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Panel Discussion: Exploring Identity  
and Community Through the  
Arts and Culture

*Ms. Josephine Cafagna (Chair)*

7:30 Report, ABC, Melbourne VIC

*Ms. Teresa Crea*

Artistic Director, SA

*Ms. Anna Maria Dell'oso*

Author, Sydney, NSW

*Ms. Melina Marchetta*

Author, Sydney, NSW

*Dr. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli*

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## PANEL DISCUSSION ON EXPLORING IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY THROUGH THE ARTS AND CULTURE

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*Teresa Crea*  
*Anna Maria Dell'oso*  
*Melina Marchetta*  
*Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli*  
*Virginia Trioli*

TONY CHARLTON: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the third session for this day, the second day of this excellent conference. Yesterday Cardinals, Archbishops, Ministers of Government and Internationals and today, so far, Vice Chancellors, Professors, Members of Parliament, experts on language and cultural diversity and multiculturalism. This evening a panel of most interesting backgrounds will explore identity and community through the Arts and Culture. I thought we might just start with a creed:

To be so strong that nothing can disturb your piece of mind; to talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet; to make all your friends feel that there is something in them; to look at the sunnyside of everything and make your optimism come true; to think only of the best; to work only for the best and to express only the best; to be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own. Lofty ideals, but you'll never hit a target unless you aim for it.

Let me introduce the panel: Dr Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, who lectures and writes on issues of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, is from Deakin University. Her publications include *Someone You Know*, *Girl's Talk: Young Women Speak their Hearts and Minds*, and *Tapestry*, a biographical narrative on five generations of her Italian family. She is also working now on a novel; Melina Marchetta, the award-winning writer of *Looking for Alibrandi*, and screenwriter for the film which you will see later; Virginia Trioli, author and journalist with the *Bulletin*, whose distinguished career in journalism included several years at *The Age*, where I also worked for 13 years; where she was well regarded for her writing on the challenges facing young people and women in particular; Anna-Maria Dell'oso, the award-winning writer of three books, who came to public prominence in the 80s; Teresa Crea, originally trained in film before completing studies in theatre direction in Rome. Teresa is a

Member of the Board of the Adelaide Festival. She received the Federal Government's Inaugural Cultural Diversity in the Arts Award. All are all distinguished and so certainly is the Chairperson. I know her well because I worked with her at 3AW, but she is now a presenter on 7.30 *Report* on the ABC and she is an outstanding lady of television and I compliment her: Josephine Cafagna. With pleasure I welcome the panel and ask the Chair to take over.

JOSEPHINE CAFAGNA: Thank you, Tony, for those kind words. Welcome to you all to this evening's session, *Exploring Identity and Community through the Arts and Culture*. I am personally delighted to be chairing this session whose participants, as you can see, are rich in talent and knowledge in this area.

It is coming up to 20 years now that I have been in the media and my first job was with Radio 3XY which I'm sure, except for the youngsters at the front, many of you would remember - in those days there was "Roctober" and Greg Evans. I recall that I was to read news and my news director, who will remain nameless, had trouble pronouncing my surname. "Cafagna" I kept saying, "Cafagna" - I did not think it was too hard. Now, he asked me to change my name. He said, could you shorten it to "Caff" - to anglicise it, make it easier for the listeners to understand. Needless to say, I told him in no uncertain words what to do with that suggestion. Back then there weren't too many women journalists, even fewer female journalists with an Italian background. And I use that story by way of contrast to what we have here today. Women on the stage tonight, who wear their culture with pride and who have reached the peak in their careers as well.

A little bit of history about the panel: it originated from the discussion on the need to include issues regarding the Arts and Literature into the conference, and how the Arts and Literature are impacted upon and indeed, influence Italian-Australian identifies and communities. Thus, the idea was discussed by Dr Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien and Diana Ruzzene Grollo and by Dr Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli who is on the stage here. They are all part of the agenda sub-committee. Well done for the suggestion. Invitations were issued and they would like to thank the writers who agreed to participate. We wish to also acknowledge the presence and absence of many writers and artists tonight. Now, Aldo Lo Bianco is here and - yes, he's at the front here - and John Fresina, so welcome and again, welcome to you all.

I hope you are fulsome during the discussion time. The process will be that I will call the writers up, to give a 10-minute or so address and after that, there will be questions from the audience, and any suggestions or ideas that you have.

To the first speaker I will give the stage. Please welcome Dr Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli.

MARIA PALLOTTA-CHIAROLLI: Thank you everyone and welcome to this evening. I must admit I feel very honoured and very humbled to be in the presence of women who have been role models and mentors for me who are now up here on the stage and also, for the men and women in the audience. Thank you so much and there are many of you whose work and ideas have been very important to me.

A lot of my work is actually involved with young women and young men and what I would like to do is present the next generation, to come forward onto the stage. In the car as I was driving them here after picking them up from school, a young women called Steph Chiarolli (I wonder where she's from) had the idea that they could help me out tonight, brilliant - and her two best friends who are rather like my daughters as well, decided they could do this too. So I am going to begin with some theoretical ideas that frame the kinds of understandings I have around identity and community, but they have kindly offered to read them for me - so as they come up to the stage - I'm amazed at their confidence because at their age I would never have been able to do this. I think it's absolutely wonderful.

Steph Chiarolli is from an Italian background; her father is Friulan or from Friulan background; her mother, me, is from Neapolitan background. We have lived some of those horrible and interesting issues about the north-south coming together in this child.

STEPH CHIAROLLI: *Multiculturalism does not lead us very far if it remains a question of difference, only, between one culture and another. To cut across boundaries and borderlines is to live aloud the malaise of categories and labels. It is to resist simplistic attempts at classifying, to resist the comfort of belonging to a classification.* (Trinh, 1991)

The next young woman is Catherine Pendrey. Her mother teaches Italian at a Catholic Primary School here in Melbourne and her father is from an Egyptian, French and English and other backgrounds. Catherine Pendrey.

CATHERINE PENDREY: *I am an act of kneading, uniting and joining, that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and of light but also a creature that questions the definition of light and dark and gives them new meanings.* (Anzaldúa, 1987)

The third young woman whose parents are from Scottish-Polish-Australian background, Natalie Cheeseman.

*NATALIE CHEESEMAN: As people are simultaneously the members of multiple life worlds, so their identities have multiple layers. Each layer in complex relation to the others. We have to be proficient as we negotiate these many life worlds; the many life worlds each of us inhabit and the meaning life worlds we encounter in our everyday lives. (Cope and Kalantzis, 1995)*

Without doing the Exhibit A thing, these young women represent the multicultural, culturally hybrid young people of our Australia. They are also talking about issues of racism; talking about sexism; they are growing up in a multicultural multi-sexual world and that's the kind of world that our young people from diverse cultures are moving into and a lot of my work is about. I want to thank these young women, and they thought they were just coming here to meet Melina!

First of all I will talk about identity. My Italian-Australian identity informs my work and indeed is informed by it. However, it is there to be interrogated. I want to explore the myths and the stereotypes; I want to do some research into my past and reconcile with some of the conflicts and the concerns that come from there and, move on and take those concerns and take my identity, my Italian-Australian and whatever the multiplications of that are, into the future.

It also means that I have to explore the bigger world. That I am not just part of an isolated community here in Australia expecting multiculturalism to make it all very nice for me - and I don't play my part in trying to make it a better world for everybody else. I am thinking of Elida Meadows' talk today about the fact that some Italian-Australians are still very good at being very racist, as I talk about in my book, *Tapestry*, and forget that indigenous issues and issues of other cultures are very significant in the way we see ourselves as part of Australia.

*So for example, and I am talking about gender issues too - we cannot pretend that multiculturalism is about protecting cultural tradition and cultural heritage; when we know and we should admit, that some of those heritages and some of those traditions are unjust and some of them have been unjust to women; some of them have been unjust to particular peoples from particular parts of Italy or particular cultural backgrounds; and they have been unjust in terms of people who could not or, did not become married and live a heterosexual lifestyle. We need to acknowledge all sorts of issues from within our*

*communities and move on and take our part in the bigger debates of this world. Multiculturalism, as officially espoused by the Australian government and as taken up by the Italian community leaders in Australia, is not enough. First, the focus on cultural heritage and the maintenance of cultural tradition has been used to hide, ignore and perpetuate the injustices and prejudices inherent within those traditions. Second, the focus on establishing and developing one's own culture has created insularity and apathy in regard to the responsibility the Italian community has to engage politically and socially in the issues facing Australia and the world.*

*As well as actively supporting and celebrating positive socio-political achievements in our country, these are some of the issues that concern us all in Australia and that our Italian-Australian communities should be actively involved in challenging: sexism, racism against Aboriginal people, heterosexism and homophobia, racism and political expediency displayed to recently arrived migrants and refugees, the oppressive dogma of religious institutions, inequalities in educational opportunity, poverty, intergenerational concerns and youth issues such as suicide and drug abuse that arise from a culture that older generations have set in place, inequitable workplace practices, a health system that disadvantages the poor, the aged and the marginal.*

In *Tapestry I* explore the racism inherent within segments of the Italian community toward more recently arrived migrants and refugees:

*Maria's sitting with some older rellies at a wedding reception held in the Adelaide Town Hall. They all seem so joyous, basking in their traditions in this display of middle-class migrant success. ...The conversation at Maria's table now gets political over the lasagna as Italian folksongs are sung in the background by a second-generation band. The older rellies speak Italian of course, or more accurately, their Napolitan and Calabrian dialects.*

*"It's the bloody Asians. They're ruining this country".*

*"They should be sent home. They're taking the jobs, they work for nothing."*

*"They're destroying our culture. Notice all the stinking restaurants, all the Japanese language and Chinese language going up everywhere. Being taught in our schools. What do my kids need to learn an Asian language for?"*

*"I'd kill my daughter if she ever married one of them."...*

*But Maria's left staring into her lasagna, her fork raised at the beginning of the admonition she didn't get to make. She wonders when the "Them" became "We", when the fence was jumped. (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1999: 125-127).*

When, why and how did the oppressed become the oppressor? What happens when migrants become economically successful and climb the

ladder? Did we learn so well from being on the receiving end of such racism that we are excellent at doing it to others? I don't think we should support that sort of thing. That is not multiculturalism for me.

I want my research and writing to show the powerful effects of love, acceptance, education and unity in crossing the boundaries and borderlines that are meant to keep people neatly classified and therefore divided into hierarchical binaries such as Anglo and ethnic; white and black; male and female; heterosexual and homosexual. The artificial homogeneity within and the blurring between such categories need to be explored and points of connection and understanding arrived at if we are truly to evolve into a cohesively diverse society.

I want my work to explore "multiple lifeworlds" and thus erase the simplistic constructions of "us" and "them". I want to show that one is not only Italian, but a particular type of Italian, and one is also a gender, and a sexuality, and a resident of a particular geographical place, and of a specific age and level of education, and with a certain economic framework.

My Italian-Australian identity informs and becomes immersed in wider issues. I am part of a bigger world of shared and divergent issues and I need to be immersed and contributing to these. So with *Someone You Know*, my first book (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1991; new edition 2000), my Italian-Australian self is there alongside my feminist self and my Italian-Australian family and community is there woven into the biography of Jon, a very dear friend of mine, a gay HIV-positive teacher in a Catholic school. I write about our friendship, explore the themes of birth and death, the Christianity that is love and acceptance, and the Christianity that is bigoted and destructive. I present the meeting and meshing of two worlds, the Italian subculture and the gay subculture, supposedly opposed or unaware of each other due to the proliferation of divisive myths and ignorant stereotypes.

When approached by a publisher to do *Girls' Talk: Young Women Speak Their Hearts and Minds* (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998), who I was and the absence of girls like me from the books I had read as a young(er) woman, directly influenced the content and style of this book. I wanted this book to be a tapestry: culturally diverse girls interwoven into a fabric of debate/writing/drawing around shared themes such as gender, identity, school, family, friendships, sexuality, sex and love. This would not be a book for and by Anglo-Australian girls with the obligatory, token "ethnic girls" chapter at the end of the book. This would not be the voice of one culture telling others the right and only way to experience growing up. I had also had enough of women's



conferences where the main parts of the day were devoted to “women’s issues” and then “ethnic women” and “Aboriginal women” made their appearance in the last panel of the last day. Was this Australian feminism being inclusive? I recall three conferences in a row in the early 1990s where Aboriginal feminist Jackie Huggins, the sole representative to speak on behalf of the diversity of Aboriginal women, and myself called upon to speak on behalf of all non-English speaking background women, were on the same panel. On the third occasion, we delivered our criticisms loud and clear.

So when given the opportunity to compile my book, it had to be inclusive, multiple, diverse. From 1996 to 1998, I worked with over 150 girls and young women from around Australia in the production and publication of writing, photography, cartoons and art that explored the multiple lifeworlds they belonged to and the impact of these “worlds” on issues such as bodies and health, school and friendship, love and sex. Australian schools, youth organisations, young women’s organisations, ethnic, lesbian and health organisations were informed of the project and girls and young women were invited to submit written and visual material that they wished to share, in the form of a book, with other girls and young women. Their work was then framed by my own writings: introductions, commentaries and questions for girls to think and talk about. These often included anecdotes or opinions based on my Italian-Australian background.

I am really thankful to Rex Finch, the publisher, who supported my ideas on inclusivity and equity. He did his marketing with some bookshops and with some schools, including some Catholic schools and unfortunately, especially in this State, he was occasionally told, “This would be a great book and you’d sell millions but you’ve got to take the lesbians and the bisexual girls out of it.” No, I won’t do that and I don’t think any of us should do that any more, if are truly going to talk about inclusivity and about multiculturalism meaning all the boundaries have to be crossed and we need to look at each other’s issues. I think we need to challenge ourselves.

My next two books, *So What’s A Boy?* and *The Stuff that Boys are Made Of* co-written with Dr Wayne Martino from Murdoch University, of Italian-Croatian background, will again weave tapestries, this time from the diversity of masculinities in Australia (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001a; 2001b). Working with over 500 boys and young men for these two books, it has been disturbing to see the racism, sexism and homophobia in many young men as well as the destructive results of these injustices in other young men. This reflects the prejudices and injustices they have

inherited from their parents and grandparents, including Italian parents and grandparents, particularly fathers and grandfathers. Is this the legacy we want to be remembered for in Australian history? That the multiculturalism the migrant communities worked so hard to achieve was only a surface veneer that concealed or actually condoned the continuation of other discriminations?

We need to unpick the tangles and suture discordant threads in our Italian-Australian community for it is both a site of support and interrogation, celebration and devastation. As I present in *Tapestry*, I remember all too well the ridicule, gossiping and ostracism my parents faced from members of their Italian community for daring to raise my brother and I with equal expectations and opportunities, regardless of gender. I remember my mother being shunned by other Italian women for being strong and independent and expecting her husband to treat her with respect and do his equal share of parenting and domestic work. I remember my father being ridiculed and homophobically harassed by other Italian men for preferring women's company and conversation in the kitchen over coffee rather than their company over beer, wine and cards; for knowing how to cook and clean, change our nappies and lavish my mother with affection. My parents taught me that community is not always home, and that it may sometimes be better to dwell on the borders of a community than be enmeshed in its conformist net. We cannot hold hypocritical and bigoted views, using the rhetoric of multiculturalism to bolster the ambitions of our community gatekeepers, and protect them from external criticism, while others in our community are stifled and marginalised. We are not meant to use multiculturalism as a shield to deflect internal criticism and interrogation.

*Tapestry* has had incredible support from the Italian communities. For example, I thank people from *Il Globo* and *Nuovo Paese*, who did beautiful reviews, Germano Spagnolo and Natalia Corbo. Writers/journalists like Aldo Lo Bianco who have actually taken it on and considered the issues from an Italian community perspective. However, there have been a few people in our Italian communities who have said to me, "There are some things in that book that should not be talked about. Who are you to say these things?" They need to be said. We need to begin to say them in different ways. We need to talk about this myth of the Italian family; some people don't fit comfortably into this myth of the all-loving wonderful Italian family; there are many different types of families out there. Some women especially have struggled in trying to maintain or live up to the construction of a

wonderful Italian family and it's been their responsibility to make sure the myth was somehow a reality. We need to work with all these kinds of issues. I think of a 16 year-old young man in a Catholic school who said to me the other day that he loves his Italian family so much. And he said, "I really hate going to Italian weddings because I know that being gay, it really hurts because I won't have that and it's really hard. For my Mum and Dad, my life will never be treated the same as my brothers." I was born into a life of many worlds and communities in Australia, each with its own codes and expectations, that I had to learn to weave and mesh, untangle and knot and am still doing so with both joy and pain. My book *Tapestry* documents the processes of suturing and scissoring that have gone into the weaving of my multiple-within self. The whole journey back into my past - physically going to Italy, emotionally travelling back into the lives of the past generations in my family, and interweaving all this with the way I was raised in Australia - was important for me to make sense of why I think, live, love and act in the multiple and sometimes seemingly contradictory ways I do as a woman, as a feminist, as a straight gay activist, as a mother, as a daughter, as a lover, as a professional well-educated middle-class Italian-Australian. I needed to know who and where and how and why in my family history in order to answer those questions about myself and the legacy and questions, indeed, the tapestry, my daughter has inherited and will undoubtedly interweave her own threads and colours into. I needed to make sense of those tangles, those times of confusion, pain and insecurity I have experienced and still do experience in Australia and experienced in Italy. The stories I grew up with and indeed my own life's experiences often didn't match the stereotypes and assumptions of an Italian family. There is so much more than the surface of a tapestry. I have grown up with stories of women's resistances to patriarchal injustices. I have grown up with stories of the power of religion as both supportive and corrupt. How can I submissively accept the dogmatic and destructive statements in Victoria made by the Archbishop Geoge Pell about young people, homosexuality, women's rights, contraception, and the family, when I come from a long line of men and women who faced and resisted socio-economic and gendered oppression coming from the joint forces of Church and State?

Finally, I wish to address one more aspect of weaving myself into the fabric of the Australian society through my work. And that is my desire and goal to act as a catalyst for others to do their work. One day in the future, what I am saying today will no longer be important or necessary. At best, my completed tapestry will decorate a museum wall as a relic

from the past. Indeed, it will appear flawed and simplistic, and if the critic is generous, it will at least be set aside with comforting labels such as “pioneering”, “significant in its day”, “paving the way for the better work that followed”. For isn’t that the measure of our success? Like dentists, we are working toward a point where we will not be needed anymore, where our stories will have been told and retold and have become part of the fabric of history. Where the issues we consider contentious and struggle for social justice with today will have been resolved or will require a new generation to take up the challenges in ways that are far more applicable to their situation. At that point, I hope to be able to bow out gracefully or to keep supporting those who come after me. Thus, one of my greatest joys in the research, teaching and writing that I do, and the way these activities keep me in contact with young(er) people, is the opportunity to empower, to open rusty gates, act as a mentor to those who will come after me.

More spaces need to be provided for the generations that will come after us to weave their own tapestries, to cross borderlines and expand boundaries, to explore the contradictions and confluences inherent in the construction of their multiple social positionings as both end-products of larger socio-political and cultural forces, and beginnings of new inscriptions into society, politics and culture. Young people need to be encouraged to gain and articulate their visions of themselves and others who co-exist with them in their schools, their immediate worlds, and the worlds beyond their perception. My work with young people, and the numerous letters, emails, and enthusiastic responses I receive when I go out to schools, have exemplified young people’s great potential to demonstrate and transcend categorical limitations, oppressions, and the splitting of concurrent realities inherent in the need to homogenise, categorise and simplify. Their recognition of themselves and others as multiplaced persons, constantly interweaving a multicultural and multisexual tapestry, can do much to challenge ethnocentric, sexist and homophobic perspectives.

Let us support and encourage our young people to explore “the creative interval” so that it becomes the larger and normative space. As fourteen year-old Khizran Khalid writes,

I’m the voice of tomorrow.

I’m the one who will make a difference.

I’m the one who will see tomorrow.

But can you take the time to listen? (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 265).

Thank you so much.

CAFAGNA: Thank you, Maria. Our next guest is Melina Marchetta. I guess she needs no introduction. I did notice that she was signing autographs earlier on and she'll probably be doing even more so after the evening and of course we will be seeing the movie a bit later on as well. Ladies and gentlemen, could you welcome Melina Marchetta.

MELINA MARCHETTA: I have to be honest, I don't speak Italian that well and for a long time that held me back, or a lot of people held me back because of it. And so my kind of talk is about how I felt about my culture but also about the idea of language. I will tell you a story because I think it's what I do best. I will tell you a story about a family I know that, like so many other families, had a story-teller - and the grandchildren of this family used to roll their eyes when they heard his stories; they didn't listen.

The grandchildren weren't impressed with these stories told to them in a language they weren't really interested in speaking and about people they didn't know - and about a country that popped up in every conversation, but they had never seen. Worse still they complained that their *Nonno* never had anything to say to them except tell them his boring stories and, all he could say was that they never listened.

The story-teller arrived in this country during the 1920s with nothing but a young bride, an old language and a sense of not knowing where he belonged and he passed all this on to his children and grandchildren. His great grandchildren may not inherit this displacement; they may never learn the old language but they know the young bride so maybe there's hope for them.

When he arrived in Australia he did a very permanent thing; he had his arm tattooed and to his grand-daughter the tattoo spoke of permanency, a kind of "this is forever" and 65 years later he died never leaving this country.

Like so many displaced people the story-teller formed a community in his adopted country and funnily enough his Italian culture strengthened, at times because of the freedom his adopted land provided and at other times because when faced with adversity and intolerance, people of their own kind stick together.

His daughter learned his language, spoke it fluently, married into the same culture, moved away and had three children. Two of the children were bi-lingual by the time they were five and the other one could barely manage Italian and will spend the rest of her life struggling between old and new.

At school she wasn't Italian enough to be able to hang out with the Italian girls because she didn't speak their language as well as they did and to them, that could only mean she didn't have pride in where her father and grandparents came from.

The girls from Anglo backgrounds would ask her where she was from and because she didn't know, she stayed displaced and confused. When she was 16 the story-teller's grand-daughter left school and, for the first time in her life she found herself hanging out with Italians which she kind of liked.

She sighed with relief knowing that not one person in that place would ask her what country her parents were from but, they did ask her a question: what region are your parents from? And she explained to them that her father and grandfather came from Sicily and they shook their heads, they mocked the dialect, they told stories of crazy Sicilian relatives by marriage and pointed out to her that she wasn't really Italian, which was a bit of a shock to her.

A few years later the story-teller's grand-daughter went to Italy. She knew that if she was ever going to feel Italian it would be in Italy and if she was ever going to speak the language, well it would be in Italy. What she discovered over there was her Italian-ness was purely Australian and it was nurtured not by language but by a community of people.

She knew that to understand her future as an Italian living in Australia and to nurture that culture and language she had to explore the past and so she began listening to the stories told to her by her relatives over there. She discovered that she didn't find them so boring at all, and all that time she thought her *Nonno* was telling her nothing but his boring stories, she realised he was actually speaking to her in the only way he knew she would one day understand.

She convinced herself that if she was going to be a good story-teller herself she'd have to go back to her *Nonno* and ask him to tell her the stories again, so she could write them, change them a bit of course, exaggerate, lie about them and create fiction.

When she returned to Australia she waited to see him that Christmas and he came and equipped with all her questions she waited for the answers, but the story-teller couldn't tell the stories any more, he didn't remember them. Six months later he didn't remember her and six months after that, he didn't even know who he was or his young bride, or his old language.

But when he died after 10 years of Alzheimer's and cancer he was skin and bones and faded, (sorry - I get a bit emotional) but the tattoo was as

vibrant and vivid and promising as it would have been 60 years ago and so were two other things: the passion his family had for this country and the passion his family had for Italy.

The story-teller's grand-daughter wrote her book without him (you won't believe this but I am the least emotional member of my family). When she began writing the novel the story-teller's grand-daughter had no idea what the plot would be, nor what would happen in the end. But she did know her character well. A third generation Italian girl from Australia, brought up by an English-speaking mother and a Sicilian-speaking *Nonna*.

The girl in Australia was comfortable with both cultures as many young third generation Italians are today. This girl discovers her identity mostly through the stories told to her by her *Nonna* and this girl, throughout the whole novel didn't speak one word of Italian, except for the words, *Nonna* and *Mamma*.

But, her sense of who she was, where she came from was as clear and strong as the story-teller's tattoo and when the book came out and was a success, the story-teller's daughter felt a bit sad. I will tell you why at the end because I don't think I can tell you why now.

Language is a wonderful thing but it's not the only thing that holds together a community of people. Sometimes it's just a superficiality and it alienates, and if someone within the community is alienated they'll walk away, and that's how the culture gets lost.

It doesn't make someone any more Italian, just like I realised over the years, that being Sicilian doesn't make me any less Italian. I spoke to my sister's husband about this because he's Irish and he said his people are a common example. The majority of the younger generation don't speak Gaelic but nobody can deny that the Irish are any less Irish, or that there is no future for that culture if they don't speak Gaelic.

So how do they preserve their culture in a country outside their own? Well, the Irish in this country are lucky; they can apply for grants from the government for writing or the arts and nobody says to them, "But didn't someone else write a novel about Irish descendants?" Or, "Excuse me, I think we're handing out too many grants to people from ethnic backgrounds such as your own".

To preserve our culture within this country we have to ensure that it's somehow represented in the arts and the media. So I tell my students, "Listen to the stories, write them down". So many young Italian girls and boys have said to me, "It's as if you wrote about my life" and they say it with pride. Others tell me that their great great grandmother was half Italian on their mother's side and they say that with pride; and they

say "That's my story". I always say to them, "No, that's part of my story."

We all have individual stories and your stories should be told because if they're not told the fourth generation will not understand and if they don't understand, they won't be interested and if they're not interested, they won't want to learn the language or develop the Italian culture in this country.

These stories don't have to be about hardship or disapproval with the way things are in this country; the future generations don't want to inherit a culture based on a victim mentality.

In 1993 I read an article by Michael Arici and he was writing about my book and it was very flattering, which was why I kept it of course. But, what I found the most important in this article is when he said that I wasn't unique and that in time there would be other publications that would be similarly creditable. I'll just read what he wrote:

"This can only happen if it is developed by community support. The Italian community owes it to their talented children to augment the benefits of the Australia Council so that such writers are not constrained by lack of financial support. The Italian community must dig deep to provide writing scholarships of a nature that will ensure publications and marketable readership. The Italian government itself must see this as a role of cultural development and not cultural maintenance. If it continues to adhere to a policy of Italian language maintenance through essay and short story competitions restricted to that language, then it will fail them miserably in bringing to light writing talents."

So in conclusion to my story that I tried to tell you, the story-teller's grand-daughter bought a house in Leichhardt and I don't know if that means anything to anyone in Melbourne, but it's like Carlton - and at first her parents just couldn't understand. "Why?" they asked, "The Italians moved out of Leichhardt; why go back?" "Worse still, why move out of home? Everything we've taught you is going to be lost, there goes the culture."

But the story-teller's grand-daughter explained to them that like so many other second and third generation Italians, she hadn't moved out of home, she's gone back home and that she was listening to her *Nonno's* stories. Thank you.

CAFAGNA: A very beautiful story, Melina and a few of us had lumps in our throats. I was thinking as you were telling the story that many other people have similar tales, so it certainly touched a cord.



Moving on to our next guest, Virginia Trioli. She is author and journalist with *The Bulletin* and she has a distinguished career in journalism including several years at *The Age*, where she well regarded for writing on the challenges facing young people and women in particular. She has another feather to add to her cap today and I would like to be the first to congratulate her. She is going to be the afternoon presenter on ABC Radio 3LO replacing Terry Laidler, so congratulations for that and welcome.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: Thank you very much. Given that little bit of news about my appointment as the presenter of *Drive* on the ABC Melbourne, I'd like to start with an apology. As a daughter of an Italian-Catholic and Irish-Catholic parents, I'm well accustomed to starting with apologies: the last 48 hours of my life have been a little bit hectic. All this, as you so kindly said, has all just come together and been announced, so I'm afraid while I've been thinking very deeply about this issue I've not had any time to put pen to paper. So I will be brief, but I'm actually feeling incredibly safe sitting here among these women because their stories are wrapping around me; they're not quite mine but they're almost mine. They are similar in ways that are almost too frightening. I think the story I'd like to tell you fits in with them very well.

In thinking about the idea of exploring identity and community for - what should I call myself, an Italo-Australian, some days I think I don't even deserve to be called that, given the distance now between me and that rather splendid land. But, in thinking about the stories, about the images that have created that identity, I sometimes feel like I'm watching a movie that's been made in a language that I don't quite understand, or that I'm looking in through the windows at a party, to which I haven't been invited.

The stories go something like this: large, wonderful, loud Italian family, grandparents who still grow tomatoes and zucchini in the back yard, children who go to school with big fat smelly sandwiches, not filled with peanut butter but filled with salami and cheese, children who are at school who don't know how to play with this funny shaped football but want to kick around a round one.

Then I've watched as culture takes over, as it invariably must when it comes to our stories, and filters these stories and they start turning up in novels and in films and all of a sudden, that terribly large smelly sandwich which caused this child so much grief, real grief at school, suddenly becomes this wonderful image of difference and charm and a wonderful tasteful, aromatic childhood. And, those moments on the

football field, where this oval-shaped ball was looked at in horror and where there was a real physical threat against that child for just a moment, becomes changed into a happy expression of cultural differences; the round ball is kicked around the field.

I look at these stories and I don't understand them; they say nothing to me because the stories that I know of Italian-ness and being an Italian, being an outsider in this country, are not so aromatic, are not so comfortable and are not so flavoursome. They're the stories of a man, my father, who arrived in this country at a very similar time. I'm very happy to hear the 1920s mentioned – it is, I think, a period of migration to this country that has long been neglected, pre-war migration.

He arrived here as a very young boy, he was only eight years of age, with his mother, to be met at Station Pier by a man he had never seen before, who was apparently a fellow called his father. He had come out here to find work and then called for his wife and for his son. They moved to Bendigo where the father tried to find work and set up a grocer's shop. It is a story of a young boy who, simply just to survive, had to eradicate from himself every little bit of Italian-ness, and he lost his language. His first day at school was the most beautiful example of not losing a language but of a language simply being knocked out of you. When he sat down in the class and the teacher wrote up on the blackboard: "What did you do in your holidays?" in English - and there was no-one to sit there with my father - and, looking at these strange white forms on the blackboard, filled out his piece of paper with: "What did you do on your holidays?" "What did you do on your holidays?" until the page was filled.

I think because of what happened to my father, at a time when he was growing up in a small country town with a World War that arrived, in which his people were the enemies - and of the violence that took place in towns like that against people like my father and his parents - that it's not that wonderful, happy, charming story of Italian-ness in Australia; it's some other kind of deprivation.

And I wait, I guess, for the day when those stories are properly told - and not told with a *Cinema Paradiso* type ending of joyous, rapturous tears at a mis-remembered, I would argue, youth. I wait for those stories to be incorporated into our lives, and I'm very happy to hear tonight, particularly from Maria, comments made about the debt that Italians owe - not only to telling those histories and those stories correctly, but to the other arrivals in this country and perhaps as a way of dealing with those new arrivals well and better. One way might be to remember the real story of arriving here.

I was overwhelmed with disappointment when during the Pauline Hanson debate, the Italian community to me seemed woefully silent. I barely heard a word from them. Indeed, I was enormously disappointed for many, many weeks, when there wasn't a word from the Jewish community either and I simply can't imagine a group of people more persecuted than them.

It is as if we are prepared to remember only the lovely stories and, perhaps it's simply a fact of family - you know how we all re-wrote those stories ourselves, the horrifying Christmas where Mum went missing or when Dad belted someone; it's forgotten and becomes the wild and crazy Christmas and wasn't that all just so funny.

We mustn't cling to the horror, but we surely must learn those lessons well and use those lessons to give us voice, a language to communicate to the new arrivals in this country. I think we all can feel enormously embarrassed, at some of the treatment of a great deal of the Kosovo refugees who were sent back in such a high-handed way and again, I think that perhaps, as a community, our voices weren't raised.

I would ask you to remember your histories, to remember them well, in the way that I can be included in them with my strange Italian-Irish-Australian background; I would like to be included with them and I hope that we can use them better than we have for the future. Thank you.

CAFAGNA: Thank you Virginia. Now I expect that the listeners of 3LO will be well educated in that area as well as you tell all the stories that have to be told on mainstream radio.

Our next guest is a true story-teller: I'm a great admirer of her writing, Anna Maria Dell'oso, an award-winning writer of three books. She came to public prominence in the 1980s with her witty and elegant magazine columns. Columnist and journalist Anna Maria Dell'oso.

ANNA MARIA DELL'OSO: It's very moving for me to be here tonight. Thinking about the third generation down there ... my eldest daughter is now eleven and she has an Italian and Jewish background, which is interesting at Easter and Passover time. She has a terrific time negotiating all sorts of different cultures. Her heroines are at this table tonight. She has read Melina Marchetta's book seven times. She has read Maria Pallotta Chiarolli (*Girls' Talk*) at least - she is getting on to about four or five times. She read through *Tapestry*. Read through *Girls Talk*. Thank you, Maria for educating her on those really difficult Mum-daughter matters. And I am sure that if she was living in Melbourne she

would know the others (here at this table) and she would know of Teresa (her work with *Doppio* and *Parallelo*) in South Australia if she was living there. So it is very interesting and heartening for me to see what is happening.

I am a child of the post-World War II mass immigration from Italy, one of the dreaded baby boomers who dominate the story-telling of our times. I have spent about 40 years accommodating and negotiating, contemplating and fighting for, and claiming and disregarding and reclaiming ideas about identity. And through it all I have called Australia home even though at times it has not felt particularly homely. But then what home is always and forever accommodating? Even the womb expels us.

It seems to me that the experience of exile and a return to a place where you understand that you cannot go home again, is part of the process of creating the inner and outer geographies of home. A crucial part of my life in Australia is the experience of having spent over 40 years of *not* living in Italy. A lifetime of not living in Italy is stamped in ink on my Australian passport and on my forehead. I have not been to Italy so many times that I am a permanent resident of this inverted place of borders and shadows where I search for somewhere to belong while still calling Australia home. But where is this place of “not Italy” that we Italo-Australian children of the second generation have created to live in? This has been my story-telling space. I have created the circle of my story-telling here, in this fertile place of sun and shadows.

For me stories come from three major places: from the suitcase, from the photo album and from family gossip and letters and diaries. For me my mother’s writing, which was long frustrated, has been a source and a stimulus of creativity. (C.G. Jung maintained that by far one of the most important influences on a child is the un-lived life of the parents.) Now not all cultural appropriation is necessarily a bad thing. I have in a sense ‘ripped off’ my mother’s work; I have ‘ripped off’ her stories. I have taken whatever I’ve wanted to take and felt most entitled to do so, re-inventing those stories, playing with them, re-fabricating the fabrications. As a story-teller I’ve been influenced by what Picasso once said about art and it is this: “Art is a lie that enables us to see the truth more clearly.” So as a storyteller I am liar, a professional liar. But one dedicated to the revealing of truth.

I was going to have photographs (to accompany this talk) but unfortunately technology has deserted me. One of the stories that I’ve ‘ripped off’ or have been fascinated by perhaps the most, has been my mother’s story of coming to Australia, which she has written about in a

poem called "The Great Step of Her Life". It is the story of a woman who came out as a proxy bride to marry a man that she had never met. She knew him by family connection; she knew him through letters, a long series of love letters that were exchanged between Italy and Australia in a courtship - well, I don't know that they were love letters (in the modern sense of such things), more courtship letters. These were in a trunk and I used to play with them a child. I couldn't read them. But they were there and as I took them apart they had this profound mystery for me. The Italian language seemed like gossamer veils over blue ink that called to me - and has for 40 and more years. It has been this anima (soul) that I have never been able to really get near, to fathom or to grieve over, for historical reasons (reasons of migration and geography and social custom). I could not absorb the Italian language (a kind of mystery and sadness, a loss).

And this is her poem, my mother's own poem about the day that she left Italy, which forms a mythological background in my mind to my own stories.

*"On that cold starry morning,  
I regretted having signed those papers.  
For the last time  
I climbed down the hills of my village  
Like a child.  
The square is filled with murmuring people.  
The car arrives, a kiss, a hug  
And I shed a few tears, as do my friends and relatives.  
I sit down, my thoughts in turmoil.  
I can feel my courage leave me.  
From the window of the car,  
I see the last houses of the village  
Blur past me under the stars.  
We cross the river and I no longer see any one.  
Farewell my home, my village, goodbye.  
I can only hope I will return to you in better times.  
Mother of God I don't know where I'm going  
Nor what kind of people I will meet there.*

In Italian it's much more beautiful. Those circumstances formed the background of her marriage and our family life, which was quite a dark story - perhaps an example of one of the dark stories that Virginia is asking us to remember.

Music was very important in our family. To me the piano accordion symbolised the joy in the Italian community, (a community life) that we

never really participated in. Because you see we come from the Abruzzi region of Italy. It's central Italy but it's psychologically and economically part of the Mezzogiorno. Part of the soul of southern Italy, even though technically (geographically) some of it is north (of Rome), but it's actually south ... So, you know, we were on all these borders and there are not that many of us (Abruzzese), it doesn't seem like there are that many of us (compared to other regional groups of Italians).

So ... music has always been an important part of my family. (Except for my father) we're all mad keen musicians and music lovers, my mother a frustrated musician and we (children) all took up musical instruments and I had longings for the piano accordion.

I once interviewed a wonderful man who was a 'king of the accordion' in Melbourne. He has now died, Ugo Ceresoli, a wonderful guy, who led the Mokambo Band. I don't know if any old-timers remember him. I would just like to read the story that I 'ripped off' him to use in "Songs of the Suitcase" (collection of fiction). I fictionalised the story and used it for my own purposes (to form part of the novella, *The King of The Accordion*). But the anecdote is from him (Ugo Ceresoli) - and it's a wonderful story about music and Italians first arriving in large numbers in post-War Australia and the shock that this caused in the community. In this novella the particular "king of the accordion" I have fictionalised to be called "Livio Simioni."

*"Livio Simioni was only in his twenties when he left Genova on the Oceania for Melbourne. He came to join his older brother, Dante, the guitarist, who was the businessman of the family. Livio was already a brilliant accordionist with a good career in Italy but he was one of those too good-looking continentals that couldn't stay out of trouble with women. He'd just left his first wife and baby daughter from a shotgun wedding in Milan, never to see them again.*

*He disembarked at Port Melbourne with suitcases of sheet music, five accordions, amplifiers, microphones - the stuff coming down the gangway on the backs of porters was like a Sultan's procession. The immigration and customs officials had never seen an Italian migrant like this.*

*To make it worse, the Australians had never seen button accordions, the true Continental accordions without keyboards that were the instruments of the European virtuosi and the Slavonic gypsies, 'and there are no better accordionists, believe me,' said the old man. (fictional character telling the story) 'They had a sound, my God, a music that made you drunk with life.'*

*The officials turned them over, shook them, slipped knives through the lining. If they really were squeeze-boxes, where were the bloody keyboards?' Was all this stuff really his own? This dago was either a Mafia courier or trying to get this equipment into one of his dago relatives' shops without paying import duties.*

*'You play all of the squeeze boxes mate?'*

*'Si. Play all. Certo. Sono musicista.'*

*The officials exchanged looks. Yeah. And they were Jacqui Kennedy. This guy's wog haircut and his two-toned puffer shoes were getting up their noses."*

*And I've got a great photo, I wish I could show you. He did, he had these shoes, he had 'the look', he was so macho, strutting down the streets of Geelong causing people to look and freaking out everywhere, you know - it was wonderful.*

*They grabbed his custom-made 120 bass Crozio which had 'Simioni' inlaid in mother-of-pearl on its side. "Fascisti," said my father, 'Why they no look at the passport eh? You look at the passport, look alla fisarmonica, and you see is belong to him. Is his instrument, is make for him. Bloody bastards. Why they no use their brains, eh?'*

*When Livio saw them confiscate his instruments he offered them lire and American dollars. He even took off his watch, which set the officers right off - 'Hey! Put that away mate. We don't do that in Australia.'*

*"My father was a brash fatherless kid from Naples who had been in this country only two years. Lina, from a village in Catania, was his proxy bride. He got her name from an Italy priest relative of her family and, after hounding her with letters for a year, Bruno was there to sweep her off to their rented rooms in Fitzroy. The disembarkation was taking a long time. He was edgy, hyped up in his best suit. The officials were a welcome distraction.*

*'Hey, Maestro,' he shouted in what I imagined was his usual reckless way. 'Play these cafoni una bella canzone. Maybe they have ears, you never know.' Livio Simioni knew better than anybody that a song is worth a thousand explanations. Wrestling the accordion from the inspection deck, he hauled it to his shoulders. The young Italian men around him wolf-whistled continental style; leaning back in their shirt-sleeves with insolent fingers in their mouths.*

*'Bravo! Viva l'Italia!'*

*'Maestro, fa Torna a Surriento!'*

*'Ma che Torna a Surriento? Fa Terra Straniera!'*

*'Ma che Terra Straniera? Fa Quel Mazzolin di Fiore!'*

*'La Donna è Mobile!'*

*'Nessun Dorma!'*

*My old man said that Simioni chose the fastest of his classical pieces, Il Volo del Calabrone, because he didn't know how long he had before they'd send for the police to arrest him. 'Flight of the Bumble Bee' by Rimsky Korsakov, usually played to show off the saltando and spiccato bowing of virtuoso violinists.*

*By the end of it, the smiling officials waved him through.*

*'That's respect', said my father. 'Even those bloody bullshit bastards had eyes wide like this,' - he made circles of his thumb and forefingers and shook them at*

my face – *‘They can’t believe. They never hear nothing like Simioni play la bella fisarmonica italiana. Ha! They look him with respect.’*

I was formulating a theory at one of the workshops where Pino Migliorino was talking about - you know - the third generation strutting down Norton Street and their idea of what Italian-ness is now to us here in Australia. I think that if you can make a connection, no matter how distant, to a *Nonna*, then maybe you’ve got your Italian-ness sewn up. A *Nonna* or a *Nonno* because they’re very important. Mine I never met on either side. One was a fearsome outstanding character who has been dead many years now. My mother, who is her daughter-in-law, probably left Italy in no large part to escape her.

I know I make it sound funny but there is actually a very dark story there. The way she had of describing that (mother) in-law was that “she was as hard as a bread with seven crusts.” (A great folk saying.) I was interested to hear Loretta Baldassar quote that saying as well in one of her works, because I’ve heard that saying so many times from my childhood.

I have used this (fearsome) fictional old woman in my stories. She appears in various guises. My last story will be featuring this fictional terrifying *Nonna* who’s funny - it’s funny but it’s also really quite dark as well. In a breast-feeding battle, of all things. The story is called “Harbour” and this scene could be subtitled “The Battle of the Breast-feeding.” When you’re a new mother a *Nonna* (of this type) can be a very terrifying person, especially if you are not of Italian descent. I’ve written a story of a cross-cultural family war that happens between two very strong characters. One is a Jewish-Australian woman, a baby-boomer former hippy type, who believes in ‘natural’ ways of doing everything. And *Nonna* for whom ‘natural’ means death - death in childbirth (which she came very close to several times.) So they have a locked battle over the birth of a child and the raising of families. And it’s one of my few short stories that I’ve written in the third person because I couldn’t decide who was the stronger of these two women. And in the end there is a reconciliation that takes place in the back yard – in the back shed of a (Aussie inner-city) terrace house.

From “Harbour” -:

*“Living so close by, the D’Angelos all had keys to each other’s houses, a practice that Rose (the Jewish mother) disliked in theory, but found quite practical and even useful at times.*

*This morning Rose was so busy getting ready to go to her birth centre appointment (she’s pregnant), trying to fill a urine sample jar while putting on her make-up and wiping Marina’s nose, that she barely heard the old woman*



and Loretta (Nonna's middle-aged daughter and Rose's mother-in-law) letting themselves in in the hallway.

Nonna Giovina surprised Rose on the toilet, Marina at her breast, a hair scrunchie in her teeth and her lipstick in her hand.

The old woman started. "Madonna delle Grazie!" She called out to her daughter. "Loretta, vieni, vieni."

Loretta scuttled obediently from the bathroom.

"Gesù Cristo," said Nonna opening the bathroom door wider. 'Madon', Loretta, what is she doing with her?'

Rose felt the baby pushing at her gullet, that feeling of no more room in there, of having to throw up. She swallowed hard and bent her head wearily over Marina, who took one look at her great-grandmother and turned back to the breast, suckling even harder.

Nonna Giovina stared at them in disgust. ( because she's breast-feeding this toddler) 'Rosa,' she said. "This no good.'

'She still just a baby, Nonna,' murmured Rose.

Two minutes with Tony's wife and Nonna Giovina lapsed into the street English she used with her grandchildren, doctors and with idiots.

'She baby? Wit all the teeth, talk, walk, do pee-pee in pot? No Rosa. Pliss don't say me this. She not baby.'

"She needs it, Nonna. She's been sick."

"Rosa, Dio Mio, Dio Mio, Rosa. Listen me. Pliss, is for you I say this. Why you sick? Why you weak? Why is go bad for you?" She turned to Loretta, 'Can't she see that she's letting this one steal the goodness from the other one?'

'That's not true,' said Rose, 'That's got nothing to do with it. Come on Loretta - tell her that's crap.'

Loretta, whose three children were each carried home from hospital in the arms of Nonna Giovina and stayed there for most of their childhood, stared from one to the other uncomfortably.

'How can she think this is right, Loretta?' said Nonna Giovina, 'Giving a grown child the milk of her unborn child? This is against nature.'

She turned to her squatting daughter-in-law, 'Rosa, this is no good. No good for you. No good for baby. In my country, we no do this. No woman does what you does.'

'Rubbish. Loretta, you know she did it herself.'

"Ma che dice questa ignorante? Never, never did I do this dirty thing. Tell her not to insult me with this, Loretta. I brought up five children, alone, through the war, through the tuberculosis fever -'

'Oh come on, Nonna, you can't tell me that when they cried you didn't -'

'With nothing to eat but what we could dig out of the ground. But still my children got food in their mouths. My children all learned how to

chew. I gave them food to eat -'

*'I give my children plenty of food to eat, Nonna.'*

*'La Vege-mite," said Nonna Giovina. La Vege-mite, sempre la Vege-mite, la Vege-mite. You think you can live on la Vege-mite, le chips, la sandawich?' Nonna Giovina pinched Marina's legs. 'Skinny, troppo skinny. Ma certo she sick, certo, living on solo la Vege-mite e la pinutta butta.'* Rose clung to the bathroom rails till her nails went white. "Loretta, explain to Nonna about comfort suckling."

*"E per la sicurezza, Mamma," Loretta obliged.*

*'Certo, certo. Don't talk to me like an idiot. I breastfed five children through the war, through the influenza epidemic-'*

*From the lounge room, Rachel and Daniel, the other children, finished with 'Play School' began yelling, 'I'm hungry Mum - Mum, can you make us something to eat?'*

*'See?'" said Nonna Giovina. "They hungry.'*

And another battle ensues.

Finally, just one paragraph about my ideas of appropriating things to spin my own worlds and my own stories out of the past.

From the title story of my collection, *Song of the Suitcase*.

"I have a bad habit of helping myself, without asking, to the endless grab-bag of my family's fabric, remnants and off-cuts. I steal them and haul them back to my work room at night, where I do a spray job and a bit of beading on them, including what I'm doing right now, this tattle-tale telling, this hocus pocus of trying to hem a bit of truth with a thread of lies, the punishment for which might well be another seven years of exile.

No matter; all night long I stuff my luggage full of everything that I can get my hands on - half-complete stories that only make sense in Abruzzese, bunches of unsorted familial threads, rolls of unsubstantiated gossip, packages of quick-fix morality - nothing is wasted in the journey around inspiration and memory.

I pack my suitcases to the brim. Yet when I look inside, all I see is the endless ocean."

Thank you very much.

CAFAGNA: Thank you Anna Maria, I felt like I was on grandma's knee just then, listening to all that - it was just very beautiful. Moving along, Teresa Crea, born in Adelaide, welcome to the podium.

TERESA CREA: It is a real pleasure indeed to follow such a distinguished panel of speakers and colleagues. I would like to thank

the organisers of the conference for creating a space wherein artists and cultural workers can also offer their interpretation of issues affecting Italian-Australian identity.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin, if I may, by recounting a recent experience. Sometime ago I found myself in London as part of a cultural exchange initiative between Britain and Australia. The two countries were sending artists, exhibitions, and performances to each other to up-date images of themselves in the respective countries. The exchange was entitled *New Images* .

I was part of a team sent across to represent Australia's artistic cultural diversity. So, there I was an Italian-Australian representing Australia on the basis of my work with *Doppio Parallelo*, an Italian-Australian cross-cultural performance company. I had been invited to apply my community process in ways of working with the Italian community in performance making, to the Italian community in London.

As I set off to make contacts with the Italian community in London I started by doing what I do here in Australia, that is making contact with the various "associazioni" and Italian social clubs that are common right across the Italian diaspora. I found several of these clubs and I discovered that one of them had an AGM the weekend that I was there, and I think, well, what better way to get to know the community I'll attend the AGM! So I set off with my map, until I finally I get to the street where this club is supposed to be and I start looking for the club.

I walk and I walk and I come across a group of people standing in a doorway. They were African. I look at them and I walk past, I keep walking and I keep walking. I realise I've gone too far, I turn around and start walking back and I come against this group of Africans again. I decide this time I'm going to go across and ask them the address because, obviously, I've made a mistake. I must be in the wrong place.

As I get closer to them I realise that this so-called group of Africans is speaking Italian. As I get even closer, I realise that some of them are speaking Sicilian and some are speaking Veneto. What's more they're speaking Sicilian and Veneto, not as an acquired language, but as native speakers! The club, which was a branch of the Italian Migrant Workers and their Families (FILEF) in London, was represented by a large contingent of African-Italian migrants. Needless to say it was a very challenging and eye-opening experience. One that brought home to me in a very concrete way, a reality that is taking place across the diaspora communities of all ethnic origins.

The following comment, for example, was recently made by a Singaporean Government Minister with reference to the Chinese

diaspora. I have taken the liberty, for the purposes of today's discussion of replacing the word 'Chinese' with 'Italian.' I quote:

*"New ethnic variations of Italians are talking place before our very eyes. There are now emerging Canadian Italians, American Italians, British Italians, African Italians, Australian Italians. One of the challenges that faces us this Century, is in fact the fact that national cultures and definitions that have shaped our ethnic identity are being re-shaped and re-invented at all levels. As we move to a new more global transnational condition new boundaries and definitions will be drawn. The ability to negotiate between cultures to live more hybrid existences will increasingly be an asset, if not a necessity. It had not always been so."*

When I began working in the Arts many years ago and during the early years spent establishing what was at that stage *Doppio Teatro*, an Italian-Australian organisation that went on to become a nationally recognised performance company, to work from an Italian-Australian perspective or indeed to declare one's ethnicity in the Arts, was to be marginalised. This despite the fact that artists of Italian heritage have been contributing to the cultural life of this nation since the beginning of white settlement. (For example we quoted examples earlier this afternoon of the Italian contribution to the establishment of Opera in this country). Fortunately, the Australian Arts have matured since then as is witnessed by very this panel. Although there are still some real barriers to participation, there is a shift in the acceptance and visibility of artists of diverse background.

But to return to the topic and to speak a little bit more directly about the Italian-Australian artists, we have over the 15-year history with *Doppio* been dedicated quite exclusively to the artistic exploration of what it means to be Italian-Australian. During this time you could also say that we have, with a range of different artists whether as actors, writers, directors, visual artists or set designers, come at the issue of being Italian-Australian from practically every conceivable angle. We have commissioned work from a youth perspective, from a woman's perspective, from a male perspective, from the perspective of the elderly. One of the main features underpinning the majority of the works we have produced, regardless of the perspective, has been the tension between a sense of displacement and the search for a unified self or cultural identity. This quest for identity is often represented as a series of "either / or " predicaments. Identity felt as a set of contrasting or conflicting values, behaviours, moral codes. Identity presented as a

search for certainty; a search for belonging; a search for authentication; validation. A search that has inevitably brought into question a reconfiguration of family life, sexuality, gender, moral codes, the role of men and women. These are issues that are present in every culture but which are brought more strongly into focus through the act of migration. In each instance too, there has usually been an underlying assumption of identity as a fixed thing, something to be resolved; something to be defined once and for all. I believe that notwithstanding the power of this search, symbolically, psychologically or otherwise and not withstanding the importance of conferences such as this where we are starting to begin to talk about Italian-Australianness, there is something much bigger happening.

The forces of globalisation and new media technologies are changing our very notions of place and space and with them, how we construct our identity. To go back to the comments of our Singaporean neighbours: our boundaries, political, social, personal are being re-drawn on a day-to-day basis. The search for personal meaning and belonging will not change; we are human. But, I would like to put to you, that perhaps the question to be asked today, or rather, the other question to be asked today is not “What does it mean to be Italian Australian?” but “What does it mean to be part of a global transnational community and have an Italian heritage. How are we to be cosmopolitan, international and rooted at the same time?”

It is a challenging question and one that will accompany us into the next century. Perhaps those that have been negotiating diverse and multiple identities from the very beginning; those cultural mongrels, those that were once marginalised, those that were born and bred between two cultures, perhaps now they might actually have a head start.

Thank you for your attention. “Grazie dell’ascolto.”

CAFAGNA: Thank you, Teresa and the other speakers. It has been a bit like hearing music tonight, hearing the story-telling, that is the theme of each of those addresses, the stories and their historical context and the importance, not just from a cultural point of view, but from a family point of view. We have heard the importance of maintaining the stories and telling them and the fear that we all have of trying to pass them on, and the difficulty of doing that.

My own way of doing this, is that I have a two-year-old son, and I have only spoken to him in Italian since he was born although it has been a bit hard because my husband is Australian. The problem now is that he doesn’t understand what his son is asking for, so while in one respect it

has achieved something, he will learn English when he goes to school. It is my small way of trying to maintain the culture and pass it on. My mother is doing the same, when she looks after him - he comes home with little Italian stories, I mean he's two and he's singing songs for his Australian father.

I'd like to open up for questions, so please be prepared. What are some practical ways that you're conscious of, that you pass these things on? How do you convince your children of the importance of passing on the culture? Is it too hard a question?

DELL'OSO: I'm finding it's coming from the children themselves. I have three children, one is two-and-a-half, so he's just himself at the moment. This Jewish-Italian thing - my oldest daughter has a connection to both sides, she's intensely interested - she went through a period of looking things up in the Internet. Her teacher has actually proved incredibly helpful in giving her a list of books, yours amongst them, to follow her interests in that way.

The middle daughter has connections through music and is almost psychic, I would argue there is an ancestral memory that you cannot explain; this middle one is so connected to her very difficult *Nonna* and the only one in the family that has this intense connection with her. I just try to encourage, by coming down to Melbourne as much as I can, by respecting the family for the two different ways, the two different religions. In a way it isn't a mixed marriage, in the sense that we agree on so many areas of philosophy and religion, because we both don't have areas of disagreement in the marriage. We're just very earnest '90s parents, wanting to be very multicultural and give them good experiences; but I think it is actually working, even if in an earnest studied way.

#### WHAT FOLLOWS IS AN EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIENCE DISCUSSION

AUDIENCE: Could someone explain to me, why it is - I say this with that music still reverberating in my ears, why it is that the best workshops by far at this conference have been where all the participants are women? Entertaining, thought-promoting, and with the maximum of intellectual honesty. None of those bloody platitudes we hear in the main hall.

CAFAGNA: I think that's a rhetorical question; I don't think he expects an answer - but well, I don't think you'll be disagreed with up here actually.

AUDIENCE: I'm not going to contribute to the question. I just want to state something. I know the work that all of you have done, I've corresponded with some of you; I know Melina's work because my daughters read it and I feel privileged to be in the same room as such talented women. I'm going to read what I want to say. "I feel privileged to have shared a brief moment where the stories of this group of complex, creative, reflective, compassionate, empathetic women have touched my heart and pricked my conscience. I feel empowered and I'm shaking - if not to have enough courage, if not to change the world but to reflect internally and come to terms with my various identities and circumstances and make my intimate place and space a better place for me and for those I share it with." I thank you.

CAFAGNA: If I can throw in a question, I don't want to dwell on the gender issue too much - but is it something that is carried through the maternal side?

PALLOTTA CHIAROLLI: If my father was here he'd be getting very upset because he was - along with my mother, as Stef knows - Nonno Stefano loves telling stories and he also experienced a lot of hardship as a young Italian man - you know, your mother's marrying a - you know, et cetera - it was very interesting, he went through a lot of problems with other men in Italy because he wasn't like what an Italian man was supposed to be. He came to Australia as a new-age guy in the '50s, way before his time. He suffered a lot with other people in the community because of that. I think it's not so much gender but I think it's the fact that there are some men and women in our communities who are willing to challenge each other and tell us the stories and get us moving on. I think they're very important role models.

In some other families because of circumstances and because of the way we've been conditioned to think - "this is what men should do and women should do", and people aren't challenging that enough, yes women often find - sometimes my mother would sit down, my auntie, my *nonna* - we'd sit down and one way of dealing with stuff was just to get it out there and talk about it and, as my daughter goes in to sit and listen, sometimes you don't know what to say - but, then one day you grow up and they're still here - and that's like coming out again.

CREA: Also I'd like to back that up, I think there are real institutional challenges to some of the comments made earlier: one that it's flattering

to say that it's wonderful to hear a panel of women speaking or artists; there are many, many people in the community who have important things to say in the Italian Australian community but the structures don't allow for it. And that's why I made my comment at the beginning about creating a space to hear what a whole range of people, men and women have to say about the real reality.

AUDIENCE: You are sorry about yourself, you feel that you are Italian and it is not good. This is the other way around - I wonder if you can understand my English? I've been here five years and I'm quite sensitive about - I had tears too - I'm just wondering, I grew up just Italian, Italian, one hundred per cent without ever asking myself about my heritage, but I had so many problems with my family, just normal problems that you have in a family, regardless of your heritage. So how did you cope with both of them, being in a family, not getting along with your father because of different personalities, or you mother - plus the question of the heritage. This is one question. The other question is, how do you see us - Italians. We come here, we don't have the problems; I have never been called "wog" and I actually find out maybe just a few years ago there was another word, not just wog, but another one, "dago", a few years before. So my question is, how can you cope with the fact that you have problems with the family and the heritage question and how do you see us - the Italians in Italy?

TRIOLI: Wow - sometimes in a family, in a home, where there are those two cultures, those two places Australia - wow, I don't know, some kind of a construction of a new Australia - and a remembered place, Italy - sometimes the Italian way is wrong as well and the quasi-Australian way which is not right either, so things fall through the gaps. This happens a lot. I found this experience with friends of mine where neither way rules, if you like - neither way is really "the way" and sometimes the children almost sort of make the decisions themselves. It's an interesting experience where there's a conflict but there are also two stools, and sometimes things fall between them.

My grandparents both *Nonna* and *Nonno* are both dead and they're long dead - and they're remembered now and I guess my grandma in particular is remembered now, through cooking and through dishes and there's this long running competition between all of us as to who can make the better meatballs, grandma's meatballs.

Grandma showed me how to make the meatballs first. My meatballs are the best, there's no question of this - but then my brother invites us over



and he makes his and - his are the finer - he mixes it a longer time than I do. And my father, when he used to cook - he's very very frail and old now so he doesn't, but he just wouldn't even enter the argument, of course his are better - for God's sake - he's her son. So we now have memories and a connection that is continued that way, because the bigger my family gets and the more my siblings and I have children, I'm one of seven children, and there are now many grandchildren - and the further we get away from that history, you can feel the distance setting in.

So to answer the second part of your question, how do we regard people like you? With envy and great love I should think.

CAFAGNA: Yes, I'd like to second that. I think when I come across someone like you, you're so lucky you've only got - you're a true Italian you're not this - I know but that's how - because when I'm in Italy - I'm not Italian and I haven't got the skill, the language skills and then I'm here and I'm not a true blue - and yes, envy as you say - I mean, that's the feeling that I have when I see someone like yourself.

AUDIENCE: It's not a question, it's a comment. There is a group of people within our community who are obviously not represented here tonight and that is our elderly people, who are in our nursing homes and more and more of them are in our nursing homes now. I who have never been privileged of having grandparents would love to be able to get closer to those people so that I can hear their stories and enrich myself with their stories and their lives and I wonder how many opportunities we give to our young people to do the same thing.

CAFAGNA: Yes, there's probably not enough of that. I know there is a program in some schools where the youngsters go to the nursing home. I don't know if that's done in a sort of purely Italian basis, or whether they do get Italian students to do it, but I think that's a wonderful thing because I've spoken to my nephew, who said, "I've met some interesting people, they've got good stories to tell" - again, to that theme of stories, we'll only learn from the older generations.

DELL'OSO: Quite a while ago I had a dream of writing a book about proxy brides; women who came out to Australia marrying men that they had not met, in the '50s - and I went around and interviewed a whole bunch of elderly women, sometimes very elderly - and I've got a whole bunch of tapes sitting in shoe boxes in my room; I would like to see a

couple of things happen out of this conference: one of them might be somebody really bright and clever to go around and really think about a systematised oral history project as the National Library has for the Australian cultural treasures, that people who are living - they call them living treasures - well, I think that a lot of the people in the Italian community, the elderly are living national treasures in a lot of different ways in that they have dialects that are dying that we want preserved in ways that they're not even preserved in Italy.

I would like to see some systematisation of that, to get these stories on tape. I tried to get my father to tell me how he grows tomatoes, I started with just taping stories about that and my mother's stories - the interesting thing is, she kept saying - is that thing on? And I'd go, "m'mm" and she'd keep talking, I don't want to talk to that thing, but she made sure it was running - she made sure, because I think that there's an instinct that if it doesn't go down it's never going to happen. The other thing I would like to see happen, I was talking with Maria about and it relates to your question before - I would really love there to be some kind of way of learning the Italian language for middle aged ex-baby boomer kids, who were called "wog" like me in my day - and never got to access the Italian language. I would like it to be a mixture of therapy, story-telling and learning Italian; I would go to any class like that, I would go.

As for the way I regard the Italian migrants, these new migrants from Italy, it is with deep anxiety, jealousy and love - I would love to be, to have those cultural riches; very jealous because it also provokes an anxiety: how do you see me? I am - you know, not quite the full quid, that sort of thing - so it provokes anxiety and also love and admiration.

AUDIENCE: Thank you very much. I apologise as well about my English, I will do my best. Anyway, I thank first of all the organisers and the panel for the lovely job they did. By the way they were very very ample, very very wide - we touch the problem of identity, cultural identity, language, the way to be alive with gender and so on and I thank you all for this.

I also like to thank a lot of the intervention of the *signora* there, because I think she touch the focal point and the focal point is that I think sometimes we keep forgetting, full of our Italian identity, what was done to us by our parents - they were in Italy till that time, so it happens to me - if they were in Australia at the time I was conceived, I would be prouder to be Australian as well and I am.

So the *signora* really touched the point where she never was called a “wog” or “dago” or something like that.

And I recollect a page of *Il Globo* last Monday in the last page, on the presentation of the IAI, where a big poem, anonymous, written in English, was presented, which is a lovely poem, nothing to say.

But even myself, I say this in favour of the younger generations, I can never identify myself in that because it's only a poem full of self-complaint, of “I was called this, I did this.” I think the real issue is the last intervention of Teresa Crea, I think, regarding the globalisation. We are living in a global world now, and in this concept really I think the most important thing to find our identity is to try to take the best we contribute to the world with our achievement.

And at last I wish - I am not surprised that there are all women there. It means they deserve - as an answer to a gentleman down there. Even if I would be proud to be there as well or to see a man there, and I wish to ask at last to the panel what are their intentions or what do they like to do to promote more through IAI, the theme of the conference? Thank you.

MARCHETTA I mean I think it is through our work, but it is also through our not so kind of arts work. I mean I teach and I just - I suppose - I don't know. This is how I feel about where I teach. I teach in the city and I teach in a school that has a lot of cultures and I think for those boys it just... I don't think it means the world to them that I am standing there in front of them, not because I am a writer because they don't care about that except now because of the film and because I know Pia the actress, but that is the only thing.

But I think what a lot of the boys from migrant families love is that they are seeing someone from a migrant background standing there in front of them, telling them what to do, changing their whole idea of gender, changing their whole idea of what they can do, and I think that's how I feel that I'm doing it more than ever, I suppose in my work as a teacher.

CHIAROLLI: Josephine, could I just address that question about what IAI could do. I'd like to see some funding or some programs for young people to come together and to do writing and to do art work and to explore a lot of these issues, to do the interviewing, I think this is a fantastic inaugural beginning, something that could really support young people from all cultures to go out there and explore all these

issues and come up and do forums like this themselves for us, and to do the inter-generational work, so - just some structural stuff.

CAFAGNA: It is great, as you say, to have forum to do it, and that just doesn't arise as often as you'd like to. This lady at the front has been waiting, and then you.

AUDIENCE: Well, I hope you don't mind me standing up and speaking at all because I am not Italian, but the only claim that I can have to it is that I am Greek and my parents are from the island of Ithaca which is on the Italian side of Greece, and we use the words from the Venetians when they were in the Ionian Islands, we use the words *nonna* and *nonno* for our grandparents. I have a big toe-in, I feel. Well, first of all was it Anna Maria who made the comment, "Some bright person to do, to write...". I have just been listening to one, two, three, four, five - one, two, three, four five, six bright people, so perhaps you can do something about what you suggested.

My mother said to me to - I mean I am listening to all the similarities and I thought you might be interested that my mother said, "Go out and learn whatever you can but you will have to pay for it. In here you will learn Greek for nothing." And finally when the migrants came out to Australia I got fed up to the teeth with hearing them saying that, "This is better in Greece, that's better in Greece and the other is better in Greece," and every single thing on earth was better in Greece. Well, one day my chance came and I wanted to go to Italy because I just adored the place from a distance and I wasn't at all interested in Greece because I had had a bellyfull of it, but I finally went there because some Australians were going there, and I did of course go to Italy, and many times since, but what I realised - and they were 14 some, and 15 and 16 year olds who were saying everything is better in Greece, and they came from some villages that, you know, I mean, no made roads, and poor villages. That is why they were in Australia of course. But when I went there of course I realised that three quarters of what they were saying was homesickness, and the other was they were right. It all was. The water was better, the bread was better and the beauty of the little tiny villages were better than any of our country towns.

And also the comment of the African Italians, I happened to go on a two year holiday to Greece. I finished up staying 19 years, and a lot of the summers were spent on Ithaca and one day a gorgeous tall handsome African got off and he said, "My name is Dr Raftopoulos and my father has just died and I have come to claim my inheritance," and three

quarters of Ithaca fainted. There were times - yes, there were times when I said to my mother - there were certain times when I said to my mother, "Why the devil did you ever come to Australia and have me here, you should have had me over in Ithaca and been done with it."

AUDIENCE: It's not so much a question. Okay. Look, it's not so much a question as a comment. I, too, have known many people who have had similar experiences to things that the panel have said. I was born in Italy and came here when I was only 10 months old so I think - I am not even a first generation Australian, my children are. But I really have not had the experiences that most people talk about and I am wondering if I am in the minority or if it is just people like me who don't say anything. I was never called a wog, I never had people say anything bad about me because I was Italian.

My mother didn't always say things in Italy were better. She complimented Italy, she did the same for Australia, and I grew up loving both countries. I grew up with stories, history, opera, the Italian language all the time and I took that proudly to school and everywhere I have been since, and I think I have taken equally the Australian side that I have received. And I don't know. As I said, maybe I am in the minority but I have not ever experienced any detriment in being an Italian growing up here. And is it that people like me don't want to say that because it contradicts so much or am I in the minority?

CAFAGNA: No, but where have you been?

AUDIENCE: I've been here.

CAFAGNA: Tell us where you've been, I would like to go there.

AUDIENCE: I just want to say two things. Can I be adopted by your parents and can I have your self-esteem?

AUDIENCE: I think Italians are huge drama queens and we like to actually remember, you know, the kid down the street calling us a wog, but it didn't actually affect me either and I think what really affected me as a child was my own family. I think what Italians do not do enough is look in their own back yards. And I think it is time we take it on. I didn't have a language to communicate to my parents because I spoke English and they spoke Italian and the frustration between the two of us trying to get ideas across was huge.

And another thing is that Italians - it isn't just about the storytelling and the wine, it's about the silence. There is so much silence that goes on in Italian families. So let's get real. Let's really look at some of the agendas here and not just - you know...

CAFAGNA: I am not sure - I think - I mean this is my point of view, but memories do that. Your memory does that, it remembers the things that impacted on your life most, and the things that impact on your life most, are the bad things that happen or the sad things. They are much stronger in my mind than the happy occasions. The happy occasions you used to sail through them. What impacts on your life are the sort of difficult parts of it.

AUDIENCE: You just need to say diversity. We have all got different stories. There are similarities, and it is great to - I think it is wonderful. I mean there had to be one or two people who went through their life without being called a wog in this country. It is wonderful to hear (indistinct). Yes, it maybe didn't come from friends, but the psyche of my parents being migrants and the fact that they had been called wogs impacted on me and perhaps a whole lot of other people. It created - well, for me, that insecurity that I felt...

CAFAGNA: The chip on the shoulder as well. They've all got the chip on the shoulder.

AUDIENCE: Of course they are, yes. Of course, and it's not to say that, you know, in the village it could have been a much more holistic thing and more understood than being here because here they also had the thing of coping with a society that was unwelcoming. I mean a lot of migrants were basically dumped here. In the 50s, there was nothing - the Italian government didn't back it up with education. They were dumped here and they were factory fodder, and they worked their guts out (indistinct) blood, sweat and tears and... and (indistinct) I am passionate. I think it's great, but we mustn't negate anyone's story. I don't want to negate yours but the moment you stand up and say, you know, people whinged, and I mean there is pain. There really is...

CAFAGNA: Okay, I just want to bring it back. And before I go to the next question does anyone from the panel want to comment on that discussion? Look, there is a gentleman that's been waiting patiently and he does want to put something in Italian so I will have to translate eventually. Yes.

AUDIENCE: Thank you. I could try, I could try to speak in English but I prefer to speak in Italian, thank you. “Io sono venuto in Australia la prima volta a ventidue anni. Soltanto per andare lontano. Mi sentivo solo me stesso, non altro che me stesso, e invece venendo qui, proprio a Melbourne, ho incominciato a capire che ero europeo, che ero italiano, che ero del nord Italia, milanese, a scale sempre più ristrette. Sono venuto qui anche per fare la mia tesi, sempre appunto in quel mio primo viaggio nel millenovecentosettantanove, e ho incontrato molti Australiani, e mi furono poste delle domande interessanti: “Are you Italian? Don’t worry, it doesn’t seem like that because you don’t wave, you don’t, you don’t look like that. You have blonde hair and everything like that.” E un’altra volta ero su un treno, viaggiavo da Sydney a Melbourne e di fianco a me c’era una ragazza della mia stessa età, quindi sto parlando di studenti, di allora: “Oh, you are Italian, very interesting, and which language do you speak there?” and I answered, “We speak Latin, don’t you know that?”

E allora a quel punto ho pensato: “Qui bisogna fare qualcosa” e quel qualcosa è stato, tornando in Italia, laureandomi ed iniziando la carriera accademica, di studiare l’Australia, gli italiani emigrati in Australia e cercare così di avvicinare, per quel poco che ho potuto, la conoscenza di due popoli.

Questo, secondo me, è un po’ l’importante che non è ancora uscito in questo incontro: dall’Italia, secondo me bisogna fare qualcosa anche dall’Italia per la cosiddetta ‘informazione di ritorno’, cioè l’utilizzazione al meglio di quelle che sono le esperienze degli Italo-Australiani anche per arricchire gli Italiani stessi che di esatto dell’Australia conoscono poco più dei canguri. È questa una cosa molto importante e significativa e pertanto io credo che questo sia uno degli elementi che dovrebbe essere, per quanto possibile, anche ufficialmente sottolineato. Cioè che anche in Italia si faccia qualcosa, insomma, si senta l’esigenza di valorizzare la cultura degli Italo-Australiani in Australia.

CAFAGNA: Yes, I think that is a very valid point. I certainly know from my mother’s point of view she feels “Why has Italy forgotten me?” and I think that is a feeling that a lot of that generation feels, that they have come here and their home country, you know, la mia patria, just doesn’t care about me any more so I think that is a good point to make.

AUDIENCE: I just wanted to add a few words to Professor Lucchesi’s words. I have not heard, I have just come today from Sydney, but I haven’t heard yet talking about another exchange, like experiences that

Australia can actually pass on to Italy. Italy is changing so Italy is becoming a multicultural society. I have heard my girlfriends who are teaching Italian in Italy telling me, asking me, "Well, we are facing problems with, for instance, Albanians of 15 years of age, where are we putting them? In primary schools? No." So I think Australia can also provide examples in this kind. And that is also something we haven't talked about yet.

AUDIENCE: I think will be the unusual story here. My family - I have the name Gervasoni. My family came out in the early 1860s, and it has been very interesting to listen to everyone's stories here because I can't quite count, but I am at least sixth or seventh generation and it is quite amazing the sense of connection that my family still feels to Italy. And my father first went to Italy in 1988 and discovered the house where the family came from. He just knew where it was. He had some sense of feeling and it was proved to be the right place. And I would - the point you just made - I was actually lucky enough to go to Italy on a trip sponsored by the Italian government to actually return third generation and people like me to Italy so we could learn a little bit more about our culture. And it is amazing how many things you discovered had been passed down through the generations that you did not quite realise were Italian. Have some hope that your culture will maintain itself.

CAFAGNA: It's in the blood, it's in the blood.

AUDIENCE: What you said today, Dr Maria, and someone else has made a comment that it is the first time that we have heard multiculturalism being put in a different context and how we as an older generation of migrants have a legacy to new immigrants in this country to help them and to - it sort of goes in jointly with what this woman just said to me before, that if we could actually document a process of what - the good things, the bad things about being immigrants so that every new group of people that comes to this country doesn't have to re-invent the wheel each time.

And I think we do have a legacy to other cultures and also to ourselves to enrich ourselves and not keep ourselves in this Italian vein. We have got to create links with our other fellow Australians too for the strength of the country. And I was hoping that as a recommendation that if you could formalise something that it could be put as one of the objectives of IAI, what you recommended today, so it is something we can talk about tomorrow perhaps.

PALLOTTA-CHIAROLLI: Thank you so much. I guess working



again with people at University, young people and people in schools, it is coming across very strongly that sometimes we are passing on our prejudices, we are passing on our problems. As I said, we have just finished interviewing 200 boys from about 10 years of age to 20 and they talk to me about a hierarchy they have at school, the ethnic hierarchy. There are Anglos and Europeans sort of on par, depending on which school you go to. Some schools it's Anglo and Italian and Greek and Croatian here. Other schools it's Italians, Greeks, Croatians and the Anglos, you know, and in the middle you have got all these mixed young people who are wondering where they go. But then after that it is the Asians and after that it is interestingly, disabled boys, and then it is a bit of a problem here, disabled girls and Aborigines. And Aboriginal girls at the bottom. We were shocked that when you begin to ask some interesting questions some young boys at the moment are replicating some of these racisms and injustices.

We have got a responsibility. I know, I own that there are issues that we have faced, our parents have faced. We have got to talk about those and we have got to get those stories out, but as Virginia was saying, okay, the next step is our responsibility to make sure that we don't pass on and that we are not - we don't go from being the oppressed to the oppressors because unfortunately we are seeing those things happening. And also our young people are very mixed now and we need to acknowledge those diversities within them and help them to not pick up our rivalries all the time.

AUDIENCE: I am sorry (indistinct) but I really want to say something about Asia. I grew up during the war and I went to school during the war. I went to a Catholic boarding college at which I - very similar to your book, very very similar, but at the age - I turned my back on a legal career and caught a ship to India and went travelling through South East Asia for quite some time. And my father who had gone through incredible suffering in the 20s and came to Australia and brought the whole family out said to me in Sicilian "Ma filio mio, what are you doing? Why are you going? I came all this way to get away from miseria and you are going looking for it." Right. So there were a lot of things. The other thing - the odyssey that I had to make when I could afford to get to Europe was I not only went and discovered my roots, I went and discovered the roots of the Greeks from Kythera and from Castellorizo and from all the other places. I went all over those places. I went behind the Iron Curtain. I had the first tourist visa into Czechoslovakia after the Russian invasion and wrote a little bit of an article about that for Guy

Morrison at the *Herald*. I went to Hungary, I went to all these places because - I went to Auschwitz. I went to the other place - the sanitized place in Germany, what's it called - Dachau, thank you.

I did all those things. I had this compelling urge to be multicultural because I had got out of that Catholic environment of the Catholic boarding school where they called me all the bloody names under the sun, right, where I felt compelled to become a wog and I went off and I did preliminary Italian so I could enter the Italian department - in those days my mother can't even speak Italian, right. We all have different stories.

My grandfather arrived and he saw me and he said, "Ma cosa ha il canguro?" because I couldn't speak Italian. So we all have these terrible struggles. It is about time we stopped - someone - I think you, mentioned this business, we don't get a chance to talk about these things because of the structural difficulties.

Who was it who mentioned structural difficulties? That's right, because of all these organisations that won't let us have a say. I am talking far too much right now. The best way to have a *sfogata* before I die, which won't be very long because I am in my late 60s, is to get pen onto paper and start writing and I think we have to, and I thank you wonderful wonderful people for giving us this enormous stimulation. I want to go out and emulate you.

CHIAROLLI: I don't want to hog this either. I just want to say one thing. One concern that I have with this conference and with many Italian organisations and community groups is that we often don't challenge one major structure that is very influential in our families and that is the church. And the fact that I am coming from a family who saw Fascism and the Catholic church as very beautifully linked, and as poor people from a little town in Southern Italy they were on the receiving end of oppression from a government, Fascism and their church, and we pretend, especially in this State with our Archbishop who is making three appearances at this conference, we are not questioning and challenging, as well as acknowledging the good stuff, but we are not questioning and challenging some of these very institutions that are supposed to be upholding family and are causing major divisions in our families.

CAFAGNA: We are getting tight for time so I am going to have to limit it now to three questions because we have got a deadline to meet and that is the great film that we are all going to see. The lady in yellow who

has had her arm up, then Vlado and then one more after that and I will have to see. Over here, the lady in yellow.

AUDIENCE: Thank you. And thank you to everybody for being patient with us. First of all I would just like to say something that my friend started and I don't intend to speak for her, and I don't intend to make too many generalisations, but there is just one small thing of experience within the family. I think what it is, I can't speak for my friend but I am going to give it a go. I wasn't called a wog because no one where I came from knew what one was. When I asked my dad what it was he said, "Just tell them to shut up." Right, Tassie.

CAFAGNA: They called you other names there didn't they?

AUDIENCE: They didn't know what it was, they didn't know. They didn't know what was going on. But it is one thing to be called an Aussie from inside your family. When you are a kid you don't get it. You don't get - you don't get it and it's a bit weird, but anyway. That is the point that I - that's the blah blah of my friend. But what I was going to say is the point that you made that I thought was really interesting about - almost like a group consciousness as a culture, and I grew up in Tassie like I said, with an Australian mother. Another question that someone posed was about women, whether this information is passed on through women, and I would like to say that I am a living example of that not being the case because my mother is Australian, and I feel incredibly Italian and didn't realise until I spoke to Maria the other day.

I stated I grew up in a community with no Italians. I grew up in a community with Aunty Beryl godmother, Uncle Mario godfather, all of their kids, heaps older than my brother and myself but all boys, no girls. No Italian mother, no *nonna*, no women, just a bunch of Italian blokes and why am I such - why am I an Italian woman? So - no, it doesn't come through the girls. And I think that it has got a lot to do with - and the Jewish people are great advocates for group consciousness and I think that what it is that a lot of people are saying it's political, it's troublesome, but it is about a state of the heart and I think that we would all agree upon that.

DALL'OSO: I feel really strongly about what you are saying. I think this whole genetic Italian determinism can go too far. I think it is actually - I - look, okay, I'll just give you this one image in my head. My husband is a musician. He went to do a gig at the Spanish Club. He gets asked year

after year because he can play the Spanish music. He is Jewish. He can play Spanish music. But that wasn't all. We go on, and there are these Spanish dancers, and amongst these dancers was a guy of Asian appearance who was the best Spanish dancer of the night - because his soul was Spanish. I don't know where he gets it from. There are mysteries. I really believe in the soul and the group consciousness thing. We don't know where these things come from but they are things of the soul and I think Italy is full of this anima thing, and yes, I don't get too caught up in the whole genetic stuff too much.

AUDIENCE: I just want to pick up a suggestion that I think you might have made, that something should come out of this particular night which has been, to my mind, the most interesting, certainly the most stimulating of all the times I have had at this conference, and I think what we should be saying is that - to pick up what the Professor speaking Italian was saying before - there is a lot that this country and the second generation, the later generations' culture can give to Italy as well.

It's a two way process, except that in Italy this is not yet recognised because there is ignorance - and I say this in the etymological sense of the word - there is not knowledge. Everything that is associated with the perspective the Italians have of Italians abroad is generally founded on ignorance, prejudice, the same things that we have heard mentioned over and over again. I think it is important that we somehow - and some is easier than the how - crack this barrier of lack of knowledge. Probably we can get assisted in this by the Italian institutions, the consulates, the Istituto di Cultura and the other organisations, but I think above all we have got to do it ourselves.

Yesterday when I was talking about television, I was talking about abandoning the cargo cult mentality that so many of us have in expecting things to come to us from Italy and getting off our butts and initiating a two-way exchange. I think this is the same case. I don't know what the tools are and perhaps I hope they will come out of this conference but I wanted to leave that thought rather than a question to the panel which is absolutely mind-bogglingly wonderful.

AUDIENCE: I haven't got so much a question but just a quick comment. While it is true that in polite conversations you do not broach the topics of religion or politics, seeing that religion has been broached I am going to broach the politics one. I was born in San Marco in Lamis, so I am a direct migrant and of course I was also called a wog and I had the smelly

sandwiches and I had to hide behind the door when I had pizza but I didn't let that bother me in the long run. I am a teacher and I was also a Councillor in Preston and to my horror I found that I was the only Italian woman to represent the large numbers of migrants who live in Preston. One of the highest concentrations of Italians is in Preston so it is a word that I have found in my movement amongst the community that Italians are very shy. We Italians are very shy about talking about positions of representation, and there are all sorts of reasons as to why that is. But I think if we are going to - now that we are a mature community I would like very much for us to keep in mind the fact that it is important not only to be very successful businesswomen, very successful academics, very successful artists or successful artists and perhaps hoping for more success down the track, or fantastic film makers or authors, I think we now have to also begin to get our minds around positions of representation at a State, Federal and also community level.

I know this is a bit heretical but I really think that as a mature community we really must consider that representation is very very important as a tool for advancing Italian culture and heritage and everything that we stand for, and it is a tool that can be used also to protect and to advance issues such as our language and to protect it, and a whole lot of other issues. I can see people shaking their heads and I know you are not all going to agree with me, but that is fine.

CAFAGNA: Thank you. We have to wind up. I just want to emphasise the point that I tend to agree that it would be great to see more people in our Parliament who are from Italian origin, there just aren't enough, and it seems that the Greek community has their political act together a lot better than the Italian community does. I am not sure why that is. We really do have to wind up.

AUDIENCE: Just a moment. You said before these women are at the pinnacle. I don't think they are. I want to see the Chair of the Australia Council, I want to see the Arts Program Director on the ABC, I want to see a Professor of Anthropology, the Booker Prizewinner and the Managing Director of the ABC [being Australian-Italians].

CAFAGNA: We will come back this time next year then.

