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# INTRA-DIASPORA KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND 'NEW' ITALIAN MIGRATION

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# INTRA-DIASPORA KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND ‘NEW’ ITALIAN MIGRATION

## ABSTRACT

The Italian Australia diaspora is a heterogeneous mix of regional, class and generational identities. This article identifies and considers the influence of four recent Italian-Australian cohorts on the processes of Italian-Australian cultural formation. Of particular interest is the most recent wave of migrants (post-2000), whose arrival is prompted by the European economic crisis and facilitated by Australia’s skilled migration program. We argue that this cohort is a new form of “elite” skilled migration comprised of people who are independent yet reliant on the community infrastructure and social standing that previous waves of Italian migrants have established. We consider the relationship between these cohorts as a process of ‘intra-diaspora’ knowledge transfer and show how diasporas play a fundamental role in the skilled migration project. These dynamics challenge assumptions that skilled migrant integration is “frictionless”. Rather, their arrival simultaneously generates diaspora renewal as well as tensions around identity and community resources.

## INTRODUCTION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This paper considers the key themes of this special issue – elite professional mobility, knowledge transfer, and policy impact – in the context of the century-long migration history between Italy and Australia. In describing the Italian diaspora in Australia, it is important to acknowledge that the diaspora is not a homogenous or necessarily close-knit group. Those who identify as being of Italian background are differentiated by links that are shaped by village, provincial, regional and national ties (Agnew, 2002), as well as according to gender, class, age, generation and place of settlement. Most importantly, the diaspora is differentiated by time of migration (migration wave) or cohort of arrival. This heterogeneity has arguably led to the formation, over time, of many Italian diasporas (Gabaccia, 2000).

Drawing on findings from two recent research projects, we distinguish the contemporary Italian Australian diaspora into distinct cohorts.<sup>1</sup> Three of these groupings represent first-generation or Italy-born migrants, beginning with the **‘post-war’ labour migrants** who arrived in Australia in the 1950s and 60s through chain-migration based primarily on kinship and village ties. Their migration project can be defined as a family economic strategy to provide ‘better opportunities for the children’. Also included in this set are the **‘post-1970s’ skilled and professional migrants** who arrived in Australia in the final few decades of the last century. This is a more disparate cohort and their motivations for migration are identified as ‘for love (and lifestyle) first and opportunity second’, reflecting the common experience of migrating to marry (or because they married) an Australian. The third cohort comprise the so-called **‘new migrants’ (or third wave)** who have been arriving in increasing numbers in the past few years on working holiday visas and are motivated by a desire to escape the difficult economic times and limiting opportunity structures of contemporary Italy. Their migration project is aspirational because many of these mostly young adults explain that they arrive ‘with a mix

of hope and desperation'. Of particular relevance is the role of the established Italian Australian community in supporting the settlement of this new wave of Italian migrants.

If we accept that diaspora identity is not defined by birthplace alone, we can add a further two cohorts made up of the second-generation Australian-born. The first are the '**post-war second generation migrants**', (primarily Australian-born children of the post-war first generation), who are generally upwardly mobile and identify as Australian with a strong sense of connection to Italy. These are individuals who, described in the literature as "hyphenated identities" (Caglar, 1997), often report being 'proud of their Italian-Australian identities'. Secondly, the '**post-1970s second generation migrants**', primarily a 1.5 generation (born in Italy but migrated to Australia before their early teens), appear to be seamlessly bicultural and transnational, and very much 'at home in both places'. Our findings suggest that while all cohorts are well-connected, they can foster tensions and division as well as cohesion and support. In addition to time of arrival, these cohorts are distinguished by historical periods with different social and political conditions. Dividing the diaspora in this way facilitates an analysis of both its relationship with the homeland and the diversity within it.

We argue that the individuals comprising these cohorts, excluding the post-war group, do not neatly fit within the categories of either 'elite' or 'migrant'. However, they are generally highly mobile, well-educated and technologically literate and their networks are influencing the character of the Italian Australian diaspora and Australia/Italy links in important ways. Accounting for these groups reveals the need for a more nuanced understanding of the category 'elite professional mobility'. For this reason, our interest is in the personal experiences of migrants to reveal the micro and domestic dimensions of migration and knowledge transfer as opposed to a macro-structural focus that is dominant in the literature. For example, previous research (Baldassar et al., 2007) shows that while career considerations are a significant motivating factor in elite professional mobility, family and caregiving obligations are often overlooked and undervalued, yet are intrinsically connected to employment choices that together shape the patterns of mobility of the elite (as well as other social classes).

We draw on the stories of individuals to examine the similarities and differences between the cohorts identified above and to provide examples of the way knowledge is exchanged. What becomes evident is how kin and career considerations rest on links between personal, family, community, economic and political motivations in migratory moves. In short, the analysis highlights the combined role of the domestic and public spheres in sustaining diaspora ties (Olwig, 2002; Baldassar and Merla, 2013). In the Italian-Australian case, these ties represent a mix of 'strong' and 'weak' network links (Granovetter, 1973) within, as well as beyond, the cohorts which define it. Our central argument is that 'intra-diaspora' knowledge transfer contributes to the development of more extensive transnational ties and a vibrant diaspora. Further, this exchange has the effect of absorbing the

settlement needs of new migrants as well as enabling successful integration into the employment market. Hence, this form of knowledge transfer should be considered in the planning of both skilled migration and multicultural social policy.

#### THE ITALIAN DIASPORA IN AUSTRALIA – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Italian migration to Australia reaches back to the early 1800s and occurred in distinct waves: early (1800s); pre-(Second World) war (1900-1945); post-war (1950s-1960s); recent (post 1970s); and what we call the ‘new’ migration, or ‘third wave’ comprising primarily working holiday and 457 visa holders (post 2000). As such, Italians played an important role in major developments of Australia’s colonized history including early European settlement, the gold rush period, post-war development, and more recently, the ‘knowledge economy’ with highly skilled migration from Italy. These waves have been shaped by parallel economic and political events in Italy that generated particular ‘push’ and ‘pull’ motivations for emigration. The most recent influence is the impact of the Global Financial Crisis which has generated unemployment rates in Italy of around 12 per cent. Recent data indicates that new migration waves started being created before the economic crisis from countries that have long ceased to have significant out-migration flows, and which have since become countries of immigration, such as Italy, Ireland and the UK (Coles and Fechter, 2008; Conway and Potter, 2009). Some of this movement is towards countries that have long ceased to have in-migration flows, like Brazil (Solimano, 2009). However, most of it is towards long-standing immigration countries like US, Canada and Australia (Khoo et al., 2011).

The Italian born population of Australia peaked at 289,476 in 1971. By 2001, the figure had declined to 218,718 (1.2 per cent of the total Australian population) due to an ageing population, repatriations and limited immigration from Italy. However, if subsequent Australian-born generations are included, the Italian-Australian diaspora remains substantial. In 2001, the second generation (at least one parent born in Italy) numbered 355,200, (44.4 per cent of the total Italo-Australian population) and over 136,000 more than the first generation, (representing 30.9%). An estimated 197,600 Australian-born of Australian-born parents claimed Italian ancestry, representing the third generation (ABS, 2003). A decade later, in 2011, 185,400 Italian-born Australian residents and 916,000 claimed Italian ancestry, representing around 4 per cent of Australians (ABS, 2012). Thus, the Italian diaspora in Australia is a heterogeneous population, with the biggest group being the descendants of post-war Italian migrants.

The most significant wave of Italian immigration was the post-war influx, a substantial part of the massive campaign to meet Australian labour and defence needs. These arrivals were mainly labourers with limited formal education who sent remittances to support the natal household in Italy (Castles and Alcorso, 1992). While most initially intended a permanent return to Italy (repatriation rates averaged 30% between 1960-69), the majority remained, with the motivation of providing a better life for their children (Thompson, 1980). Australia’s post-war ‘white Australia policy’, also cast Italian

migrants as ‘non-white’, a threat to Australian ways of life and were initially met by considerable racism and discrimination (Jupp, 2002).

The dismantling of the Immigration Restriction Act in the 1970s saw the removal of any official criteria based on notions of race or colour but coincided with increased restrictions and a reduction in overall immigration numbers. Together with improved economic conditions in Italy, there was a substantial decrease in Italian immigration from the 1970s until very recently. In contrast to earlier waves, the post 1970s cohort comprised mainly professionals from the middle classes, migrating for career, lifestyle and/or love. They are more likely to retain formal connections to Italy through professional and business associations and they are generally not connected through the ‘strong ties’ of kin and chain migration networks to each other or to the post-war cohort. However, they are often involved in occupations and/or voluntary associations that bring them into direct contact with the post war group that foster the important ‘weak’ network ties of association. Many, for example, are teachers of Italian or welfare workers who provide services to the Italian communities. It is from the pool of recent (post 1970s) migrants that many of the leadership positions in the community are filled. These roles are partly a result of Australian multicultural policy implemented in the 1980s and 90s.<sup>2</sup>

The new cohort of Italian migration to Australia is of a considerably different nature than previous waves. Fuelled by the economic downturn in Europe, young people are arriving in Australia on working holiday and 457 (Business – long stay) visas in search of employment opportunities. Recently, the size of this group has risen dramatically from 1,106 entrants in 2006 to 3,178 in 2011 (Markus, 2012). This is concurrent with a 64 per cent increase in Italian applications for 457 visas (Business – long stay visas) from 2011 to 2012 (DIAC, 2012). These young and often single migrants are highly mobile and technologically literate. These attributes arguably make the term ‘migrant’ less pertinent given that the term ‘migrant’ conveys notions of one-way emigration and permanent settlement (Castles, 2002). Rather, they appear to be very much transnational actors, strongly connected to both their home and host societies. While rich in human, social and cultural capital, they are not often wealthy due to their life stage, and seek support from the established post-war migrant communities by activating their networks to find accommodation and employment. These new migrants are coming into contact with well-established Italian diaspora communities, representing both challenges and benefits for Italy-Australia relations and identities.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW: ELITE PROFESSIONALS AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Intra-diaspora linkages – or the connections within and between immigrant cohorts – facilitate, in Granovetter’s (1973) terms, both ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ network ties. Strong ties (like kinship, friendship and close ‘kin-like’ associates) are characterised by emotional intensity, intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal support fundamental to successful integration and settlement. In contrast, ‘weak’ ties (as in loose associations and informal contacts) offer a wider and more diffuse set of

connections that cut across different social classes, groups and settings, and are important to the “diffusion of ideas and information and the connection of individuals over distance” (Werbner, 1999). In Granovetter’s terms (1973: 1370-1371), weak ties provide “the channels through which ideas, influences, or information socially distant from ego may reach him”. Both strong and weak ties increase the scope for successful knowledge transfer in the broader context of Australia-diaspora and international relations. This is particularly the case in the context of almost universal access to, and use of, multiple forms of communications technology, that in themselves, provide tools for generating and widening transnational ties (Cohen, 2008). Migration studies have tended to assume that diaspora communities are defined by ‘strong ties’ through what Amit (2007: 68) calls the ‘ethnic template’ with a focus on “the retention of strong communal links” (Shimoda, 2012). But as the case of Italo-Australian clearly shows, diasporas are heterogeneous with diverse cohorts that represent enormous potential for ‘weak ties’ as well. This is particularly the case when we consider the significant differences between the post war working class labour migrants and the ‘new’ professional and highly skilled, or ‘elite’ entrants.

Much of the literature on global mobility is highly polarised between these two types of migration: ‘elite’ and ‘unskilled’. This polarisation contributes to the perception that there are two classes of the globally mobile – one that is privileged, ‘frictionless’ and transnational, the other being highly disadvantaged and vulnerable to social exclusion due to ethnicity and race. As Flavell et al. (2007: 17) frame it, there is an image of, “...a sharp-suited global elite service industry workforce, but serviced by an army of lower-class immigrant cleaners, shop owners, domestic home help, and sex workers...”. A central problem with these stereotypes is that they disguise the diversity of migrants across the spectrum. Consequently, there is commonly little specificity about the use of the term ‘elite’ which is deployed in different ways across the literature. The term is variously used to describe those eminent in the sciences, professions or the arts (Laudel, 2005), those with skills or qualifications in the context of ‘brain drain’ debates (Salmani et al., 2011), or very broadly, to denote ‘a sort of advantage...’ (Caglioti, 2008: 144) Further, ‘elite’ is a decidedly relative term, defined against the variable conditions of both the sending and receiving country. Given these limitations, our understanding of ‘elite’ is applied to those cohorts rich in human, social and cultural capital to describe the relative privilege of recent waves of arrivals from Italy, as well as those of the Australian born cohorts of Italians who have enjoyed considerable upward social mobility (Khoo et al., 2011).

The important role of diasporas as being the vehicles for knowledge transfer is increasingly being recognised in the literature relating to diasporas and their role in generating ‘brain circulation’ or the two-way transfer of skills, capital and knowledge and for reversing the harsher impacts of ‘brain drain’ (Mahroum et al., 2006). This attention is relatively recent, given that the capacity of diaspora networks is increasingly mobilised through the internet and social media platforms and there is evidence of a growing number and range of diaspora networks which are sustained over considerable



periods of time (Meyer and Wattiaux, 2006). Much of this literature explores the strength of networks with a concentration on highly skilled science and technology networks, and how the knowledge of highly skilled overseas nationals can be directed toward the development goals of the homeland (Brinkerhoff, 2004; Ciomasu, 2010; Cooper, 2009; Faist, 2008; Kleist, 2008; Meyer, 2001; Meyer and Wattiaux, 2006; Plaza and Ratha, 2011; Rauch, 2003; Teferra, 2005).

In contrast, our focus is on intra-diaspora knowledge transfer or the process of knowledge exchange between ‘new’ migrants and the established Australian diaspora. In doing so, we view migrants as individuals in light of how migrants, as ‘knowledgeable workers’, go largely unexamined with little appreciation of the contextual processes involved in knowledge acquisition, and barriers to the transfer of knowledge acquired in other places (Williams, 2007). We highlight the important role of diasporas in facilitating the transfer of knowledge to new places, in particular the important flow of knowledge within and between the heterogeneous cohorts that comprise them, which we argue has policy consequences in light of unprecedented global mobility as well as the increasing emphasis on individual responsibility for learning and the growth of “boundaryless careers” (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). These implications are related to the potential for “entrapment” of skilled migrants in suboptimal career paths as well as the economic losses that occur through the economic incapacity to utilise migrant knowledge (Syed, 2008; Hawthorne, 2005).

Williams (2007) highlights how migrants may face considerable barriers in utilising and transferring their personal knowledge in new places for a mix of reasons. These relate to the contextual character of knowledge and the migrant’s capacity to be able to ‘read’ the new context as well as the extent to which the receiving country can ‘hear’ or utilise the knowledge embodied and ‘embrained’ by the migrant worker. As Wenger (2000) describes, the extent to which knowledge transfer can occur depends largely upon employer or organisational capacity to recognise, draw upon and utilise the knowledge of the migrant worker. Importantly, Williams (2007) argues that to enhance the effectiveness of national skilled immigration policies, it is necessary to focus to the ways in which knowledge is acquired and transferred. Through this lens, types of knowledge that are essential in the capacity to both transfer and receive knowledge become visible. For example, networks, including both strong and weak ties, reflexivity, self-confidence and languages are rarely identified in the assessment of skill, yet they are essential pre-requisites for the use of knowledge in different contexts. For this reason, we use the term ‘intra-diaspora knowledge transfer’ to bring to light processes that occur within the diaspora to support settlement and renew transnational ties.

Such analysis is rarely undertaken particularly in the context of reforms to the Australian skilled migration program introduced in the late 1990s. These reforms included the introduction of a ‘points’ system designed to ensure that entry to Australia is targeted at those who are most likely to contribute to the economy through employment in fields identified as experiencing a skills shortage. It also

included the introduction of temporary visa categories including the Temporary Business Entry Visa (457 long stay), the Working Holiday Maker (WHM) program that allows young people working holidays for up to a year and international student visas (DIAC, 2012). These reforms are widely applauded as being highly effective both in addressing skill shortages and in improving migrant labour market outcomes. As Hawthorne (2005) puts it, the system is successful in ‘picking winners’.

In the following section we examine four case studies to reveal both the interdependence and tensions between new and established cohorts of migrants. We explore how diasporas, through both local and transnational networks, play a fundamental role in the broader project of international knowledge transfer.

### CASE STUDIES

The case studies highlight three key and contrasting factors – motivations for migration; transnational and diaspora connections; and experience of Italian identity – in an effort to explore the dimensions and dynamics of ‘intra-diaspora’ knowledge transfer.<sup>3</sup> We draw on research on Italian migration history to Australia, and on two recent ARC research projects. The first includes ethnographic interviews and participant observation with 20 Italian migrant families in Australia including 40 interviews from post 1970s migrants, their Australian born children and their kin living in various Italian regions.<sup>4</sup> The second project includes a survey, focus group discussions, and participant observation on Italian diaspora and its connections with Italy today, how they are manifest and why.<sup>5</sup>

#### Case study one:

‘elite’ professional migrant from post 1970s wave – *for love first and opportunity second*

Maria arrived in Australia for the first time in 1991, when she was in her mid-20s, for a holiday after meeting a young Australian man who was working in Italy. Maria fell in love with the man and the country so in 1992 she returned on an intended spouse visa. After marrying she successfully applied for permanent residency. Maria was very happy to migrate to Australia because it offered excellent opportunities in her chosen career. Although one of the first things Maria did after arriving was apply for a scholarship to specialise in her chosen field, she insists that the real motivation for migrating was ‘personal’.

Maria travels regularly to Italy with her husband and children to see her family. Her siblings have visited her in Australia. She describes returning to Italy is ‘an emotional, educational and economic investment’. It is emotional because her children have been able to form close and meaningful relationships with their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Maria also meets her obligations to care for her parents which are important to her. At the same time, she has also been able to set up an exchange program between her work place in Australia and her previous work place in Italy. Maria was clear that personal links motivated the development of professional links and not the other way

around. Maria actively fostered transnational work ties because her work now brings her ‘close to where my family live in Italy...’ This work-related initiative supported her main objective of staying in close contact with family.

With the advent of new technologies, Maria maintains daily contact with her mother and sister in Italy by sending text messages. They Skype almost every week and phone often. As she stated:

... my connections with Italy are on two separate levels. The personal one, I have family in Italy. I have been in regular contact over these years and that’s probably the major drive, but there is another important factor. That’s my professional interest in Italy ... that means that I’m happy to ...follow what’s going on in Italy and to keep up with any development because of my professional interest... The two things may be seen as separate, but in the end they come together.

Although Maria has lived in Australia for over 20 years, is a near native English speaker, has married an Australian and has Australian born children, she is clear about her sense of identity: “In Australia I feel very Italian and in Italy I feel quite Australian. But I feel Italian, I feel strongly, quite strongly Italian”.

Case study Two: ‘new’ migrants  
– ‘elite’ professional migrant from post 2000 wave ‘with hope and in desperation’

Flavio arrived in Australia in 2009. Like Maria, when she first migrated, Flavio is in his mid-20s. Unlike Maria, and many of the people from her post 1970s cohort, Flavio did not migrate for love but arrived with his girlfriend (and co-national), Anita. Like most other ‘new’ migrants, Flavio and Anita’s arrival was motivated by the aspiration for better career prospects. Even stronger, however, is their sense of hopelessness about their prospects in Italy due to the current economic crisis. As Flavio mentioned:

The sense of dissatisfaction in Italy now affects everyone. It affects the young people like us... then it affects even the middle-aged who have children old enough to think about the future and they see that their children are going to find it really hard... it’s not just the young people, it’s a crisis across all people in Italy.

Australia was their chosen destination because of the working holiday visa, which permits people aged 18 to 30 years to remain in Australia for up to two years. Flavio and Anita felt they had nothing to lose and a lot to potentially gain from taking advantage of the working holiday visa – ‘to try it out’. As Anita stated:

...we both came here together. In 2009 I had finished my university degree and I really didn’t have many job opportunities there, so I was happy to try something else... After a few months I applied and got a scholarship and a student visa...and a few months ago we switched to a 457 visa.

Like Anita and Flavio, many working holiday visa entrants hope to transfer to a 457 visa by finding a sponsor. The 457 visa means sponsored temporary residence (up to four years). It also assists in building ‘points’ for applications for permanent residency. The flexibility is appealing as they are not

sure if they will settle permanently. Unlike earlier cohorts, the mobility of the post 2000 ‘new’ arrivals is striking. This mobility is facilitated by both temporary visa options as well as by the opportunity for dual citizenship. As Flavio explained:

You have nothing to lose... and the worst scenario, you buy a ticket back to Italy and just start all over again...I’m very flexible. My vision in the future includes doing other jobs, looking for something different, but for now I’m happy with that.

Both Flavio and Anita have close ties to Italy and remain in touch with kin and friends daily. They define themselves as ‘definitely’ Italian, but are open to the prospect of also becoming Australian citizens.

#### Case Study Three: Post war second generation migrant: marrying a ‘real’ Italian

Bianca was born to post-war migrant parents: “My Dad came out in 1952 and my Mum came out later in ‘56 with my three brothers, who were all born in Italy obviously, and I was born the year after. I was the reunion baby.” At the age of 20, Bianca embarked on what she describes as ‘a pilgrimage’ to her ancestral home-town to see her family and heritage. Once there, she fell in love and married a ‘real’ Italian - a *paesano*. As she mentioned:

As it happened the five weeks turned into five months, turned into a lifetime, but anyway... we married in Italy and lived there for 10 years. Had three sons all in Italy. The minute they were born I would be at the Embassy signing them up for Australian citizenship. After 10 years of being in Italy my husband was in business with his family and they had a pastry shop so he said, ‘Ok it’s time for us to move onto our own and make our own life’.

Bianca and her family moved to Australia assisted by her Australia based family. She describes her transnational connections as ‘intensive’. For several years the whole family returned to Italy each year. They have ‘constant’ interaction by phone and Skype. Bianca’s migration history reflects what has been called the ‘circularity’ of the migration process, which challenges the notion of migration as a one way process (see Hugo, this volume). Bianca explains that when she is in Australia, she “feels very Italian” and when she is in Italy, she “feels very Australian”.

#### Case Study Four: 1.5 migrants from post 1970s cohort – ‘at home in both places’

Christian arrived when he was 10 years old and is perfectly fluent in both English and Italian. He describes his annual trips to Italy as “the privilege of returning often”. Christian’s parents migrated in 1993 for a short work trip and then returned permanently in 1995. His father worked for a transnational company based in Italy with business connections in Australia. Christian met his girlfriend, Loredana, in Australia who is also a 1.5 generation migrant whose parents are affiliated with the organisation that Christian’s father works for. Their parents are family friends. Loredana arrived in Australia in 1989 with her parents and sister. They established themselves here and were

granted permanent residency in 1992. Loredana describes the first years as: “It was really a backwards and forwards. In fact I was going to school in Perth as well as in Rome, because we were travelling a lot”.

Loredana did not obtain Australian citizenship until 2005, and then only to avoid paying international student fees to attend a local university. Her parents only became citizens recently, after 23 years in Australia:

We’ve also gone back pretty much every year since we’ve come here. My sister now lives in Rome, she decided to move back and she’s getting married there. So I have quite a strong connection with Italy, with the fact that I return quite often.

Loredana and Christian’s experiences are an example of ‘transnational lives’, where they are strongly invested in both Italy-based and Australia-based networks. They are in daily contact with friends and kin in Italy and they utilise a mix of communications technology (email, Skype, SMS, phone, Facebook). Loredana and Christian plan to settle in Perth ‘for the moment’ and define themselves as ‘both Italian and Australian’.

## DISCUSSION

### Contribution to and impacts on the Italian Australian diaspora – intra-diaspora knowledge transfer

The case studies illustrate four distinctive cohorts of the Italian diaspora in Australia. Each illustrates diverse forms of transnational lives that are shaped by deep connections with both Italy and Australia. They are also distinctive in their differences to, and relationship with, the established post-war community. The concept of knowledge transfer implicitly focuses on the positive exchange of information, which is presumed to be ‘frictionless’ in the case of ‘elite’ migrants. However, in the Italian Australian case there are points of tension concerning personal and community identity, competition for limited services, as well as ability to support aspirations.

One of the flash points concerns identity: personal, community and national. In the multicultural migrant landscape that defines Australia today, post-war Italian migrants and their children remain somewhat set apart, as not exactly Australian but ‘Italian-Australian’ in ways that reinforce their multiple attachments to both countries. They are defined, along with other non-Anglo groups, in relation to the nation-state or what it means to be Australian. Herein lies both the strengths and perils of Australia’s multicultural legacy – it provides an acknowledgement of diversity and a celebration of difference, but may also foster a marginalisation of so-called ‘ethnic’ Australians. This has been described as a type of ‘repressive tolerance’ (Bottomley, 1992) evident in the lumping together of a diverse group of people and labelling them all, in this case, ‘Italian’. New arrivals are assumed to be easily absorbed by the existing community because they are labelled in the same way.

This diaspora-identity context is often met by the ‘new’ Italians with surprise, for they are inclined to view their long-settled co-nationals as Australian, who have little relevance to contemporary Italy. In contrast to the Australian context, with its history of multicultural policy and related notions of mixed identities, notions of ethnic diversity are relatively absent in Italian social policy and a more narrow and essentialist definition of Italian identity prevails (Grillo and Pratt, 2002). Not surprisingly, tensions arise from the conflicting notions about what it means to be Italian between cohorts. Throughout the research process, we witnessed several extended discussions about who could claim Italian identity. One example was provided by Maria who described a confrontation between two colleagues at work, Rita and Joanne. Rita is a new migrant from Italy on a working holiday visa and Joanne is an Australian-born, second-generation post-war ‘migrant’. When Joanne told Rita that she is Italian, Rita strongly rejected this identity claim and insisted Joanne is Australian. Joanne was so upset that Maria had to intervene and explain to Rita that this was a commonly held view by many Italian migrants in Australia. Rita remained firmly unconvinced.

Furthermore, the new migrants have very different needs to established communities and may compete for resources from existing services. There is evidence to suggest that service providers are inspired by the new migration and find the enthusiasm and youthfulness of these recent arrivals an attractive focus of their attentions: “They are much more fun to work with” confessed a Sydney based ‘ethnic service provider’, especially when compared to the issues facing the older Italian migrants, of ageing, loneliness and isolation. The new migrants are also a much more visible target than the second generation; as one project officer explained: “The new migrants make themselves and their needs known, while the second generation often seem hard to find and even harder to get them interested in activities we are meant to be organising for them”. The result is the limited services and resources available are at risk of being re-directed to the needs of the new migrants.

Another point of difference between the cohorts concerns their relationships with, and connections to, Italy. The post-war arrivals tend to have lesser ‘obligations’ to homeland kin, primarily because their parents are deceased. This said, many continue to visit Italy and our data indicates that the vast majority feel and identify primarily as Italian. Yet, we would argue that the sense of ‘being Italian’ for this group is more about connections to Italo-Australia than to contemporary Italy. Our survey findings, for example, indicate that this cohort read the newspapers, listen to the radio stations, and belong to the associations associated with Italo-Australia, not Italy. Their strongest connections are to family in Australia as well as to the *paesani* (townspeople) who were key players in their chain migration, settlement, employment and social life in Australia, and who continue to be their greatest source of “strong ties” (Baldassar et al., 2012 ). The plethora of clubs and associations that characterise Italo-Australia are a case in point. Apart from peak body service providers in the form of social and cultural centres, the vast majority of these associations are hometown, provincial or regional entities that represent the community lifeblood of the post-war group. We might therefore

describe the post-war Italian-Australian diaspora as firmly established and relatively self-contained, but largely independent from Italy. This is not to suggest that the post-war cohort is not interested in Italy, or that they do not wish to foster relationships with the 'new' Italians and we return to this point below.

Like their parent's generation, the second generation post-war migrants represent Italo-Australia. They are fluent in English, the majority have limited Italian language skills, yet many feel strongly connected to Italy and are proud of their Italian identity. They have an extensive set of strong and weak ties to the Italian-Australian post war communities and it is primarily through these ties that they are linked to Italy. However, they share much in common with the new arrivals in terms of age, social and cultural capital, technological literacy and life experience and have the potential to quickly develop both strong and weak ties with this group. Given their bicultural competences, they represent excellent network facilitators for the new migrant cohort; indeed, they are a potential source of marriage partners. Our survey findings suggest that the second generation also foster their own new connections to Italy, quite distinct from their parent's networks, during their return visits and through social media platforms like Facebook.

Of all the migrant cohorts that make up the Italian diaspora in Australia, the post-1970s migrants and their children, are arguably in the best position to mediate knowledge transfer within and between the various cohorts, particularly for the new arrivals. These groups have more in common with the new migrants in term of educational and professional background than with the post-war cohort. However, they are well established in Australia and most have developed a wide network of both strong and weak ties to the post-war group. Their high rates of employment in administrative positions that service the post-war cohort means they have a solid understanding of what it means to be Italian-Australian. They have also remained very connected to Italy, primarily through their obligations to parents and kin. Moreover, they have benefitted from communication technologies and cheaper air travel to retain professional and business links. These individuals have the contextual knowledge to interpret and translate within and between the cohorts of the diaspora, not only because they are perfectly bilingual and 'at home in both places', but they are also sensitive to what it means to be Italian for both the post-war and the new wave of migrants.

While Italy is often categorised as a 'family-oriented' cultural system, (Blackman, 2000), traditional notions of family obligation are being challenged in Italy by rapid changes in employment, gender and family relations as well as policy and service delivery. Blackman et al. (2001: 147) identify 'signs of a shift in social attitudes from family obligation and responsibility to individual responsibility and citizenship rights'. This shift is evident in what we might call the 'new' mobility of young educated Italians who are searching for career opportunities overseas.

For their part, the ‘new Italians’ are closely linked with Italy in multiple and practical ways. They spend considerable time in Italy for both professional and family reasons, with strong ties in both realms. They are also strongly motivated by disenchantment in the Italian state and frustration with the Italian system of patronage which does not reward merit. With their significant educational resources and capacity to live in both places, these ‘new migrants’ represent great potential for knowledge transfer between Italy and Australia. In terms of the heterogeneous Italian diaspora in Australia, however, they also represent something of a double edged sword. At one level, their presence promises to revitalise the community, injecting youth, vitality, renewed language use and so on. Conversely, their relatively essentialist view of Italian identity, and their tendency to reject regionalism, can threaten the hard-won constructions of mixed and regional identities so central to the diaspora.

#### Intra diaspora knowledge transfer

As intended by skilled migration policy, the ‘new’ or ‘third wave’ arrivals are young, highly skilled and relatively self-sufficient. Yet they call on links to older migrant communities for information and support. Our research identified three main examples of this kind of networking and cross-cohort assistance in the form of ‘pre-trip’, ‘settlement’ and ‘future goals’ information, which we define as a form of ‘intra-diaspora knowledge transfer’.

In order to identify contacts and information about Australia, would-be ‘new’ migrants sought ‘planning/pre-trip information’ utilise two types of local Italy-based network ties. Firstly, the ‘strong’ ties of kinship provide links to the weak ties of ‘friends of friends’ or more precisely, ‘kinsmen of townsmen’, drawing on the historic ‘village-out’ (Baily, 1989) migration chains. In other words, the prospective migrant activates ties to family members living in Australia, or, if none exist, a family member in Italy is located who has ties to kin or townsmen living in Australia. Secondly, the ‘weak’ ties of home-town, provincial and regional networks, including established intuitions like the *nel mondo* associations and regional clubs, provide another avenue. Commonly the would-be migrant would email these contacts and seek assistance long before their anticipated departure.

Prospective migrants also use on-line mediums to research potential professional contacts in Australia of Italian birth or heritage in their chosen occupation and ‘cold call’ in the hope of assistance including advice about migration pathways and employment prospects. Anecdotal evidence suggests this strategy is less successful and it is primarily the networks that lead to connections with the post-war and post-1970s migrants that reap rewards. The contacts established often leads to ‘arrival and settlement information’ in the form of cheap accommodation. Hence, people who initially represented ‘weak’ ties might quickly develop into ‘strong ties’ by providing moral and emotional support during the first weeks in Australia. Employment is also often sought through these contacts, but given the work histories of the post-war cohort, job opportunities are primarily as unskilled labour and in family



run businesses. This scenario highlights some limitations in the ‘attainment of future goals information’, which ultimately determines the success of the ‘new’ migration campaign. Finding appropriate employment sponsorship to convert their working migration visas to 457 visas is the major challenge facing this cohort.

Despite the limitations on the extent to which the knowledge available to transfer is pertinent, the post-war community represent an important source of knowledge and support for new arrivals through their extensive web of ‘weak ties’ that span their hometown communities in Italy as well as across the regional migration networks of their co-nationals in Australia. These weak ties are important to the development of a sense of community, as Granovetter points out:

[f]rom the individual’s point of view.... weak ties are an important resource in making possible mobility opportunity. Seen from a more macroscopic vantage, weak ties play a role in effecting social cohesion (1973: 1373).

While the newer migrants do not tend to become formal and active members of the post-war network of regional, provincial and hometown clubs and associations, they often attend important meetings, festas and conventions. Granovetter argues that “the maintenance of weak ties may well be the most important consequence of such meetings” (1973: 1373) and that the flow of information and ideas contribute to a ‘sense of community’. To return to Williams (2007), and the preconditions of knowledge transfer, a less tangible outcome is that the longevity, success and ‘respectability’ of Italian networks have provided the basis for the knowledge and experience of the ‘new migrants’ to be heard and valued. This is illustrated in some part through comparisons between migrant groups and employment discrimination where Italians fare well in contrast with others (Booth et al., 2012).

With their significant educational resources and capacity to live in both places, the ‘new migrants’ also represent great potential for knowledge transfer between Italy and Australia. Knowledge transfer flows from the new arrival to the other cohorts in the form of information about Italy, becoming more up to date with and connected to what is happening there and, renewed and new ties to Italy through involvement in the new migrant’s Italy networks. Here again we see the potential transformation of ‘weak’ ties into ‘strong’. Unlike Amit (2007a: 69), who found that “[t]he paradox of globalizing connections is that they are likely to be most effectively facilitated by ‘weak’ rather than ‘strong’ interpersonal links” we found that the processes of intra-diaspora knowledge transfer activates both strong and weak ties, and that the two are often mixed.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this discussion is to highlight how the migration of the highly skilled between Australia and Italy is not ‘frictionless’ as framed by skilled migration policy and much of the literature relating to elite migration. Rather, these movements between countries have important impacts on both the existing Italian Australian community as well as shed light on some of the

important pre-conditions necessary for the successful transfer of knowledge between Italy and Australia. These include the presence of kinship networks, a receiving community to facilitate settlement and a society that values Italian language and cultural capital more broadly. Our analysis highlights the role of diasporas in supporting both skilled migration and knowledge transfer through interactions between the newer and more established migrant cohorts, including both local and transnational networks, and their mix of both 'strong' and 'weak' network ties.

The policy implications of these insights into the diverse experiences of cohorts of Italian migrants are twofold. First, skilled migration policy implicitly and explicitly assumes that skilled migrants are part of the 'elite mobile professional' class that can cross borders with ease making minimum demands on existing host communities and infrastructure (Williams, 2007). The skilled migration program is designed to ensure that migration resolves skills shortages, and through temporary visa arrangements governments can 'try before you buy', ensuring that those who do not settle, go home. Our research suggests that while Italian skilled migration to Australia is largely successful, it has important effects in shaping the identity, functioning and characteristics of the diaspora. At one level, the new migrants are instrumental in community regeneration yet they also pose a challenge to the existing Italian community identity and infrastructure.

Our findings highlight the gap in the literature in relation to understanding the spectrum of experiences of skill migrants. Closer analysis of the processes that support skilled migrants to successfully transfer their skills and knowledge would usefully inform migration policy. Such analysis also needs to consider how well that transfer actually occurs. 'New' Italian migrants enter and engage with a migrant community infrastructure which has been nurtured by successive waves of multicultural policy. This infrastructure now absorbs many of the demands of temporary arrivals and plays a key role in enabling them to transfer their knowledge in a new place, a process that is not without its challenges. Our research suggests that there is a heavy reliance on cultural background and language as a means to secure employment in Australia. While the effects of this might be benign, it raises questions about the extent to which the professional capacity of skilled Italian migrants is being utilised or whether they are being channelled into particular and potentially suboptimal career paths due to the exclusionary processes of ethnicity.

While earlier conceptualisation of migration were deeply influenced by the straight line thesis of settlement which predicted a gradual process of assimilation, more recent transnational perspectives have debunked this view to reveal continued connections to homeland despite distance and over time (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Bauböck and Faist, 2010). Contemporary transnational migration, in particular, represents a form of transmigration that relies on sustained connections with the homeland and assimilation in the host country becomes neither essential, nor necessarily desirable. Such dynamics are potentially unsettling and demanding for the established Italian Australian community

which have long been held up as the exemplar of multicultural harmony. In this context, the impacts of skilled migration in relation to multicultural policy need to be considered. In particular, the role of the diaspora in supporting knowledge transfer, a central goal of skilled migration policy, needs to be understood and supported.

## NOTES

1. For further discussion of the similarities and distinctions between these cohorts see Baldassar et al. (2007) Chapter 3 and Baldassar (2007).
2. Referred to by Castles (2000) as “the ethnicity industry”
3. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of informants and in some cases personal details have been changed
4. This data forms part of a much larger study that focused on transnational family and caregiving relationships comprising over 200 ethnographic interviews and participant observations with Australian migrants and their parents living abroad (Baldassar et al., 2007).
5. The survey comprised a total of 613 responses (423 complete) and the focus group included representatives from each of the main waves of Italian migration to Australia. A detailed report can be found at <http://www.deakin.edu.au/arts-ed/ccg/publication/res-report.php>.

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