour based on the understanding that Vincenzo and his brothers lacked proficiency in English. This behaviour on the parts of the cannery bosses may have been good business for them, but points at lack of respect for the livelihoods of Italian workers. This, to me, was a display of racist and xenophobic behaviours that, without the ingenuity of Vincenzo, could have had devastating and detrimental effects on himself and his family.

However, again, like narrations given from Sebastiano, Vincenzo looked at the life lessons learned and takes the blame on himself and his lack of education, the pastoral responsibility of his employers. Vincenzo's pride at being able to turn a situation around and still marry with a respectful amount of money draw parallels between this story and Sebastiano's feelings on welfare and cane cutting. Despite the financial hardship, Vincenzo saw an avenue to better his prospects that

⁵¹ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

required no one else's input but his own and his brothers which keeps in tune with his philosophy on work and the dole: "people who want to work gotta the bread".⁵² The tone conveyed in his voice while telling the story makes it plain that the achievement he had with the growth of the peas was significant, something of which he was and is still proud.

These are the reflectively nostalgic of stories throughout all my interviewees. Things that appear to be significant hardships and tough times of life in Australia are brushed off or the lesson learned through perseverance highlighted before the subject quickly changes to more memorable things like past loves in the case of Vincenzo or family time in the instances of Florinda and Maria.⁵³ These negative experiences shaped positive lessons and pride out of these people in a space where they easily could have shaped victims. They do not consider themselves victims, on the contrary, they see themselves as very lucky to have had the opportunities they had in Australia: "my father send me here, God bless my father because I came to Griffith, I am happy".⁵⁴ They see the positives and nostalgic times of joy as the key shapers of their life; "aww dance we like a dance, tarantella, whena do the tarantella everybody do the circle, used to call us all the time you come there come there".⁵⁵

There are instances within the interviewees where racist behaviour is not concealed but somehow was not identified as racism, bullying or prejudice. These

⁵² Schirripa.

⁵³ Boym, 'Nostalgia and Its Discontents'. 455

⁵⁴ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

⁵⁵ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio.

are the hardest to explain. I did not outrightly in the interviewees tell my subjects, that I considered what they experienced a form of racism. This would have been enforcing my views on their memory, attaching my meaning to something intimate of theirs, which holds other meaning. In one instance when discussing racism which had previously been denied Sebastiano bought up one of his first employers in Griffith and genuinely what a lovely man he was, Sebastiano then expressed something he found to be humorous;

bloody china man, bloody china man they call me, bloody china man
I don't know, because where I work, he was Irish, he was Irish.
Sometime we go in town we having shoppe in that time there and you
know all the shopping is was there you the in the boots. Then he call
me, "come on bloody china man," you know. On I load 'em up be
careful there is a bag of spuds, spud *allora* potato. That's why in the
night-time when I go the priest, I call him and I go he call me spuds.
And that's why it's a slang. He he he he was Irish, and then you know
the? A lot of slang [laughing].⁵⁶

The main experience from this story for Sebastiano was the word 'spud' and how he did not know how to understand the context of his Irish boss calling potatoes spuds. It was not the bizarre referencing to being called a 'china man'. The reference to 'china man' from what best can be extrapolated is evidence that it was not racist behaviour principally targeted at Italians, the Italian culture or the tone of whiteness, but xenophobic behaviour towards immigrants in general. Particularly as name-calling could be so interchangeable between an Asian reference and an Italian man, simply an exclusion from whiteness. Andreoni discusses this in depth the occurrence of maligning Italians as the 'Chinese of

⁵⁶ D'Aquino and D'Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D'Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

Europe', particularly toward southern Italians, and Sebastiano is of Sicilian heritage.⁵⁷ There are many occurrences discussing Italians as the "Olive Peril" much in the same way discussion around Asian immigration was framed as the "Yellow Peril".⁵⁸ Despite lingually, geographically, religiously and characteristically different peoples the same formulaic racist tropes are applied just altered to fit a certain specification.⁵⁹ This anecdote from Sebastiano is a clear indicator of racism in Griffith not only toward Italians but also toward the Asian population. But Sebastiano instead of taking offence finds humour in the new slang he is learning.

The most intriguing of instances of memories where there was, by my perception, flawless indication of racist behaviours is when it was denied and explained away as something else. While attempting to discuss hard times I was commonly met with a severe and unexpected redirection of the conversation or consistent across the interviews but paradoxical denial when asked did you experience any racism, "no, never".⁶⁰ All except one of my narrators denied experiencing any racism, Rosa who as a restaurateur had many memories about racism, fights and police intervention and a general lack of respect.⁶¹ However immediately after these denials, they told anecdotal stories that either to an academic understanding of racism saw it clearly perpetuated or highlighted that the narrators knew and understood the significance of words like dago and wog.⁶² The racism was often argued away as a different response, but the use of words like wog and dago was

⁵⁷ Andreoni, 'Olive or White?' 86

⁵⁸ Andreoni. 85-86

⁵⁹ Andreoni. 85-87

⁶⁰ D'Aquino and D'Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D'Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

⁶¹ Daltorio, Interview with Rosa Daltorio by Bianca Vecchio.

⁶² D'Aquino and D'Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D'Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

met with shrugs.⁶³ It was clear my narrators understood and knew what racism was but were choosing not to identify it, in their legacy or in Griffith.

During the interview with Ignazio Zappacosta, after our second coffee and pre-lunch (not morning tea) which preceded lunch, we were discussing his brief years of schooling in Australia and how work on the farm and harvest often saw him missing large chunks.⁶⁴ So, any English learned was soon forgotten by the time he was back in classes regularly he bought up issues with the Australian children.⁶⁵ Ignazio said;

Ma they were all *tutti inglese, italiani* [all English [Australian?] and Italian in the classroom] there was *that* Sergi boy they had no money, “oh hey hey Zappacosta I’ll come next to you so they won’t hit me”

Maria: [laughing] you too big, bigger than him

Ignazio: Oh yeh! Nobody used to touch me! Cos we used to get into fights you no, that’s another story, they bloodied my nose!

Maria: mmm your nose is crooked. Because somebody punched him!

Interviewer: How come?

Ignazio: Aww because they call you names sometimes.

Interviewer: The *Australian*?

Ignazio: Yeh, the first for a long time, not many, just one to two

Maria: Wog

⁶³ Zappacosta and Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio.

⁶⁴ Snack was ham, homemade olives, bread and preserved capsicum.

⁶⁵ Zappacosta and Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio.

Ignazio: “aww you bloody come here in Australia, take this take this”,
I don’t know, there was always the *gelosia* [jealousy].⁶⁶

Gelosia translates in English to jealousy. We had already discussed encounters with racism to a resounding no. However, by my understanding being called a ‘wog’ in the schoolyard and physical altercations then ensuing is a clear example of racist and recognised racist behaviour. However, here in the presentation of this memory, it was explained as ‘jealousy’, nothing to do with that of being Italian and immigrant but that the Australian school kids were jealous of Ignazio and his friends. His refusal to consider himself a victim extends even to the point of implying he had something the Australian children would want. He does not call them bullies or racists nor does he condemn them, at first, he laughs at the idea of youthfulness (nostalgia) and being the best in a fight but sounds tired by the time he explains why they called names. It is clear both of them suspect this behaviour is not appropriate and they allude to racism without mentioning it directly, indicated by Maria just supplying the word ‘wog’ with limited context when her husband skirts around it. In the beginning of the memory Ignazio is caught up retelling nostalgic brave battles from his youth where he comes out looking macho but when questioned for the specifics becomes vague and short of memory.

Key in tying the memories presented of racism (whether or not acknowledged as such) together are the memoirs of Rosa who identifies certain actions as racism but even then, is careful not to exaggerate and remembers events of a petty nature as acts of racial hate;

⁶⁶ Zappacosta and Zappacosta.

We socialised with everybody because there was no one from *Puglia* here...when we came to Griffith it was a bit hard because the Australians couldn't stand the Italians, so at the *Belvedere*, I wouldn't say every night cos that's exaggerate but I would say on the weekends we had to call the police all the time because the Australians they used to come there, they used love the food but you know they would be the salt in the sugar, couldn't pronounce spaghetti they used to call passcehtti...so there was always fights and it took a couple years before they accepted, it was hard it was tough...I wanted to go back always to Melbourne, because [shrug] you know it's Griffith [sigh eyeroll], it's Griffith. I was an outsider, *Calabrese* a lot, *Siciliano* a lot, *Veneti* a lot and we come here all the families they knew each other we didn't know anyone; you know what I mean so we sorta stayed *solitaria* [alone].⁶⁷

Even when discussing racism, which Rosa willingly identifies, it is clear from this part of the interview the racism faced from the Australians was just as heartbreaking as having no regional connections to people from *Puglia*. In losing this regional connection Rosa felt isolated within the Italian community in Griffith. *Solitaria* in this instance translates to solitary or alone, her and her family “sorta stayed by themselves”.⁶⁸ While they were Italian and mixed with everyone, whether socially or through the *Belevedere*, the loss of the regional connection to a specific part of Italy holds just as much importance to how she remembered the past and hardships as racism she encountered. Even when acknowledging racism, she relativises it, saying it was no worse than how other Italians treated her. The two were on par in impact and emotion for her memory of hard times.

⁶⁷ Daltorio, Interview with Rosa Daltorio by Bianca Vecchio.

⁶⁸ Daltorio.

What is crucial and in line with the rest of the narrators is that Rosa too does not recall any racism in Griffith in the early years;

Not in the first years like 68, up until the 70s everything changed after the 70s...I think the women's liberation I would say [changed things], because that's when everything starts the drugs coming, the women want to be treated like the mans and all that and I think that's when the people wake up and start hating the other people that came in.⁶⁹

Here Rosa is displaying a social awareness of the cultural revolutions that rocked Australia in the 1970s. The 1970s are famous for sex, drugs and rock and roll and the surge of youth culture but waves were also made with the changing social and academic debates around gender, sex, race and social trends.⁷⁰ Rosa displays an understanding of the social change going on in the 1970s that saw the political and social fights for migrant (and Indigenous) rights cause disharmony across Australia, and the trickle-down effect this had within in a rural town like Griffith with such a high Italian population. During the 1970s the offspring of the Italian immigrants from the post-second world war era were all reaching the latter end of their teen years or early adulthood. This saw a rise in political activism in the Sydney and Melbourne for migrant rights.⁷¹ Within Griffith itself there is little evidence of these movements, outside of the maintained popularity and success of Labour Representatives George Enticknap, pro-migrant candidate Al Grassby and Alan Gordon until 1984.⁷²

⁶⁹ Daltorio.

⁷⁰ Arrow and Woollacott, 'Introduction—How the Personal Became Political'. 1-8

⁷¹ Battiston, *Immigrants Turned Activists*, 39–40; Marin, 'Migrant Activism in Australia: The Case of the Italian Federation of Migrant Workers and Their Families (FILEF)', 87.

⁷² Hagan and Turner, 'The Italian Influence on Political Change in the Murrumbidgee NSW 1941-2007'. 175-176

Conclusions

Nostalgia plays a key part in how the oral histories are narrated and constructed. They are told to establish a history and personal legacy that fits the success story of immigrants that Australia so eagerly promotes. They present individual success stories that build the legacy of the individual Italian in Griffith, imparting notions of success, triumph, hope and redemption even among the most difficult years of their migration story. These stories suggest racism was present and directed, not only among Italians but also directed at the Asian community. These stories however are in the control of the narrator and can be spun to explain conflict as nearly anything other than racism. The malice is erased from the stories; any evidence of conflict only further adds to the narrators' legacy of hard work, determination and self-respect.

Similarly, the difficulties and regrets of motherhood and working are mitigated through the success of their children. Memories of hardship as mothers prove to narrators that all their sacrifice was worth it and mitigate any of the damage done, adding to their success legacy not only as women but as mothers. Negative memories and hard times are accommodated through nostalgia. As presented in the legacies of my narrators, nostalgia augmented their memories to always have messages of positivity and success. The following chapter will be examining memories that fall outside of the personal sphere. That is, public memories which are therefore not available to be subject to the same redemptive manipulation. The chapter will reveal how the silences around these memories too were shaped by participants' drive to construct a personal legacy.

Chapter Three: Silence in a Public Space

This chapter continues the exploration of the denial of racism occurring in Griffith begun in chapter two but moves on to consider memories of events outside narrators' personal and private lives. In particular, I examine and how the speech patterns around the topic of racism correlate with another difficult topic discussed in my interviews, the (not so) 'mysterious' 1977 assassination of local politician Donald MacKay. The chapter covers themes of denial and collective memory. In this chapter I argue that events and memories that do not contribute to the triumphant immigrant legacy that my participants have carefully and over years crafted for themselves are denied and not given the same importance as other memories that demonstrate overcoming hardship. First, I discuss the denial of racism and how the conversations are either awkwardly stopped or diverted, then I move on to how the events around MacKay are communicated. Finally, I conclude that that, from analysing the similar styles in which both topics are discussed, comparatively and collectively, that these two issues do not fit into the legacy of success and the pride they attributing to having succeeded in Australia.

Italians and the Colour Line

Race and racism are complex issues with regards to the identity of Italian people. There are two issues to contend with: racism coming from outsiders of the Italian culture and racism coming from within, that is, racism which exists amongst people both of the Italian culture. During the later 19th and early 20th century, so-called 'scientific' examinations of the Italian peninsula by anthropologists, such as Cesare Lombroso, Giuseppe Sergi, and Alfredo Niceforo, decreed that Italy

was to racially be categorised into thirds: north, middle, south.¹ The objective of Lombroso's research was to encourage an intermixing of the Northerners with the Southerners he had categorised.² This further developed the already strong attachment, that predated the unification of Italy, of being more connected to one's regionality versus being Italian. This can be seen reflected in my interviews as some of the narrators did not speak Italian in their homes but chose to specify dialect;

Maria: Ahh the kids wouldn't understand English when they were babies, so I had to speak my dialect

Interviewer: So, you spoke dialect, not Italian?

Maria: No, just the dialect.³

And even when Italian was used in large social settings regional differences were raised and disbelief at one's ability to communicate outside their regional dialect.

For example, Vincenzo explained:

No calabrese, io so parlare italiana, ma esse non sa. Io avuto le ragazze italiana sei che erano di Reggio qua i di la. Io ho parlato con uno qua che...il club di Yoogali, io parlavo con lui e c'era un altro che diceva. Che sa parlavo italiano erano un paesano proprio, cognatto di meo fratello di questo qua (indicates photo). A detto che non sei parlare italiano questo qua. No tu non sei di Calabria il calabrese non so parlare italiano. Non e vero! Che mene da la Calabria Reggio Calabria province Gioiosa Calabria. Lui dicevo che il calabrese non parlare italiano. Se il calabrese parlano italiano I parlano bene. I Veneti non parlano bene italiano.... Perche lascio sempre la 'n' l'ultimo [then gives examples of

¹ Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Cary, USA: Oxford University Press USA, 2003); 32., Gaia Giuliani, 'Whose Whiteness? Cultural Dis-Locations Between Italy and Australia', in *Transmediterranean: Diasporas, Histories, Geopolitical Spaces* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2010) 129.

² Giuliani, 'Whose Whiteness? Cultural Dis-Locations Between Italy and Australia'. 136 "He believed, would breed out the inferior genes and supposed innate southern criminality and allow the newly created Italian state to have a place of prominence within white Europe." Lombroso is also known as the 'father of criminology'.

³ Zappacosta and Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio.

words in *Veneto* dialect].⁴

[When I was at the clubs, I didn't speak Calabrese I spoke Italian, and they didn't know I was Calabrese. I met this one guy at the Yoogali club, and he spoke to me, after we spoke, he asked me where I was from and I said I was Calabrese. He said you can't be Calabrese because you speak Italian so well! I told him Calabrese when they speak Italian, they speak it well. When the *Veneti* speak Italian, they don't do it well. Calabrese speak Italian better than what the other Italians do. The *Veneti* always leave the 'n' on words.]

In this discussion, Vincenzo is forced to defend the intelligence of the southern region of Calabria to another Italian man, as well as justify his own intellect at being so fluent in Italian his dialect accent is lost. While defending his own dialect and the people of his own region in their superiority at speaking Italian Vincenzo also maligns a separate region highlighting that this makes the *Calabrese* better than the *Veneti* because they speak two languages 'properly'.

Lombroso's Darwinist research became internationally renowned and used to create policy and law that would subject Italian (and other) immigrants to cruelty and racial vilification for the next two centuries.⁵ His ideas were particularly popular in the United States of America, which had a high influx of Italian immigrants in the early 20th century. Fear about Italians, particularly supposedly 'criminal' southern Italians were given legitimacy through this work, furthered by popularised racial cartoons and government anti-immigration propaganda.⁶ Decades later in the 1930s in Australia, Raphael Cilento's (a self-subscribed Italian northerner), whose works on racial hierarchy and eugenics were directed at

⁴ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

⁵ Giuliani, 'Whose Whiteness? Cultural Dis-Locations Between Italy and Australia'. 128

⁶ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*. 99

defining both Italy and Australia as prestigious white nations, bolstered and encouraged the previous prejudice about Southern Italian, Mediterranean and Indigenous peoples.⁷ This can be seen as still having apparent effects in my interviews when discussing regionality and dialect. I made the mistake of listing regions and then categorising them all as Italian; I was interrupted by Maria, a Centralist, who placed a hand on my arm, looked me in the eye and quickly reminded me “we all different though”.⁸

Guglielmo deals with the decades of social and political hardship Italian immigrants to the USA suffered due to American provocations of race-based on colour and ethnicity, religion. While Italians in America were never segregated to the same degree as African Americans or First Nation Peoples, they too suffered atrocities.⁹ Yet their failure to be ‘white’ was demonstrably more to do with exclusion from a social category than skin colour. Though Italians were accepted as ‘white on arrival’, once settled their whiteness had to be defended and fought for as a means of social mobility for the better life they sought when moving to America. The line between white and not white enough that Italian immigrants carefully walked is the overrunning theme of Guglielmo’s work. Guglielmo explains that following the Second World War, Italian Americans had an established and growing second generation “were well primed to identify as whites”.¹⁰

⁷ Giuliani, ‘Whose Whiteness? Cultural Dis-Locations Between Italy and Australia’. 134-138

⁸ Zappacosta and Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio.

⁹ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*. 47, 37 “Records tell in 1891 eleven Sicilians were lynched in New Orleans and one as late as 1915 a Sicilian in Illinois.”

¹⁰ Guglielmo. 208

This raises the question, of what the anti-Italian sentiments in Australia were truly about in the 1950s and 1960s. Clearly, Italians were ‘white (enough) on arrival’ during an era in Australia where Asians were excluded entirely from the immigration process, Italians were included.¹¹ The spectrum of whiteness is clearly ambiguous in nature particularly when one considers the constraints placed on migrating Baltic DP’s, as these were applied to them in a similar way to assimilating Greeks and Italians.¹² These forces came from both external (pressures from white Australia) and internal, when one considers as Damousi does the ethnic and racial tensions that arose over who could/would identify as Greek, whereas Italian tensions rose from feelings of regional superiority.¹³ A generation previously in Australia the Irish faced the same persecutions of race and harassment, known colloquially as the ‘blacks’ of Europe.¹⁴ Evidently the racialisation of others and the colour line moves independently of skin tone but rather to the ideas of fear of the outsider and unknown, skin tone merely affecting the degree and severity.

In conversation with Florinda, I asked what she understood about the White Australia policy; she replied “pft (eye-roll) All white? (laughing) yeh well, all white, gotta the black too cos they come with us pick carrots, onion garlic, the black one call you all the time, talk to you, English, black and Italian”.¹⁵ Even though

¹¹ Richards, *Destination Australia*. 200-203; MacDonald and MacDonald, ‘Italian Migration to Australia’. 254

¹² Persian, *Beautiful Balts*; 46., Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War*; 53., Gianfranco Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, Rev. ed (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 126

¹³ Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War*. 77

¹⁴ Jonathan W. Warren and France Winddance Twine, ‘White Americans, the New Minority?: Non-Blacks and the Ever-Expanding Boundaries of Whiteness’, *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 2 (1997). 202-204; Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995). 6

¹⁵ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio.

academically uneducated Florinda could highlight the settler fantasy of a white Australia as a ridiculous notion. Donato La Rocca expressed a philosophy that seems transnational in the immigrant plight in the post-war years “aww well I thought it was a bit strange, but that's the law, and we had to put up with it, can't say anything”.¹⁶ And then he preceded not to say anything, which was a theme across the board. It is interesting then when racism against southern Europeans was at a nationally remembered height as evidence by Ricatti's findings specifically on the 1950-1960s, with migrants being spat on as they left the boat, being called ‘greasy wogs’ by the populace, disdain openly expressed within parliament and the Racial Discrimination Act not coming until 1975 that almost all of my interviewees do not recall experiencing any racism when asked directly about it in the interviews.¹⁷

The Forgetting of Racism in Griffith

Numerous scholars before me have explored the apparent forgetting of or silence in regard to painful memories of public events or shared experiences in the past. Denial, silence and group dis-remembering are themes of Portelli's key works.¹⁸ Portelli focused on Italian memory of events, highlighting the political and social concepts that go into how a memory of the past is retold and reconstructed in a modern setting but also why it so changed. Wulf Kansteiner argues that collective

¹⁶ Donato La Rocca, Interview with Donato La Rocca by Bianca Vecchio, 14 April 2019.

¹⁷ Ricatti, *Italians in Australia*. 62

¹⁸ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories : Form and Meaning in Oral History*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); 4-6., Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out : History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). 206

memories have no organic basis or even exist in any literal sense.¹⁹ Ron Eyerman explores the concepts that collective memory is used a framing device “master frames” to create an imagined community.²⁰ For Paul Ricoeur, who argues that one aspect of forgetting can be categories as the “escapist route”, the strategy of avoidance is guided by a desire not to know, not to be informed and to an extent not to inquire about atrocities.²¹

I suggest that Ricoeur’s understanding can usefully applied to the collective memory and forgetting applied in both in the denial of anti-Italian racism in Griffith and the avoidance around discussing the events around Mackay. That is, my interviews reflect an impulse to not know and to avoid. Ricoeur also argues that forgiving is passive forgetting because to forgive is to remember the incident of dispute but forgetting is truly forgiving because it becomes a non-grata issue of discussion.²² However, in my oral histories these interpretations of forgetting and forgiveness do not seem to apply as well as actively avoiding or distancing oneself from the discussion when the events concern dose not aid in shaping the collective legacies of Italians in Griffith.

Out of twelve participants, eleven claimed to have not faced any racism, name-calling, judgement, bullying or prejudice behaviour in Australia. Of these, eleven

¹⁹ Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies’, in *The Collective Memory Reader*, by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 302

²⁰ Ron Eyerman, ‘The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory’, in *The Collective Memory Reader*, by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 305-306

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, ‘Memory-History-Forgetting’, in *The Collective Memory Reader*, by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 479

²² Ricoeur. 480

were farm or fruit packing workers, one participant Lucia Dei'Agnoli discussed racism faced in Switzerland and was surprised and happy to not have faced any in Griffith.²³ Rosa, who did remember instances of racist behaviour is a restaurateur.²⁴ However, the difference of occupation, in this case, has little impact on the probabilities of exposure to racism as all the farm and fruit packing workers worked alongside Australian, Indigenous and other ethnic minority groups, whereas Rosa worked solely with Italians, with some Anglo Australian customers.²⁵

It was not that the interviews were entirely positive; the narrators did not deny the hard times when first immigrating to Australia and establishing their lives (see chapter 2). However, when questioned directly about standing out as racially other, the questions were met with adamant rejection and confusion over what there could have been to stand out about. For example, when asked if she 'stood out,' Leonarda insisted "No I don't think so, as I said I assimilated with the Australians pretty good".²⁶

Different experiences in the workforce and social life have shaped the differing responses of each narrator. Donato claimed he was made to feel welcome to the place by Australians and that he "never had any trouble with anyone or racism stuff like that, I never had any problem like that at all, even today".²⁷ When

²³ Dei'Agnoli, Interview with Lucia Dei'Agnoli by Bianca Vecchio.

²⁴ Daltorio, Interview with Rosa Daltorio by Bianca Vecchio.

²⁵ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio; Daltorio, Interview with Rosa Daltorio by Bianca Vecchio.

²⁶ D'Aquino and D'Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D'Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

²⁷ La Rocca, Interview with Donato La Rocca by Bianca Vecchio.

pressed about standing out as Italian, he admitted that “sometime when I don’t understand something or can’t write properly, I feel about it down”.²⁸

Nevertheless, he claimed there was no discrimination. In fact, in his employment, “actually they treat me better, they paid me even more because after a couple a months I was Foreman even though I didn’t understand English properly, you can’t get better than that”.²⁹ When asked if he thought of himself as an immigrant he insisted, “no, I never thought of myself like that at all.”³⁰

Donato came to Australia as a widely travelled man with a good education and specialised skill set. He immigrated slightly differently to all my other participants. By the time he came to Griffith in 1969 he arrived on a plane rather than a three-month-long journey on a boat.³¹ It is possible that his high skill set as a boilermaker and welder (taking up farming later in life) contributed to his different experiences in the workplace. He quickly held a position of power within his workplace, as a Northern Italian from *Potenza* and highly skilled, someone who could be developed into the “very useful Australian Citizens” Calwell desired.³²

Yet Donato was not exceptional. None of the narrators wished to elaborate on themes of racism and discrimination. Most gave short, often single word answers and appeared uncomfortably discussing the topic. They quickly looked at me, ready to move on to new topics. This response was exemplified by Nelsa. Asked

²⁸ La Rocca.

²⁹ La Rocca.

³⁰ La Rocca.

³¹ La Rocca.

³² Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War*. 153

if she felt like an outsider she replied, “No, not really”.³³ Whether she felt any racism? “No”, Whether she or family members were called names she insisted, “no, never, and my children never complained.”³⁴ After expressing that there was no racist memory for her to call upon, she abruptly transitioned into discussing the high school and university education of her son Hermes and daughter Sonia, unprompted and unrelated.³⁵ It was evident she no longer wanted to discuss memories of racist behaviour and would rather discuss education and the achievements of her children. A similar deflection was made during the dialogue with Florinda:

Interviewer: Were Australian people happy you were here?

Florinda: Yeh, *Australiana* people good, it’s alright, we went to Mildura and then after Mildura go up to.³⁶

These short, succinct answers with no offer of elaboration and subtle refusal to do so when prompted are mirrored in interviews throughout the process, as is the overt diversion as seen above from answering the question to suddenly discussing an unrelated trip to Mildura. However, both quick diversions show an activeness of wanting to avoid and not know as explained by Ricoeur. As exemplified here in my many attempts to discuss racism and prejudice in varied ways with Sebastiano and Leonarda. Only when Leonarda addresses question about racism to her daughter, who sat in on the interview is it discussed directly;

Interviewer: What about you *Zia* did you experience any racism?

Nella: No, not really, I don’t think so aye Alfia?

³³ Andrighetta, Interview with Nelsa Andrighetta by Bianca Vecchio.

³⁴ Andrighetta.

³⁵ Andrighetta.

³⁶ Cerrito, Interview with Florinda Cerrito by Bianca Vecchio.

Alfia: Oh, we used just get called wogs, it was nothing, no big deal, whatever. If that makes you happy.³⁷

The insights shared here are not elaborated on except one instance of being called a ‘china man’ (see chapter 2). Even when Alfia corrected her mother in admitting to experiencing racism, she firstly remembers the event as being “no big deal” and does not need to elaborate on it, it is just what was, not what is. Sebastiano and Leonarda do not comment on what Alfia shares instead both turned to face me ready to move on and make no reference to Alfia’s example for the rest of the interview when race or issues of conflict and hardship arose again. Alfia’s statement did not fit the memories they were attempting to convey and was simply left to the side. This suggests that perhaps, had I interviewed the younger generation of who immigrants and children of immigrants who grew up in Australia, rather than the immigrant community who worked in Australia, the outcomes and narratives would have been drastically different. Whereas my narrators happily discuss overcoming physical and laborious hardship as key in imparting their message to future generations. I theorise it would be a different legacy from the next generation as their parents had done the ‘back breaking’ work to physically establish them, the next step would be the political, theoretical and legal.³⁸

³⁷ D’Aquino and D’Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D’Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

³⁸ Battiston, *Immigrants Turned Activists*, 89–90; Marin, ‘Migrant Activism in Australia: The Case of the Italian Federation of Migrant Workers and Their Families (FILEF)’, 26–27.

Diversions were not the only device used to steer the conversation. At times these same short succinct answers filled with multiple “no’s” to really emphasise points were narrated in the interview with Vincenzo. It is interesting how similar the answers given through the interview process are when discussing racism.

Independently of one and other a collective rhetoric is used to discuss these topics different interviews for which they were all unprepared. Despite being unprepared, they had collectively common style of addressing themes like racism and prejudice that did not in their memories hold power or influence in their legacies. When asked if his children experienced racism, he similarly insisted “No, no, no, no, no, no, only the thing is the kids when a come to *calabrese* they had a hard time to learn English but otherwise no, no.”³⁹

Memory disputes, as seen here between my narratives and the secondary material, implicate big issues that highlight social and political stakes.⁴⁰ The denial of racism not only builds on the individual narrative of success but also distances the idea that in the present times Italian-Australians could (once again) be subject to hateful rhetoric, or be compared to, the current ‘new Australians’ who are experiencing it on a daily basis from the public agenda aided by the media channels, because it was ‘never’ experienced in the past.⁴¹ The denial not only shapes the past such that it is expressed according to a the nationally accepted pre-determined narrative of collective and individual success legacies of migrants, it also functions to distance the Italian (European) migrant populace from today’s

³⁹ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

⁴⁰ Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (Somerset: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007). 69. With a global resurgence of the far right it could be interpreted as an attempt to protect themselves and their families.

⁴¹ Irwin-Zarecka. 69

migrants and refugees.⁴² The Italian-Australian hardships, according to these memories, were physical, found on the farm or the cane fields, not social or political.

We could examine these memoirs as times when they remove themselves from their self-identified Italian categories into their categories as Australians as Eder and Spohn suggest is common among immigrant collective memories.⁴³ By this standard, it could possibly be argued that; the formulaic and collective memories presented are part of the social memory of Griffith but also part of their innate *italianity* which is a shared identifier. However, when we get these deviant memories, that diverge from the information given in secondary material we could possibly attribute it to collective identities within Griffith of which Italian is only one. Another identity was being a successfully assimilated 'new Australians' into rural Australian society, of which they are all sure and proud.⁴⁴ So when the collective memory of the denial of racism occurs, in the navigation of negative memories in legacy building, the narrators are possibly removing themselves from the collective memory of their Italian membership. Choosing to move their identity into their collective memory of their new Australian identities as exemplified by Leonarda when asked if she stood out as Italian; “No not really, more or less like everybody else”.⁴⁵

⁴² Irwin-Zarecka. 69

⁴³ Willfried Spohn and Klaus Eder, *Collective Memory and European Identity: The Effects of Integration and Enlargement* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2005). 234

⁴⁴ Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio.

⁴⁵ D'Aquino and D'Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D'Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

Collective memory and Donald MacKay

Parallels can be drawn here in examining the similar ways in which the memories of racism and prejudice are narrated and how the memories around the assassination of Donald Mackay are presented within the interviews. The interviews all naturally progressed to discussing the assassination of MacKay. This was a significant event in Griffith, such that everyone has their own carefully curated memories. It was surprising to discover again, much like the memories given about racism and prejudicial behaviour, that independently of one another, narratives of the event each had a similar structure and wording. I argue, therefore, that these similarities tell us that negative events that occurred outside of the narrators' control and which cannot be readily refashioned into an achievement and triumph story are more likely to be met with denial and avoidance in oral history.

Donald Mackay was assassinated on the 15 July 1977.⁴⁶ He was a politician and furniture store owner, Liberal party candidate who ran on an anti-drug campaign. Mackay was also identified as the whistle-blower on the marijuana farm in Coleambally that was a crucial case in the 1979 Woodward Royal Commission into Drug Trafficking.⁴⁷ On 15 July 1977, Mackay disappeared from a hotel car park after having drinks with friends.⁴⁸ Stains from his blood group were evident on his van and the ground nearby, and his car keys were underneath the van.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Moor, *Crims in Grass Castles*. 3

⁴⁷ New South Wales Royal Commission into Drug Trafficking and Philip Morgan Woodward, *Report of the Royal Commission into Drug Trafficking, October 1979* (Sydney: Govt. Printer, 1979). 145

⁴⁸ Small and Gilling, *Evil Life*. 59

⁴⁹ Small and Gilling. 59

Nearby were drag marks, hair, and three spent .22 calibre cases.⁵⁰ Mackay's remains have never been found, and the event and unresolved nature are still considered a point of shame " [after the disappearance] "they say where you come from?" the first thing I say I come from the country, I say I come from Wagga!", heartache "feel a sad", and dishonour in Griffith "ma we said the way they it happened it's not good to do this especially in this town".⁵¹ There is a code of silence '*omerta*' among the Italian mafias, the narrators then being uncomfortable in discussing these events shrouded in illegality and danger is understandable as there is still a very real risk of fatal or harmful consequences.⁵² The unsolved nature of the case and lack of closure also plays a part in this, they have no way to finish the story "the worst thing is that the real story never came out, that's the worst the lot".⁵³

These historical details that can be checked against police evidence, sourced from newspaper reporting at the time and articles of in-memoriam that appear every year in the *Area News* on the anniversary of his disappearance. When discussing the disappearance of MacKay, the narrators all had similar layouts to how their memories of MacKay before and after the event were presented and refused to talk about or directly name the event of his disappearance. A summarised structure for narrations would be; a few moments of reflection about him being a great man; "No, he was a good man Donald MacKay was so when we heard he

⁵⁰ Small and Gilling, 62

⁵¹ Small and Gilling; 14., Zappacosta and Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio; Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio.

⁵² Cavalli, 'Reflections on Political Culture and the "Italian National Character"'. 125-126

⁵³ La Rocca, Interview with Donato La Rocca by Bianca Vecchio.

was missing we were really sad” and “yeh he was very good, yeh he was a very very nice man.”⁵⁴ Narrators would remember him giving thousands of dollars of furniture on credit without a contract;

I will tell you just a story, it was the time there when I got married and all the money we got put the deposit on the farm here and we should need some chairs, tables, some bed some other things to you know like furniture and things like that, so that’s why then one particular day before we got married I say we go get in touch with Donald Mackay and I told him what was going on and he said to me “anything you want take”... and he give me I think it was nearly 2000 pounds, 2000 pounds for furniture, without paying without signing any, any, any paper.⁵⁵

As another narrator similarly remembered, “yeh yeh, always, we buy furniture we buy everything there, he gave credit too!”⁵⁶

Praise for MacKay’s generosity was typically followed by stumbled words in expressing the event, an expression of deep sadness and grief over the horrifying event followed by a firm assurance that an expression of grief and distancing from “these people”; “everybody knew we never would meet, no mix, never no one, like you no, never”, is all they had to say on the matter.⁵⁷ The focus is heavily on what made in him a good man, his generosity and understanding of the Italian people, over the specific questions I was asking, in an attempt to channel Mark Peel’s direct style, about their personal opinion on how the events were handled and emotional responses. The assassination was an event that shook Australia and

⁵⁴ D’Aquino and D’Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D’Aquino with Bianca Vecchio; La Rocca, Interview with Donato La Rocca by Bianca Vecchio.

⁵⁵ D’Aquino and D’Aquino, Interview with Leonarda and Sebastiano D’Aquino with Bianca Vecchio.

⁵⁶ Schirripa, Interview with Vincenzo Schirripa by Bianca Vecchio.

⁵⁷ Vecchio and Vecchio, Interview with Maria and Carmelo Vecchio by Bianca Vecchio; Daltorio, Interview with Rosa Daltorio by Bianca Vecchio.

proceeded to have enormous political and legal ramifications years after its date.⁵⁸ Yet this part of our interviews was over quickly with an explicit silent request that we move on.

The exception to this pattern was during the interview with Ignazio and Maria.

Ignazio was more than happy to discuss his opinions around drugs and the ordeal;

The big winery Tharbogang, that was done by starting marijuana, I don't wanna say...but that's how they started but today, and bloody now they blame the old people, 'oh the old people it was their way', but then the next generation their children they bloody show it off!.⁵⁹

While Maria constantly in this instance was elbowing him, telling him to be quiet or glaring quite hard “NO! BE QUIET!”.⁶⁰ However, it should be made clear that Maria's rhetoric, if read independently from her husband's, fits the collective profile of short succinct and clear separation from those involved “Yeh yep, the family was good”, “I don't mix with those people” and “oh yeh, bad name for Griffith”.⁶¹ Many times, she attempts to divert or stop the line of discussion to no avail “Yeh but that's a long story”.⁶² This demonstrated how strongly Ignazio feels about the topic as she successfully dominates other parts of the interview. The line of discussion progresses until Ignazio makes comments that could feasibly reflect poorly on them both “oh, you know [they ask you] “you come from the marijuana country, you got any? Can you have some made?” no no I don't grow”

⁵⁸ Small and Gilling, *Evil Life*. 59-69

⁵⁹ Zappacosta and Zappacosta, Interview with Maria and Ignazio Zappacosta with Bianca Vecchio.

⁶⁰ Zappacosta and Zappacosta.

⁶¹ Zappacosta and Zappacosta.

⁶² Zappacosta and Zappacosta.

and Maria then yells and tells him to be quiet.⁶³ This is however the one diversion and outlier among all the narrations on this topic.

In much the same way that memories of racism were presented, the discussions of MacKay were met by a denial of knowledge occurrence and a silent request that we move on. The posture changes that occur when both topics were brought up, the thinning of lips, guarding of expression and precise, careful calculation of what is about to be said are all telling features that signpost the uncomfortableness of talking about such issues. A clear attempt to not know, distance themselves from both event and perpetrator, happy to remain ignorant of the intricate details lest they should be associated with any part of the affair.⁶⁴ What is so fascinating is that in both cases this occurred independently. No one knew who else was being interviewed nor had they seen the questions. Yet they each used similar and parallel structures to how the memories were remembered and presented.

These examples of silence around uncomfortable memories raise the question of why is it so easy to expound for hours on the hardships on the boat, the war in Italy, leaving their families, hard years on the farm, inter-family conflict and inter-regional conflict, but when asked about a huge national event or racists behaviour silence, narrators resort to denial and short answers. The way in which the memories of racism and the assassination of MacKay are curated and presented harken to the tradition of silence in Italian culture that is usually associated with

⁶³ Zappacosta and Zappacosta.

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, 'Memory-History-Forgetting'. 479-480, Auge, 'Oblivion'. 473

discussing family outside the family and the code of silence among the Italian mafias.⁶⁵ The narrators of this thesis are apparently self-censoring during interviews where I am encouraging them to bring these memories and experiences to light. By Eyeman's example of framing narratives and master frames that collective memories of groups use and my own interpretation of these narrations as an attempt to build a legacy. It is apparent that comparing the two reveals that the collective memory of uncomfortable and demeaning situations does not fit with either the desired legacy, individual or collective, of the framing narrative. The same is true for the framing of the individual legacy; these public memories do not aid the messages and stories that are being conveyed during the narration in an attempt to build a legacy of success.

⁶⁵ Cavalli, 'Reflections on Political Culture and the "Italian National Character"'. 126

Conclusions

This chapter has focused on the denial and silences of difficult experiences that were beyond the control of the narrator. These public and at times collective memories are not contemporaneous with the facts presented in secondary literature around the discourse of race and racism faced by post war immigrants. From analysing the similar styles in which racism and the assassination of MacKay are approached both comparatively and collectively across the interviews, it is clear that there is a more formulaic and rigid structure to these memories. Words are carefully chosen and similar patterns which indicate collective memory are given. Unlike the positive spin put on laboriously hard times in Australia, these two issues cannot be made to fit into the legacy and memory of rags to comfort, and instead provoke emotions such as shame. When these uncomfortable themes are raised, narrators employ avoidance and ignorance as devices of forgetting. A degree of separation from the MacKay issues safely dissociates themselves and their families from the criminal members in town and the wider community, be it Woodrow's Royal Commission or journalists reports.

The denial of racism however fits more into the category of imagined places as explained by Boym. That is, in attempting to create a legacy filled with positivity and triumph, redeemable hardships racism does not fit and there for passively or actively it is almost impossible to call is forgotten. The narrators imagined a past Griffith where racism did not exist. Note that these memories presented do not lie in the private sphere like those presented in chapter two, in fact the memories on Mackay are nationally public. They are not as easily susceptible to slight nostalgic re-invention, positive spins or redemptive narratives as the memories of

hard times presented in chapter two were. This explains the silences and reluctance to then discuss them in the overall theme of thesis, as they do not add to the overall message of a legacy of success that they seek to communicate.

Figure 8 – Mr Cerrito working on the farm circa 1960s, donated from private collection



Figure 9 - Mr Vecchio working on the farm circa 1970s, donated from private collection



Conclusion

This thesis has explored how Italian immigrants in the rural community of Griffith narrated their life stories. I found that similar structures appeared in all twelve oral histories, allowing the narrators not only to tell their life stories, but to build a legacy to impart to me, their audience, who represented the next generation. My insider relationships allowed me to access particular memories that may not have been revealed to others. The history constructed was determined by my perceived insider categories for which the narrators then tailored their life story to the extent that they became more than narratives about the past but practical and moral guidelines for me on how to best live my life.

My research has enabled a fresh perspective on how historians might interpret memories shared in oral history when there is a significant relational factor involved. This is especially important when we consider the rise in migrant and oral history coming from within communities. By doing so, it also offers relevant insights into histories of migration in Australia and beyond as well as for the fields of oral history and memory studies. This thesis investigated how positive memories of hard times expressed in oral histories are to be understood by historians. It has demonstrated that they are to be interpreted, in part, as the desire to build a lasting legacy for the future generations. This means that, in interpreting oral narratives, oral historians must pay close attention to their relatedness to their narrators and consider, not only how their insider status (or not) shapes the content of life-stories, but also the role narrators imagine the interviewer might have in carrying their legacy into the future.

Given this, the thesis further asked how the individual's desire to construct a personal legacy affected their narration of the life story. The thesis revealed that private memories of hard times were shaped into a redemptive narrative, which in every occurrence had the end point of success. Yet when public memories were discussed, the narrator's ability to alter the core message was limited. Instead, these topics were avoided and silenced. Nevertheless, in the case of Griffith's migrant Italian community, the overwhelming desire to construct a legacy meant that every story was required to end on a positive note or find some redeemable feature, for even the most unpleasant of memories. Since oral history is the past remembered by the individual, nostalgia holds great power. Nostalgia allows the present and the future to be found in the past, while memories from the past are brought into the present. In the case of migrant histories recorded in Griffith in 2019, memories of the past are accessed through nostalgia and remembered in the present to create a legacy of success which develops into both a history of immigration to rural Australia and life lessons for the following generations by which they can both live and remember. This thesis therefore concludes that oral history is subject to reimagined memories that are not falsehoods but reflect desires for an idealised past and present.

This raises the question of why every story ended so positively in my interviews.

This is not necessarily the case for all migrant communities, many academic accounts remember the past more negatively.¹ Plenty of urban stories, as

¹ See as discussed Ricatti, *Italians in Australia*; Soutphommasane, *I'm Not Racist But ... 40 Years of the Racial Discrimination Act*. Persian, *Beautiful Balts*; Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War*.

mentioned in the introduction, do not always end with positive or successful outcomes.² Why did my narrators, for instance, not attempt to construct a legacy by emphasising hardship and suffering? Perhaps the particular emphasis on positivity that I encountered has to do with the migrant culture of regional areas and towns. I postulate, however, that in the realm of legacy building and the story of immigrants, those that do not end in success do little to help frame a master narrative that expresses the ideals and hopes of (Italian) migrants. Beyond this it is also fair to assume that life lessons that do not end on a positive or successful note are less likely for me, the audience and bearer of their legacy, to be acted upon. Further research comparing other rural settings in Australia with a high population of migrants like Mildura would be helpful in comparing, contrasting and analysing the narratives of migrants for similarities or to help explain disparities.

This thesis has also contributed to the oral history archive of Australia's migration story by recording the life stories of twelve immigrants, from regionally varying heritages, in a rural and untapped area. More than this, however, it has broken new ground for oral history, memory and migrant studies by analysing the importance of the relational aspects between interviewer and narrator. Examining why the oral histories are constructed and presented in the way they are reveals the complex relationships between memory, the past, present and desired futures of migrant communities.

² Gaita, *Romulus, My Father*; Chapman, *Sasha & Olga*.

In conclusion, I have found that oral histories communicate desires for the future as much as they impart knowledge of the past. They are not perfect representations of the past, as one might strive to glean from a traditional archive. But then again, no historical sources are; historians always construct pasts based on fragmentary sources and interpretation. Yet oral history, in particular, presents the past as it was perceived. On this occasion it is used by the narrators to curate the future through idealising the past. The strong will to build a legacy using history shows that when oral history is undertaken by researchers with deep insider connections, narrators build their legacies for the future through the interviewer herself. That is, history is constructed relationally.

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