

TAPES and TESTIMONY:
making the local history of
Italians in the Western Cape
in the first half of the 20th
century

Thesis submitted by

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for the degree of Master of Arts*

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to explore the historical uses of oral testimony, through both discussion of the methodology, advantages and pitfalls of life history interviews, and through a suggestive reconstruction of the social and economic history of the Italian community in the Western Cape. Oral history is placed in a disciplinary context; a description is provided of how it has developed over the years, pointing out how oral tradition and oral history were first used before any written records were kept, and how authors as early as in the eighteenth century perceived the importance of oral testimony as historical evidence. Anthropologists, by the very nature of their discipline, were naturally among the first to use oral testimony and oral tradition, with Jan Vansina's seminal study, *Oral Tradition* (1961), marking the beginning of the modern development of African oral history. However, except for a minority of innovative scholarly individuals, oral history has only slowly become accepted by conventional historians in the last twenty years, as a useful tool to supplement and complement conventional written records and, in cases where there is no written evidence, to be used as a primary source in its own right. Oral testimony has now come to be used extensively in the USA and in Great Britain, mostly to record social studies of lower class communities, but also with some attention to business history. In Africa it has been used to impart a new perspective to colonial history. Here it has strengthened the expression of a more "Africanist" point of view and aided the elimination of some of the biases of conventional Eurocentric historical enquiry. An assessment of the oral history field is undertaken with reference to publications and work undertaken by various organisations and societies in South Africa, Great Britain and the USA. The dissertation also attempts

briefly to show the potential of oral history as applied in Economic History and other related fields, such as the history of corporations, individual businesses and entrepreneurship, where testimony can be gathered from both management and workers in order to obtain as composite an historical picture as possible.

The history of long distance immigrant communities, particularly those with few or no written documentary records, is often cited as an obvious example for oral historical enquiry. Such groupings would be represented by the Greek, Portuguese and Jewish as well as the Italian population in South Africa, and by similar settler communities in Great Britain and the USA. The advantages of an orally-derived community history is surely shown by the potential richness of information found in interviews where people's history is offered in their own words, in which migrants consider the life they have lived as basically their own formations. The Italian community was selected because there are only very thin and fragmentary records of its local history and because of the author's own origins. Through interviews, one has been able to expand on the existing sparse historical picture and to gather fresh material concerning a range of active individuals who, through their business lives and practices, established successful new industries and other local economic enterprises. Sample interviews have been transcribed and edited, to illustrate the range of oral testimony. Through them one hears something of the history of men such as Oreste Nannucci who started a laundry business, Giuseppe Rubbi, who was one of the most prominent builders in Cape Town before the Second World War, and Amedeo Traverso who, with his partners, developed the sea front in Sea Point, among many other speculative ventures. Through the examples of Mrs Ida Peroni's and Antonio Introna's testimony we move away from the historical voice of male petty entrepreneurs to obtain a new insight into the fortunes of the Sicilian fishing community. Wherever possible, attempts have been made to check

the information generated by oral testimony by consulting census reports, migration figures, consular and parliamentary reports, books, documents, newspapers and personal correspondence both in South Africa and Italy. Written documentary sources are utilised in relevant chapters. By piecing together this disparate range of source material, the present study shows the dimensions of Italian migrant economic and social experience not simply as generalities but as something to be glimpsed in the uniqueness inherent in every life history.

FOREWORD

This thesis has been written in fulfilment of the requirements for an M. A. degree in Economic History at the University of Cape Town, under the supervision of Dr Bill Nasson. Professor Ian Phimister, Head of the Department, also provided guidance and advice. I am also grateful to the previous head of the Department, Professor M. Kooy, for her advice and solicitude. In the early phases of the work, special encouragement and very valuable directions were given by the late Prof. H. M. Robertson, Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Cape Town and a leading authority on South African economic history.

The study could not have been conducted, however, without the co-operation and active support of many members of the Italian community at the Cape, especially the persons who agreed to be interviewed, often more than once. Some of them were old, frail, or not in good health, and their willingness to help, their effort and time spent and their invaluable contribution with their memories as well as personal documentation, is deeply appreciated. **To them I would like to dedicate this study.**

Finally, I also wish to remember here my wife, Roma, who supplied strength and determination, and who patiently waited for this thesis to be finished.

Cape Town, September 1989

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INTRODUCTION

As originally conceptualised, this thesis was intended to be a conventional historical enquiry into the social and economic life of the Italian community in South Africa. Initially, research was undertaken mainly in order to analyse the special contribution of Italians to the development of the economy in the Cape. However, I soon discovered that written evidence, whether official or unofficial, public or private, was extremely scarce.

The only known printed secondary work was a small book on the Italian community in South Africa, published in 1957 by an old Italian resident, Adolfo Giuseppe Bini.(1) It was not a systematic study, but an anecdotal account of individuals, societies and associations, together with personal reminiscences. Nevertheless, it was the only source utilized for the entry on Italians which appeared in 1974 in the Encyclopaedia of South Africa. (2) A comprehensive search in the South African Library in Cape Town, and in the library of the University of Cape Town subsequently failed to uncover any other relevant secondary sources.

Consular reports from Italian diplomatic representatives in South Africa were not available for consultation for the most recent periods, because they were confidential and closed to the public. For previous periods, all

the pertinent documentation had been sent back to Rome.

Successive visits to the Archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 1984 and 1985, proved to be rather disappointing. Nothing of specific value was found on the Italian community in South Africa, with the exception of some scattered special reports dating back to the first decades of this century. These were located in general accounts of Italian migration published by different departments of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The South African Archives in Cape Town contain no catalogue entries on the topic. Random searches through likely categories of material drew blanks in virtually every instance or produced totally irrelevant information. Census reports were helpful, but even here only aggregate information was available. Specific professions and personal detail were unlisted. Private archives were also unhelpful in this respect. The Cape Chamber of Commerce records, so voluminous in many other aspects, contained no material directly relevant to this study.

Because very few published or written records on the economic activities of the Italian community in South Africa and in the Western Cape specifically, could be located, it soon became obvious that other sources of evidence needed to be tapped. While some effort was made to locate private diaries and papers, most emphasis was ultimately placed on initiating a programme of interviewing identifiable older members of the Italian community. This programme commenced with people in Cape Town to whom personal introduction was easier.

As my general historical enquiry within the community broadened, I discovered that a great deal of oral information and evidence could be obtained. But to cover the whole country would have meant extensive travel and years of research work in order to accumulate evidence and interview Italians scattered all over the Republic. I then decided to limit my social and geographic field of enquiry to Cape Town and its immediate hinterland. Within this more limited area, the first successful interviews initiated a sequence of personal introductions to other informants and to increasingly useful contacts for orally-transmitted historical data. In about four years of part time work, a body of over 80 life history interviews was compiled, solely in Cape Town and its environs. Altogether, this represented over 160 hours of personal interviewing.

The considerable difficulties encountered at the start of the thesis in locating suitable written evidence, together with the amount of time consumed in selecting and collecting oral testimony which took longer than anticipated, obliged me to rethink the scope and direction of my study. While the material at my disposal was not yet comprehensive enough to enable me to pursue a full scale dissertation on the Italian contribution to Western Cape economy and society, it was certainly rich enough perhaps to make some small contribution to scholarly understanding of the practice both of recording oral data and of writing local history. The focus of this study thus shifted somewhat also to encompass methodological issues of oral historical practice. As a result of this different focus, my enquiry, broadly speaking, tries to explore some of the potentialities and problems associated with the collection of oral testimony for the reconstruction of regional, local and community history. By analysing the practice of oral

data collection, by systematically refracting this through other available evidence, this study seeks simultaneously to comment on the significance of oral testimony for local economic and social history in general, while also throwing light on the history of one particular social group, the Italian community in the Western Cape. Inevitably, this has been the most formidable conceptual challenge; namely, that of trying to make sense of a very thin documentary record by relating scrappy written sources to the experiences contained within the reminiscences of living Italian informants. Thus this is a community history of a very **exploratory** kind; not a total reconstruction but perhaps more a methodological evaluation.

Both these considerations also inform the historical period covered by this study. For several reasons, the bulk of oral data tended to cluster around the first fifty years or so of this century. In the first place, most of the persons interviewed were in their seventies and eighties. It was urgent to collect the testimony of informants who might soon die. Several people interviewed in the 1982-1984 period had already died by the time this thesis was being written up, over three years later. Had not their life histories been already recorded, their traces would be entirely lost to historical enquiry by now, as in most cases the surviving children do not carry family oral tradition.(3). Obviously, most of these older informants had memories shaped by a sense of personal achievement. There was a concentration on their beginnings, their successes and failures, of parents' struggles, and cultural and other definitions of their active life. The wider context was that of events that happened during a period that spanned the end of the last century and the first half of this century.

This period also coincides with the years for which little written documentation or other records are available for this topic. But whatever the deficiency of conventional sources, from the broader perspective of South African economic history, these important years span the establishment and consolidation in the country of immigrant groups of European workers, among them Italians. They cover several important episodes, ranging from the large immigration from Europe during the mini-boom that followed the Anglo-Boer war, through the struggling period of the Depression between the two World Wars, to the second great influx of people from Europe in the aftermath of the last war. Especially important for a study of the Italian presence in South Africa is the influence of the large contingent of prisoners of war during the 1940s. Each of these elements found particular expression in the Western Cape.

Chapter One attempts to analyse what sparse information there is on Italians contained in the South African census reports for the years 1911 to 1951. This evidence includes data on the numerical strength and occupational categories of Italians in South Africa and the Western Cape in particular. Comparisons are made with other European immigrant groups.

Chapter Two then discusses what little documentation I was able to find on the Italian community and individuals in the Cape and in South Africa as a whole, giving specific examples of early recorded Italians of note. It also comments on consular reports found in the archives of the Italian Foreign Ministry in Rome, together with other information where Italians and their achievements are mentioned.

Having established the severe limitations of written sources, Chapter Three examines oral history in general, and its development and different usages with particular reference to Africa. Examples are provided to show the development and practice of oral history in South Africa, in particular how oral testimony is being used to record aspects of political, social and economic life, with particular reference to black labour and to immigrant communities with little or no recorded history. The methods, problems and use of oral testimony are discussed in some detail with particular reference to the role of oral evidence in the specific field of economic and social history

Chapter Four focuses on the interviews themselves. It specifies the problems encountered, the methods used and the time and labour involved in setting up and transcribing interviews; furthermore, consideration is given to such key historical issues as the reliability of the material generated by the interviews and the use of cross-reference illumination. The chapter closes with a list of oral informants whose histories are utilised in the writing of this dissertation. A schematic biographical note on each informant is provided.

Chapter Five incorporates sample, edited transcriptions of three key life history interviews. These interviews illustrate historical and contemporary aspects of the Italian community, suggest what material is available, and underline the individuality of informants. Their reminiscences provide insights into the domestic and wider worlds of which, as immigrants, they were part. Thus Mrs **Ida Peroni**, born 12 March 1907, daughter of a fisherman, supplies a great variety of information about the Italian

community, its members, its social structure, and touches on important experiences of fishermen, and the more socially prominent members of the community.

Mr. **Antonio Introna**, born 22 September 1924, also the son of a fisherman, provides a more personal, family orientated interview, whilst still providing additional information about the wider community.

Mr. **Amedeo Traverso**, born 6 June 1905, is the story of a successful, upwardly mobile, immigrant entrepreneur. This interview reveals his proclaimed versatility as a businessman and provides valuable information about business developments and methods. Additionally he brings to light many other Italian businessmen and their personal achievements, and discusses various aspects of the social life of the Italian community. Traverso provides a classic construction of an "achieving" immigrant community portrait.

The conclusion discusses the extent to which oral testimony can help to illuminate the study of economic and social history. In particular, it attempts to illustrate how oral evidence can be used to record the history of immigrant communities and their material contribution as settlers, and suggests the considerable untapped sources in this field of enquiry. In many respects, these are still at an exploratory stage when we consider the creation of oral source material for the history of what popular community historians would commonly term the "**people**".

Notes to Introduction

- 1) A. G. Bini, *Italiani in Sud Africa*, (Arti Grafiche Artigianelli, Milano, 1957)
- 2) *Standard Encyclopaedia of South Africa*, Vol VI, Cape Town, S.E.S.A. p.164
- 3) The same problem was recently faced by the series of interviews among European immigrants in Canada in the special research work by Jane Synge, "Immigrant Communities - British and Continental European- in Early Twentieth Century Hamilton, Canada," *Oral History*, 4, 2, (1976) pp.38-51

Chapter One

THE ITALIAN COMMUNITY AT THE CAPE IN FIFTY YEARS OF LOCAL CENSUS REPORTS

While official data from the early census returns reveal little more than very basic, skeletal information on the Italian community at the Cape, they do provide an important background against which other evidence can be evaluated.

The demographic surveys carried out in the Cape prior to the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 do not provide any information either for individual Italian residents or on the Italian community as a whole. The first direct information on this subject comes from the first Union census of 1911. This census enumerated the presence of 1843 Italian-born persons in the country (Table I of the 1911 Census Report. - **All tables quoted in this chapter refer to the Census Report of the respective year.**) About 31% of them, or 579 individuals, were residents in the Cape Province. At this relatively early date, place of birth can be used as a reasonable indication of national affiliation, as most, if not all, foreigners, had come as immigrants to South Africa and few were born in the country.

A total of 579 persons in the entire Cape Province was not very large, representing only 0.09% of the local white population, or one Italian-born for every 1110 whites. Yet this group was the fourth largest among immigrant communities from continental Europe. The largest group was made up of Jews from Lithuania, Poland and other areas then part of the Russian Empire, followed by well established communities from Germany and the Netherlands. The Italians, as a group, were next, followed by Swedes, Norwegians and others :

TABLE 1.1

1911 CENSUS - Cape of Good Hope			
Total White Population	582337	100.00 %	
People Born in Europe	18536	3.18 %	100.0 %
<i>of which:</i>			
Russian Empire	8342	1.43 %	45.0 %
Germany	5342	0.92 %	28.8 %
Netherlands	1080	0.18 %	5.8 %
ITALY	579	0.09 %	3.1 %
Sweden	575	0.08 %	2.6 %
Norway	467	0.08 %	2.5 %
Greece	383	0.06 %	2.0 %
Austro-Hungary	374	0.06 %	2.0 %
France	364	0.06 %	2.0 %
Denmark	353	0.06 %	1.9 %
Switzerland	246	0.04 %	1.3 %
Portugal	134	0.02 %	0.7 %
Turkish Empire	107	0.02 %	0.6 %
Belgium	84	0.01 %	0.5 %
Spain	71	0.01 %	0.4 %
other/unspecified	135	0.02 %	0.7 %

Like many other immigrant communities, these early Italians were mostly grouped in urban areas:

TABLE 1.2

1911 CENSUS - Cape of Good Hope				
Italian-born	males	females	total	%
urban areas	369	100	469	81 %
rural areas	103	7	110	19 %

Although the census returns do not specify the number of people of Italian origin who were resident in Cape Town itself, surveys conducted in 1918 and in 1921 would suggest that about two-thirds of the entire Italian community was concentrated in the parliamentary capital. Hence, we can estimate a resident community of a little over 380 persons of Italian origin in Cape Town in this period.

The 1911 Census revealed a striking **preponderance of men over women** in this early immigrant community. One can assume that in established populations, the male-female ratio tends to be less unbalanced.

(1) An immigrant flow aimed at permanent settlement also tends to have a relatively balanced gender ratio, even if sometimes the number of males is somewhat larger than the number of females. It appears that most of the immigrants arrived by themselves, without families.

On this subject the information provided by the Census Reports gives only the following figures:

TABLE 1.3

1911 CENSUS - Cape of Good Hope	
Total Cape Population	48.9 % males
White population	51.7 % males
European immigrants(average)	63.1 % males
<i>of which from :</i>	
Switzerland	48.0 % males
Germany	56.0 % males
Russian Empire	61.3 % males
Poland	62.9 % males
Netherlands	63.7 % males
France	66.2 % males
-- over 2/3	--
Turkish Empire	67.3 % males
Austro-Hungary	68.5 % males
Denmark	71.4 % males
Italy	81.5 % males
Norway	86.1 % males
Portugal	92.5 % males
Greece	93.5 % males

Italian immigration before World War One was primarily that of individual males, many of whom came to the Cape possibly as contract labourers in different fields, rather than a phenomenon of settlement by whole family groups. (2) We know, for instance, from documentary sources discussed in the following chapter, that between 1900 and 1914 there were Italian stonemasons working on several Government contracts in the Cape Province, like the building of Simonstown harbour, Government buildings, and on the railways. More evidence would need to be gathered from other sources before arriving at specific conclusions about occupational pursuits in other areas.

Documentary evidence discussed in Chapter Two makes it clear that during the period from the last decade of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of World War One, Italy actively encouraged emigration to other European countries and the colonial world. Some migrants began making their way to South Africa. Here the period of economic recession in the

Cape which followed shortly after the 1899-1902 South African War, caused widespread unemployment in the towns, particularly from the end of 1903 to 1909. South Africa was therefore forced to introduce restrictions limiting the number of immigrants. According to contemporary consular reports, quoting South African legislation, only eight persons a month were allowed into the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and they had to prove that they possessed at least the sum of £ 20. Many immigrants who arrived disregarding the Italian consular warnings of the difficulties in obtaining employment, therefore had to wait for weeks and sometimes months at their port of entry, usually Cape Town, before being allowed to move further inland to the Rand.

The 1911 census also reports the presence in the Cape Province of one Italian-born person classified as Coloured. This was not an unusual occurrence, as in the same census some Coloureds appear with the birthplace indication of Belgium (1), France (5), Germany (1), Holland (1), Norway (1), Portugal (8), Spain (1), and Turkey (11). It is difficult to ascertain whether these individuals were Europeans who were living among the Coloured population at the Cape, or children of mixed couples. There were certainly mixed marriages at this time. Subsequent offspring tended to be incorporated into the Coloured community and disappeared from view, so far as census returns are concerned.

Seven years later a new census provided further information on the state of the Italian community by 1918. The first feature to take into account is a noticeable decrease in the number of Italian-born residents both in the Cape Province and in the country as a whole :

TABLE 1.4

Italian-born individuals	1911 Census	1918 Census	Difference
<u>Union of South Africa:</u>			
males	1480	1212	-18 %
females	362	415	+15 %
total	1842	1627	-12%
<u>Cape Province:</u>			
males	472	370	-22%
females	107	115	+7%
total	579	485	-16 %

The war in Europe, in which Italy was also directly involved, caused many of the men working under contract in South Africa to be recalled. Consequently, those remaining in the country were mainly settled immigrants who had already been partially or wholly absorbed into local white society. The war also caused some sectors of commerce and industry to contract because of increased costs and import fluctuations, creating a period of economic stagnation which eventually affected the amount of working opportunities available in the country.

The South African Chamber of Commerce reported that the war caused the cost of living to rise, which was aggravated by increases in government taxation; there was a shortage of goods coming to South Africa because of the lack of shipping, and even though the war stimulated exports and encouraged some expansion of local industries, it was not sufficient to counterbalance the economic instability. (3) According to census returns, the Italian community in the Cape Province was particularly affected by unsettling war-time conditions, and in Cape Town itself the number of persons of Italian origin decreased by 17%, from a probable group of about 385 around 1911 to only 319. However, the general increase in the number of women can be taken as an indication that even during the war a certain amount of immigration (between 10-15% of the existing community) was still taking place, mainly for

settlement and mostly in the Transvaal where there were better job opportunities.

In 1918, for the first time, the number of Italian "nationals" is indicated by the census' returns (Table X). At first sight, it seems strange that their number exceeds that of Italian-born persons (Table IV) in the Cape Province and in the rest of the Union as well:

TABLE 1.5

	Union. of S.A.	Cape Province
<u>Italian nationals</u>	1726	524
males	1189	370
females	537	154
<u>Italian-born individuals</u>	1627	485
males	1212	370
females	415	115

Because we know from Table IX of the 1918 Census how many foreign subjects resident in South Africa were born in Italy, it is possible to reconstruct the number of Italian-born persons who were then South African citizens. We should subtract from the number of local residents who were born in Italy the number of residents who still kept their Italian citizenship (termed *Italian nationals* in the Census Report). The result will be the number of residents in South Africa born in Italy, who have acquired another, most probably South African, citizenship:

TABLE 1.6

	total	males	females
<u>Union of S.A.</u>			
Italian-born residents	1627 100 %	1212 100 %	415 100 %
of which:			
Italian nationals	1280 79 %	971 80 %	309 74 %
other (S.A.) nationals	347 21 %	241 20 %	106 26 %
<u>Cape Province</u>			
Italian-born residents	485 100 %	370 100 %	115 100 %
of which:			

continued	total		males		females	
Italian nationals	399	82 %	307	83 %	92	80 %
other (S.A.) nationals	86	18 %	63	17 %	23	20 %

Only 21% of the residents of Italian origin in the Union were not Italian citizens and we can presume that most (if not all) of them acquired South African nationality. In the Cape, this percentage of "assimilation" was even lower (18%). It also appears that women tended to acquire South African nationality more readily than men, perhaps because of higher rates of marriage into local families. Moreover, by comparing these figures with those for other European immigrant communities, it becomes clear that the Italian community, especially at the Cape, was the least prone to be incorporated into white South African society, and at least at this early historical stage, tended to keep its Italian nationality.

TABLE 1.7

% of S.A. nationals among residents born in the following countries:	Union of S.A.	Cape area
	Russian Empire (Jews)	44.0 %
Germany	43.0 %	57.0 %
Norway	42.0 %	25.0 %
France	32.5 %	41.0 %
Greece	23.5 %	25.0 %
Portugal	21.0 %	55.0 %
<i>Italy</i>	<i>21.0 %</i>	<i>18.0 %</i>

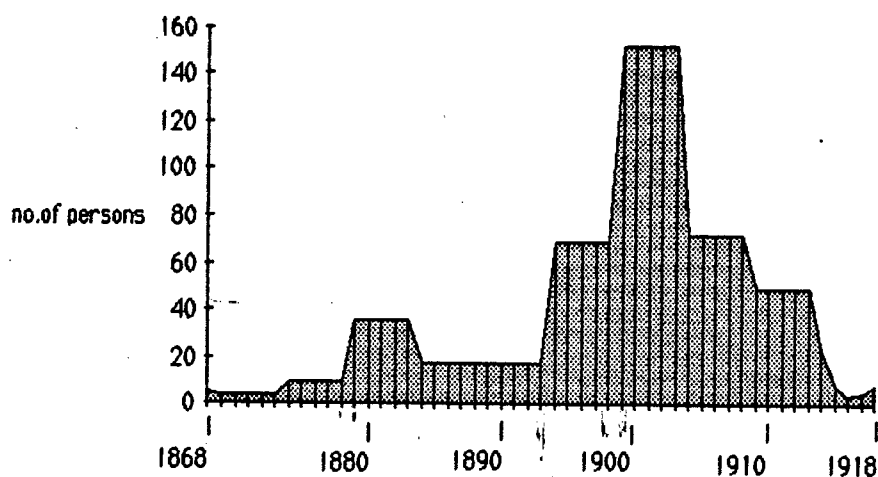
Neither the number of Italian-born individuals nor that of Italian nationals provides an accurate indication of the size of the "community". For instance, children born in South Africa from those relatively few Italian immigrants who had taken local nationality cannot be identified from the data provided by the 1918 census. Nevertheless, they were probably also part of the local Italian group - or at least were defined as being of Italian parentage.

We can therefore expect that the size of the local Italian community, as locally perceived, was in reality somewhat larger than that indicated by the demographic figures (Italian-born persons and/or Italian nationals) provided by the census. It would be difficult, however, to define the exact size of the community in existence in the Cape - or in the Union - at this time, unless on the basis of aggregate statistical evidence from possible other unknown sources.

Additional important information provided by the 1918 census is the date of arrival in South Africa of persons of Italian origin, derived from Table VIII, which gives the length of permanent residence in the country for all inhabitants divided by birthplace. For easier analysis, this information has been converted into graph form as shown below:

GRAPH 1.1

DATE OF ARRIVAL OF PERSONS OF ITALIAN ORIGIN IN THE CAPE PROVINCE-1918



The small peak in the 1880s' is explained by evidence from documentary sources cited in Chapter Two as well as from oral testimony detailed in Chapter Five. The graph also shows that the large majority of Italians arrived at the Cape at the turn of the century, a period corresponding to the peak of the overall migratory movement from Italy for various overseas destinations. Over 70% of all the Italian-born persons residing in the Cape Province at the end of World War I had arrived in the country in the twenty years between 1895 and 1915, while 31.3% - or nearly one in every three persons - arrived between 1900 and 1905. These waves of immigration are discussed in detail in the consular reports and other Foreign Ministry documentation examined in Chapter Two.

This concentrated local influx of immigrants was much more important than the "gold rush" immigration of the 1880s' and can be considered the key movement which created the Italian community in the Cape Province.

Finally, Tables V and VI in the 1918 Census Report provide a geographical distribution of the persons of Italian origin at the Cape:

TABLE 1.8

1918 CENSUS - Cape of Good Hope	
Cape Town + suburbs	331 persons of Italian origin
Simonstown	12 persons of Italian origin
Paarl + Stellenbosch	11 persons of Italian origin
Port Elizabeth + suburbs	22 persons of Italian origin
Kimberley	14 persons of Italian origin
East London + suburbs	9 persons of Italian origin
Knysna	6 persons of Italian origin
Grahamstown	4 persons of Italian origin
Kingwilliamstown	4 persons of Italian origin

Moreover, a noticeable grouping of 51 Italian immigrants was concentrated in the rural areas to the north of Cape Town, namely :

Malmesbury	29 persons
Piketberg	4 persons
Clanwilliam	3 persons
Van Rhynsdorp	12 persons
Calvinia	3 persons

The census figures alone do not explain this particular local pattern of Western Cape district settlement. However some light is cast on this phenomenon by documentary materials discussed in the next chapter.

Three years later, in 1921, there was another census. The Italian community registered a decline in the number of Italian subjects working in South Africa but not in the number of residents of Italian origin (Tables 4 and 10 of the Census Report) :

TABLE 1.9

1921 CENSUS	Italian nationals	Italian-born individuals (birthplace)
Union of S.A.	1649	1649
males	1013 -15 %	1198 -1 %
females	484 -25 %	451 +9 %
Cape Province		
males	307 -17 %	362 -2 %
females	150 -2 %	124 +8 %

The decrease indicated in this table represents the percentage fall over the previous census of 1918. In only three years there appears to have been a reduction of Italian nationals in South Africa, yet fewer seem to have left the communities in the Cape Province (Table 2). The reasons for such a decline clearly cannot be deduced by the census data alone but require

evidence from other sources. Here it is only possible to note the occurrence of this phenomenon. A further indication of a small increase in Italian-born women can perhaps be construed as a result of the reunion of families of resident workers.

The geographical distribution of Italians in the Cape Province, according to the 1921 census data, was not very different from the situation pertaining three years previously (Tables 5 and 6 of the Census Report). There was an increase in Cape Town and its suburbs, which accounted for 365 persons of Italian origin, 34 more than in 1918. The small communities at Paarl and Stellenbosch increased from 11 to 17 individuals, but the number of Italians working in the northern districts of the Western Cape, from Malmesbury to Calvinia, fell from 51 to 36. Other Italians were scattered as individuals in a dozen districts in the Karroo, the Eastern Cape, as well as in the Transkei.

The next census was taken in 1926. The overall number of persons of Italian origin increased, especially in the Transvaal. Johannesburg's Italian community had grown particularly rapidly, but with the increase in the number of so-called Poor-Whites flocking to the towns, urban unemployment, adverse economic conditions, and nationalist fear that immigrants would take away jobs from South Africans, it was not an encouraging situation for immigrants. There was, however, a shortage of labour in agriculture and the government tried to institute schemes to encourage British farmers to come to South Africa. (4)

In the whole of the Union of South Africa there were 1521 individuals who declared Italy as their birthplace, of whom 471 were residents in the Cape Province. The Cape Town community actually decreased in number, from

365 to 312. In 1921 the number of Italians who declared Italy as their birthplace was 1649. (Tables 2-4-5 of the 1926 Census Report). This decline is clearly shown in the tables showing Italian nationality : in 1921 there were 1497 Italians, whereas in 1926 there were only 1118.

TABLE 1.10

1926 CENSUS - Residents of Italian Origin(birthplace)		
Union of S.A.	1521	100.- %
in urban areas	1149	75.5 %
in rural areas	372	24.5 %
Cape Province	471	31.- %
Transvaal	804	53.- %
other provinces	246	16.- %
Cape Town + suburbs	312	20.5 %
Johannesburg + suburbs	397	26.- %

While still an important nucleus of the Italian community in South Africa, Italians in the Cape were becoming outnumbered by those on the Witwatersrand, where one out of every two-to-three South African Italians now lived.

Very relevant to the 1926 census are the different indications of the number of Italian-born persons, Italian nationals, and people of Italian parentage, which are supplied as part of the vital statistics for the whole Union for the first time. Unfortunately, not all of this data is available for the Cape Province or the Cape Town metropolitan area, and no regional comparison can therefore be made (Tables 2-14-15 of the Census Report).

TABLE 1.11

1926 CENSUS - Union of S.A.			
	Italian birthplace	Italian nationality	Italian parentage
males	1073 = 100 %	642 = 60 %	1157 = 108%
females	448 = 100 %	273 = 61 %	498 = 111 %
total community	1521 = 100 %	915 = 60 %	1655 = 109 %

It would be fair to assume that the indication of parentage is perhaps one way which can be used to define the size of the Italian community in South Africa as it was perceived at that time, internally by its own members and externally by the local population. Here there appears to be some discrepancy between the figures given by the census and those supplied by the Consular authorities. According to Italian emigration figures, the number of Italians in South Africa between 1911-1923 was 1964 persons, the majority being in the Transvaal, with a small Sicilian community in Cape Town. However, this figure appears to include Italians living in the Rhodesias. This assumption could be correct, as seen from the figures published under Italian nationality for the Union census for 1918, 1921 and 1926 : these are 1726, 1497 and 1118 respectively. Similarly, Italians according to birthplace for the years 1911, 1921 and 1926 are 1842, 1649, and 1521 respectively. (5) The report also states that there is no official record of the number of Italians who returned to Italy at the outbreak of the war. In the Italian publications on emigration to South Africa during the years 1924-25 there appears to be no reference to the number of Italians living in South Africa, as the same figures are reported in 1927 as before: 1365 males and 599 females (total 1964). (6) It is not surprising that there appears to be little interest in South Africa if we look

at the table showing immigrants from Italy for the years 1924 and 1925, which are 25 and 31 respectively. Compared to say, the U.S.A, South Africa was clearly a marginal area of settlement.

From Table 1.11 , it is clear that the number of people indicating Italian parentage is approximately 10% larger than the number of people of Italian origin (= *Italian birthplace*). If one assumes and accepts that this proportion is valid for the entire period under consideration, i.e. the first half of the twentieth century, in order reasonably to determine the size of the various Italian communities in South Africa, we could increase the number of residents who declared Italy as their birthplace by about 10%. Birthplace figures are available from all the various census reports in the first decades of the century and from these we can now reconstruct some plausible estimates for community size. On this basis, we can expect that in the whole of the Cape Province there were about 520 " *Italians* " , three-quarters of whom (or about 345) were concentrated in Cape Town and its suburbs. However, if we compare the figures for Italian nationality and Italian birthplace for the years 1921 and 1926, we see that for the year 1921 there is a difference of 10%, whereas the difference for the year 1926 is 20%. In 1936 the difference was over 30%. The most probable explanation for this shift is that as more Italian settlers are absorbed in the community more are taking South African nationality.

Further information provided by Table 9 in the 1926 Census Report specifies which official language, English or Afrikaans, was usually spoken by the various immigrant groups, as defined by birthplace .

TABLE 1.12

1926 CENSUS- Union of S.A.				
official language spoken:	both	English	Afrikaans	neither
Italian-born people:				
urban males	22 %	70 %	0.1 %	8 %
urban females	19 %	70 %	0.2 %	11 %
rural males	35 %	55 %	2. - %	8 %
rural females	25 %	54 %	5. - %	16 %
total community	24 %	66 %	1. - %	9 %
other selected groups:				
Austrian	45 %	48 %	0.5 %	6 %
French	26 %	69 %	0.5 %	4 %
German	60 %	33 %	3. - %	4 %
Greek	28 %	65 %	0.3 %	6 %
Dutch	86 %	1 %	12.5 %	--
Norwegian	18 %	77 %	--	4 %
Portuguese	16 %	36 %	0.5 %	47 %
Lithuanians	55 %	35 %	2. - %	7 %
Swiss	43 %	55 %	1. - %	1 %

Although not as well integrated as the Dutch, German, or even Jewish (Lithuanian) communities, for example, it would seem that Italians were assimilating relatively more readily into local white society than was the case 10-15 years previously. Patterns of usage of the official languages were similar to those of other European groups, the extreme case of the Portuguese aside, even if the percentage of persons of Italian origin conversant with neither English or Afrikaans was fractionally higher, especially among women.

As the next census was taken only after ten years, in 1936, it provides an opportunity to measure changes and trends over an extended period. There was an increase in the number of Italians in the Union of South Africa as a whole, mostly due to immigration from Italy. (according to the immigration figures for 1936, 340 Italians arrived from Italy.) This is shown by the fact that the number of Italian subjects increased

proportionally more than the number of people of Italian origin (period 1926 - 1936) : The average increase in the number of persons with an Italian birthplace was 31.5 % whereas the average increase in the number of persons with Italian nationality was 105.4 %

Despite increased numbers, the various Italian communities represented only a fraction of the local white population, especially in the Cape, as shown by the following percentage figures:

TABLE 1.13

1936 CENSUS	Italian origin	change from 1926	as% of local white population	probable group size
Union of S.A	2001	+31 %	0.10 %	about 2200
Cape Province	547	+16 %	0.07 %	about 600
Cape Town area	388	+21 %	0.22 %	about 430
other Cape cities	101	+11 %	0.03 %	about 110
Cape rural areas	58	- 3 %	0.02 %	about 64

The "probable group size" in the last column of Table no. 1.13 is based on the likely size of the local Italian communities, given the assumed relationship between the number of Italian-born individuals and that of persons of Italian parentage, discussed above. (7) These figures also show that a large percentage of Italians must by now have taken South African nationality.

Overall data provided by this census, conducted well into the 1930s' Great Depression, show a renewal of an immigrant flow from Italy, mainly directed toward the Transvaal. The numbers involved were not particularly large, however. In addition, Italians already settled in South Africa, especially those in the rural Cape Province, were gradually leaving the countryside for the towns and cities. This phenomenon was of course widespread in the 1930s', due to crisis conditions in capitalist agriculture.

"Poor-Whiteism" became widespread, especially on the Rand and also in a number of towns and cities in the Cape. During the harsh Depression years there was a substantial movement from the unemployment of rural areas into the towns and cities in a desperate effort to seek work. (8)

Yet, by 1936, the Government of the Union was also arguing that immigration was essential for the country to develop, while Nationalists voiced populist fears for their identity and were afraid of being swamped by other groups. (9)

Although recent arrivals from Italy now totalled nearly half of the Italian community in South Africa, there was still a significant number of people who had been settled in the country for 20-30 years. The relevant detail on this point is provided by Table 10, which refers to the Union in general. No data is available for the Cape Province or Cape Town in particular.

TABLE 1.14

Union of S.A. - Proportion of residents of Italian origin				
period of residence in S.A.	1918 census		1936 census	
45 years and over	(before 1870)	1.5 %	(before 1890)	1.5 %
44-35 years	(1870-1880)	4.5 %	(1890-1900)	9.5 %
34-25 years	(1880-1890)	6.- %	(1900-1910)	14.- %
24-15 years	(1890-1900)	32.5 %	(1910-1920)	8.5 %
14- 5 years	(1900-1910)	31.- %	(1920-1930)	19.- %
less than 5 years	(1910-1918)	24.5 %	(1930-1936)	47.5 %

One piece of evidence from which it is perhaps possible to assess the degree of immigrant assimilation is the indication of home language spoken by the various residents in the country. This data is only given by the 1936 Census Report, in its Tables 6-7-12-14.

TABLE 1.15

1936 CENSUS	Union of S.A		Cape Province	
	males	females	males	females
Italian birthplace	1162	510	333	156
Italian nationality	893	389	231	127
Italian as home language	1034	645	233	150
<i>when given as % :</i>				
Italian birthplace	100.- %	100.- %	100.- %	100.- %
Italian nationality	72.2 %	76.3 %	69.4 %	81.4 %
Italian as home language	89.- %	126.5 %	70.- %	96.1 %

It is not easy to conclude from the above percentages that home language was retained more readily than nationality by European settlers in South Africa, because the original language was also spoken in the family by some of the children born in the country, as it appears from Table 12 of the 1936 Census Report :

TABLE 1.16

% of people arriving in South Africa in 1936 using Italian as home language	Union of S.A.	Cape Province
50 years previously or more	0 %	0.5 %
30 to 50 years previously	13 %	18 %
15 to 30 years previously	10 %	7 %
10 to 15 years previously	11 %	9 %
5 to 10 years previously	13 %	14 %
less than 5 years previously	26 %	23 %
persons born in the Union	27 %	28 %

The use of national language does not necessarily provide sufficiently reliable evidence with which to determine the size of a settled immigrant community. It would be more appropriate to use a more reliable indicator, such as parentage, for instance, as previously discussed.

In the **Cape Town area**, among the 430 people who formed the local Italian community in 1936, (a figure extrapolated from the local number of Italian-born, on the basis of their probable correlation with the number of local people of Italian parentage) there were 281 persons who declared Italian their home language (Table 15, 1936 Census Report). Of them,

91 (32.3%) were born in South Africa

184 (65.5%) were born in Italy

4 (1.4%) were born in other European countries

1 (0.4%) was born in Argentina

1 (0.4%) was born somewhere in Africa.

In the same metropolitan area, there were 388 persons whose birthplace was given as Italy. They declared their **home language** as follows:

English	191 people	49.3%
Italian	184 people	47.4%
Afrikaans	3 people	0.8%
English+Afrikaans	2 people	0.5%
Germans	2 people	0.5%
Greek	2 people	0.5%
French	2 people	0.5%
unspecified	2 people	0.5%

Only the Greek community in Cape Town maintained a stronger attachment to its national language. Every other European group was linguistically somewhat more integrated, as appears from the data of Table 6 of the Census Report :

TABLE 1.17

1936 CENSUS - Cape Town + suburbs				
declared home language	English	Afrikaans	Eng/Afr	Home Lang
among Austrians	69.-%	0.8%	2.3%	21.-%
among French	85.8%	1.3%	2.-%	9.5%
among Germans	50.7%	4.5%	2.3%	41.1%
among Greeks	48.2%	--	1.2%	49.4%
among Italians	49.3%	0.8%	0.5%	47.4%
among Lithuanians	56.4%	0.6%	1.-%	41.5%
among Portuguese	63.6%	3.6%	--	29.1%

Unfortunately, this data on the language spoken by the various local communities cannot be directly compared with the reports of the previous census 10 years earlier, because questions were differently organized ("*use of official language*" in 1926 versus "*use of home language*" in 1936) which therefore produced two different and obviously not comparable sets of answers. Yet, despite this discrepancy, we can still observe that by 1936 the Cape Town Italian community tended to approach, in its daily use of languages, the behaviour of other European groups in the area; in contrast, only 10 years earlier it appeared to be somewhat less assimilated.

Following the same ten year interval, the next census was taken in 1946, after the Second World War. Despite hostilities in which Italy was on the enemy side, and despite the return home of many Italian nationals and the initial internment in special camps of other residents of Italian origin, the end of World War Two saw a numerical increase in the Italian community in South Africa:

TABLE 1.8

1946 CENSUS	Union of S.A.		Cape Province	
<u>Italian birthplace</u>				
total people	2447	+22.- %	624	+14 %
males	1417	+ 1.5 %	317	-16 %
females	1030	+70.- %	307	+83 %
<u>Italian nationality</u>				
total people	1826	+42.5 %	420	+17 %
males	1090	+22.- %	221	- 4 %
females	736	+90.- %	199	+57 %

Most of the increase in these local communities was due to a relatively large influx of women from Italy. In the Cape Province, the number of males of Italian origin, as well as Italian nationality, actually decreased. The most credible explanation for this new excess of Italian women in the post-war years is the arrival of many "war brides" of South African soldiers who served in Italy, now joining their husbands. (10)

By 1946, only one in three residents of Italian origin (or with Italy as declared birthplace) had arrived in South Africa during the last ten years. The bulk of the Italian population had been in the country for about 15 to 45 years (*years of arrival are given in parenthesis*):

TABLE 1.19

Length of residence	1946 CENSUS Union of S.A.		
	no.	percentage	
1 year or less (1945-1946)	292	12.5 %	-)
at least 5 years (1941-1945)	93	4.- %	-) = 33.5 %
5 to 10 years (1936-1940)	389	17.- %	-)
10 to 20 years (1926-1935)	708	30.5 %	
20 to 30 years (1916-1925)	228	10.- %	
30 to 40 years (1906-1915)	243	10.5 %	
40 to 50 years (1896-1905)	313	12.5 %	
over 50 years (before 1895)	68	3.- %	

Also, in the last ten years, despite the difficult war situation, the overall increase in the number of residents maintaining their Italian citizenship was proportionally larger (+42.5%) than the increase in the number of people declaring an Italian birthplace (+22%). From this observation, we can infer that there had been a recent influx of new people from Italy, who still retained their nationality. There were also an estimated 800 prisoners of war who settled in the country at the end of wartime hostilities.

A similar increase, reflecting mostly the presence of people recently arrived in the country and therefore retaining their original citizenship, occurred in the ranks of other immigrant communities in South Africa:

TABLE 1.20

1946 CENSUS - Union of S.A.	
increase in the number of people with foreign nationality	1936-1946 period
Netherlands	+ 83.5 %
Portugal	+ 76.5 %
Greece	+ 73.3 %
Switzerland	+ 73.- %
Italy	+ 42.5 %
France	+ 29.- %
Austria	+ 29.- %
Germany	+ 29.- %
* Lithuania	+ 26.3 %

* - mostly Jewish

Very little else concerning the characteristics of the new post-war wave of European immigrants can be extracted from this Census Report. We only know that in this period most of the residents of Italian origin were increasingly concentrated in urban areas, with percentages much higher (83.5% in the Union as a whole, but as high as 93% in the Cape Province

alone) than those of the rest of the white population (70.5% in the Union and 69% in the Cape Province).

After the short survey of the immediate post-war period, a more comprehensive census was conducted in 1951. While this latter census does not provide much specific information on the size, distribution, or characteristics of the main immigrant communities in South Africa, it does throw some light on other changes associated with post-war migration from Europe. In the period between 1946 and 1951, the Italian population in South Africa practically doubled in size, with a numerical increase of over 100%. This increase is also reflected in the greater number of persons with Italian nationality, many of whom were undoubtedly recent immigrants. (Tables 3 - 7 of the 1951 Census Report):

TABLE 1.21

1951 CENSUS	actual number	increase since 1946	increase since 1936
<i>People of Italian origin</i>			
<u>Union of S.A.</u>			
males	3313		
females	2129		
total persons	5442	+122.4 %	+172.-%
<u>Cape Province</u>			
males	711		
females	499		
total persons	1210	+93.9 %	+121.2 %
<u>Cape Town area</u>			
males	348		
females	292		
total persons	640	n.a.	+65.-%
<i>Italian Nationals</i>			
<u>Union of S.A.</u>			
males	2484		
females	1403		
total persons	3887	+112.9 %	+94.2 %

continued

	actual number	increase since 1946	increase since 1936
<u>Cape Province</u>			
males	506		
females	302		
total persons	808	+92.4 %	+125.7 %
<u>Cape Town area</u>			
males	n.a.		
females	n.a.		
total persons	401	+13.- %	+56.6 %

From the above figures, it is clear that the Cape Province in general, and the Cape Town metropolitan area in particular, did not fully participate in this expansionist trend. Most of the war time and post-war arrivals settled in other areas, mainly in the Transvaal, which was booming in the immediate post war era. It is interesting to note that there was a similar pattern in 1926, as shown in table 1.10.

Post-war Italian migration consisted largely of people with particular occupational skills, such as artisans, builders and some professional people; they represented a large number of the skilled immigrants who arrived in South Africa. With the large migratory movement of the late 1940s' and early 1950s', the Italian community in South Africa became the third largest foreign grouping among the local white population. Apart from English nationals, only the German and the Dutch communities were bigger. The position of the Italian community is best appreciated when comparisons are made within other foreign nationals resident in South Africa at that time. As mentioned earlier, English or other Commonwealth nationals have been excluded from such comparisons because many South African residents of English stock very often kept dual nationality. (*Data*

on this point has been extracted from Table 7 of the 1951 Census Reports and refers to the whole country)

TABLE 1.22

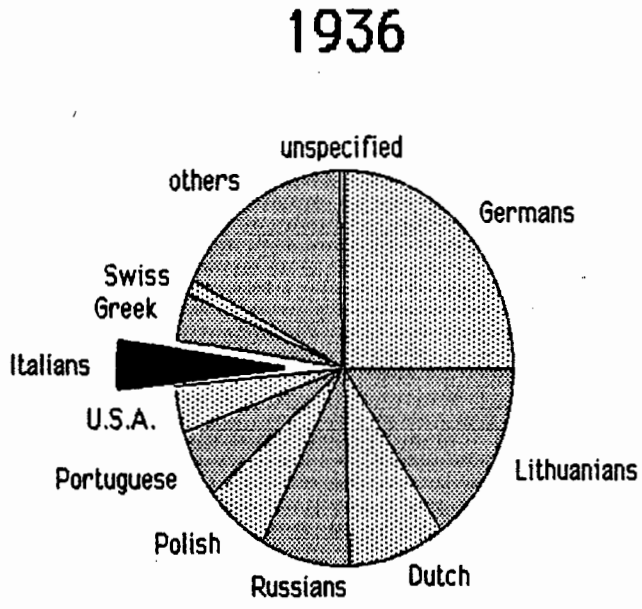
national groups as % of foreign population in S.A.	1951		1936
Dutch	23.7%	Germans	25.-%
Germans	15.-%	*Lithuanians	15.-%
Italians	9.5%	Dutch	9.4%
Portuguese	7.-%	*U.S.S.R.	8.7%
U.S.A.	5.-%	*Polish	6.-%
Greek	4.3%	Portuguese	5.5%
*Lithuanians	4.-%	U.S.A.	4.-%
*Polish	3.6%	Italians	4.-%
Swiss	2.6%	Greek	3.8%
Belgians	2.5%	Swiss	1.6%
other countries	16.5%	other countries	16.7%
stateless/unspecified	6.3%	stateless/unsp.	0.3%

* - mostly Jewish

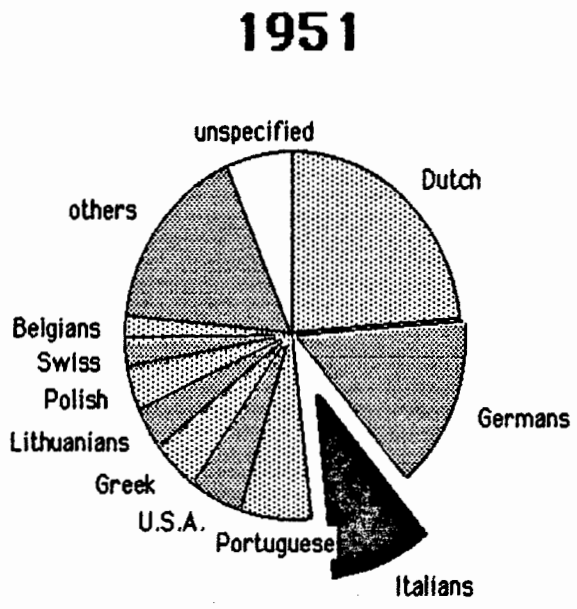
After the Dutch community, the Italians were responsible for the largest increase (203%) in the 15 years since 1936. Recent immigration from Greece and Portugal augmented those communities by 40 and 60% respectively. The share of other middle European countries did not increase noticeably. Indeed, the number of German nationals fell in this period by over 13%. For the first time, the importance of the local Italian groups and their impact on the socio-economic life of the country were becoming visible and, in some instances even prominent.

The same data can be visualized more effectively when shown as graphs:

GRAPH 1.2

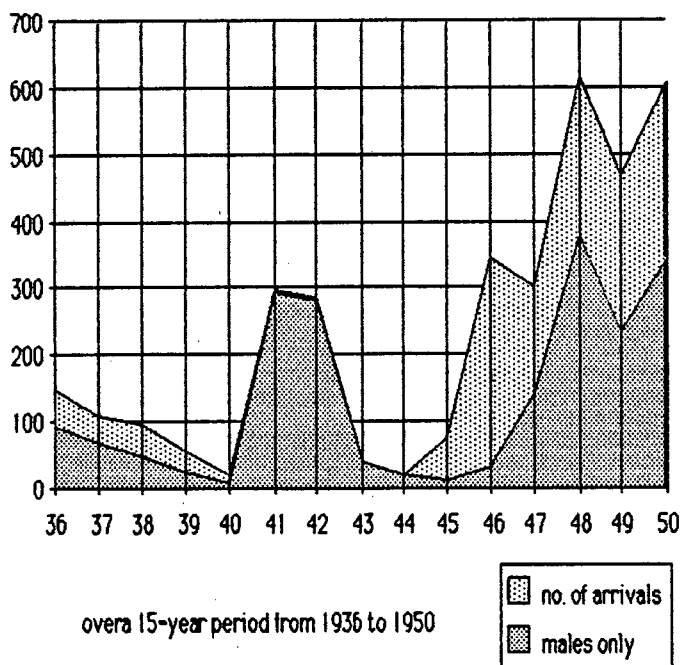


GRAPH 1.3



One possible contributory element to the expansion of an Italian presence in South Africa in this period was the large contingent of Second World War Italian prisoners of war from Ethiopia and North Africa, who were sent to South Africa for the duration of the conflict. Some remained in the country, but an even larger group returned to South Africa in the post-war years, after experiencing the traumas of a ruined economy and the widespread unemployment which plagued Italy during this period. Census Reports do not explicitly mention this ex-P.O.W. influx, but some indirect evidence can be extrapolated by observing the dates of arrival in South Africa declared by the residents of Italian origin in 1951, as reported in Table 5. The information has been converted into graph form as follows:

GRAPH 1.4



It appears from the graph that those persons of Italian origin who indicated their arrival date during the war years (1941-1944) were exclusively males. As already noted, the predominance of female arrivals in this later period almost certainly refers to the coming of war brides; it is estimated that as many as 2000 are thought to have married South African soldiers who had fought in Italy. Some of these women, particularly those who did not marry professional people or who had married Coloured soldiers, could not adapt socially to a new way of life in South Africa and returned to Italy. Evidence of this is to be found in oral testimony.

A few other distinguishing characteristics of the post-war Italian community are supplied by the census figures. For instance, it appears that most people of Italian origin in South Africa were living in towns (85%) rather than in rural areas (15%). Moreover, they tended to be concentrated in the Transvaal, where they represented one person in every 333 whites. In the Cape Province, the number of Italian residents was not only much lower, but also formed a smaller proportion of the local white population, i.e. on average one for every 770 people. As indicated by Table 3 in the Census Report of 1951, more than half of the people of Italian origin in the Cape Province were concentrated in Cape Town itself. The other towns had only small numbers, often too small to be locally perceived as a discrete and sufficiently defined associational community. These scattered individuals or families hardly operated as "constructed" immigrant communities. In many cases, they were eventually absorbed into the local white population. Only in the Western Cape area were Italians numerous enough to be noticeable as a group. Table 1.23 gives the distribution and relative significance, in size, of the various Italian groups in the Cape Province :

TABLE 1.23

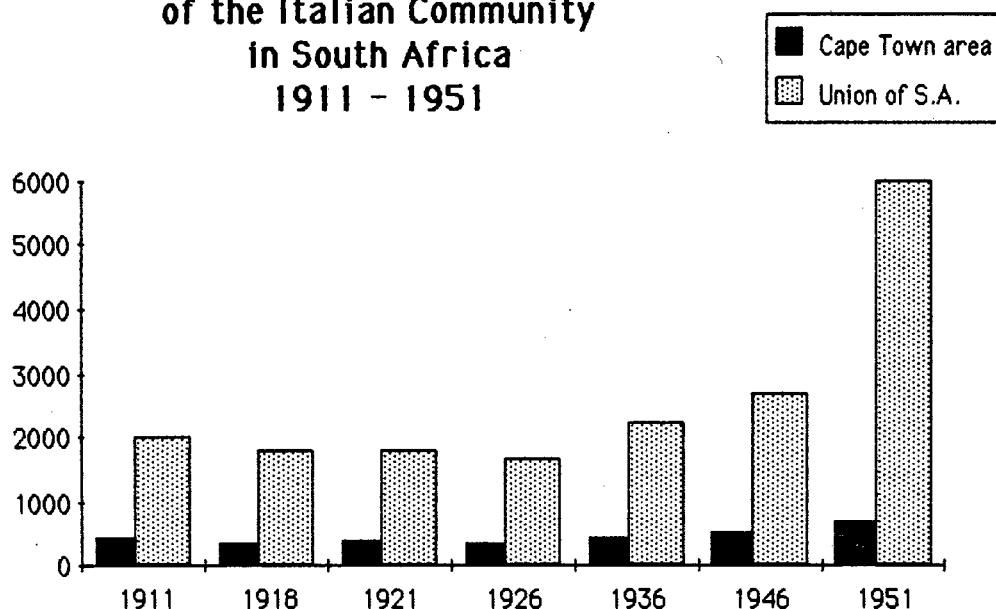
**1951 CENSUS - Distribution of persons of Italian origin
in the Cape Province**

geographical area	actual number	% of the community	proportion among local residents
Cape Town area	640	53 %	1 every 322 Whites
Port Elizabeth	102	8 %	1 every 667 Whites
East London	59	5 %	1 every 667 Whites
Paarl	43	4 %	1 every 294 Whites
Kimberley	9	1 %	1 every 2500 Whites
all other towns	156	13%	1 every 2000 Whites
Cape rural areas	192	16%	1 every 1250 Whites

By way of conclusion to this review of data provided by the first eight official censuses of the Italian communities in South Africa, and in the Cape in particular, the growth sequence of the community through the first half of this century has been expressed in graph form. The accompanying tabulation of basic data provides a summary of the main points outlined in this introductory analysis. As already discussed, the most likely evidence of the real size of the Italian communities in South Africa is the indication of "Italian parentage". However, this data was not always provided in the various census reports. Nevertheless, we can still arrive at reasonably sufficient estimates by adding some 10% to the much more common indication of "Italian birthplace" or "Italian origin", which are available for all eight reports. In this way, we can also take due account of those persons born in the country of Italian parents who had become South African nationals, but who were still perceived as being part of the local Italian community or were generally defined as "Italians" by the rest of the local population.

GRAPH 1.5

**The Patterns of Growth
of the Italian Community
in South Africa
1911 - 1951**



It is evident from the graph that the Italian community of Cape Town did not grow at the same pace as the rest of the Italian population in South Africa, especially in the period of most intense migration from 1936 to 1951. Its rate of increase was more moderate. Eventually, the Cape's proportion declined from an approximate 20% to less than 12% of the Italian population living in the country.

TABLE 1.24

Growth Pattern of Italians in South Africa

Census year	Union of S.A.	Cape Town area	
1911	2026 persons	(445 persons)	=21.9%
1918	1790 persons	364 persons	=20.3%
1921	1814 persons	401 persons	=22.1%
1926	1673 persons	343 persons	=20.5%
1936	2200 persons	427 persons	=19.4%
1946	2692 persons	(504 persons)	=18.7%
1951	5986 persons	704 persons	=11.8%

Obviously, self-reported census figures, useful as they are, do not provide sufficient historical insight and full understanding of the activities and characteristics of a special group such as the Italian community living and working at the Cape and in the rest of South Africa. Clearly some Italians might not have been recorded, owing to illiteracy or to the fact that they were illegal immigrants. Further documentary sources therefore need to be utilized to try and construct a more comprehensive population picture, from which social history can ultimately be written. We must, then, look for other sources which might provide suitable information with which to flesh out the skeletal outline supplied by the census data.

Notes to Chapter One

- 1) B.M. Shutz, "European Population Patterns, Cultural Persistence, and Political Change in Rhodesia", *The Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 7, (1973).
- 2) Edna Bradlow, *Immigration into the Union 1910-1948. Policies and attitudes* Ph. D.Thesis, University of Cape Town ,1978. p408.
- 3) R.F.M.Immelman, *Men of Good Hope*, (Cape Town Chamber of Commerce, Cape Town 1955), pp.287-92.
- 4) Bradlow, *Immigration into the Union 1910-1948*, pp.424-38.
- 5) Union Statistics for 50 years ,1910-1960. Jubilee Issue,C7, A25
- 6) C.Valori,G.Miglietta,C.Cesari,A.Giordano,G.Barlassina, *Giustizia Per il Lavoro Italiano in Africa*, (Edizioni GEA, Roma, 1958 ,Vol 2),p. 144.
- 7) It is interesting to note that according to the table in *Giustizia per il Lavoro Italiano in Africa* Vol.1, p. 306, the number of Italians at the Cape in 1936 was 326, and in the Union 1118, these figures almost the same as the ones shown in table 1.15, where , according to the official South African census figures there were 368 Italian nationals in the Cape and a total of 1282 in the Union. There is no reference as to where the figures quoted had been obtained but one could assume they came from Italian Consular Reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 8) Carnegie Commission Report, *The Poor-White Problem in South Africa* (Stellenbosch, 1932); see also C.W. De Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford,1978), p.195.
- 9) Bradlow, *Immigration*, pp.531-47.
- 10) Even the 100 or so S.A. soldiers who married Italian girls without official permission were allowed to bring their war brides into the country, according to the *House of Assembly's Debates of 15 March 1946*.

The Italian Consulate in Cape Town unofficially estimates that about 2000 war brides arrived in South Africa after the war . Many, for various reasons, did not remain in South Africa and returned to Italy soon after arrival . It is possible that at the time of the 1946 South African census many had not yet arrived or had already left. However, according to a list compiled by the Consulate in Cape Town, there were 81 war brides in the Cape Province in 1951.

Appendix: Chapter One

Immigrants into the Union by country of previous permanent residence: Italy

year	numbers
1924	25
1925	31
1926	59
1927	50
1928	71
1929	86
1930	68
1931	65
1932	63
1933	51
1934	132
1935	237
1936	340
1937	162
1938	134
1939	81
1940	-
1941	-
1942	-
1943	-
1944	-
1945	4
1946	40
1947	921
1948	1698
1949	691
1950	664
1951	1164

Union Statistics for 50 years. 1910-1960. Jubilee Issue. C7

Chapter Two

INFORMATION FROM OTHER WRITTEN SOURCES

In the Introduction to the authoritative study of Italian migration to the United States by the Princeton historian R. Foerster, R.J. Vecoli writes: *unlike most ethnic groups, which have established historical societies, historical journals, and libraries to collect the records of their people, to sponsor research projects, and to publish studies, the Italians have done little or nothing of this nature.* (1) For Foerster, undertaking serious research on this subject required immense patience and considerable detective work, as there were no archives preserving Italo-American records. The same problem was faced when trying to collect evidence for historical reconstruction of the Italian community in South Africa. Because of the absence of self- documentation, it is difficult at one level to advance beyond the very bare outline sketched in census reports. However, there are some skimpy additional written sources, mostly in the form of consular correspondence of the Italian government. This and other documentary evidence is examined in the following pages.

Under the Dutch administration, especially during the 18th century, a few individual Italians settled at the Cape of Good Hope. These individuals and their successors were soon absorbed into local families. Some of these early Italians kept family records. Prominent among these is the Chiappini family who still have in their possession original letters and documents. These sources identify the original founder of the Cape branch of the family as Antonio Chiappini, a painter born in Florence in 1788, and the son of an aristocrat. His sister married Lord Newborough and settled in England (2)

As a result of his connection with the Newborough family, the young Antonio was commissioned to paint portraits in India. On his return from India, between 1803 and 1805 (the exact date appears to be uncertain), he stopped at the Cape of Good Hope, apparently fell in love with the scenery, and decided to stay. A year later, he married . According to the family tree drawn by Antonio's daughter-in-law, née Bolleurs, who died in 1877, (she had married his son Alexander) Antonio arrived *from Italy about 1805, He married a Miss Hugh (French) who died at 80 ; he died at the age of 83*. The original marriage certificate is still in the Chiappini family and records the marriage between *Antony Balthazar Chiappini van Florence jongman met Johanna Magdalena Heughs jaage Doger 31.st July 1804* . According to Miss Bolleurs, Miss Heughs was *French* . Yet, according to other private records with the Chiappini family, Antonio Baldazar Melchior Casper Chiappini, was born in Italy in 1777 and came to the Cape about 1796. In 1804 he married Miss Johanna Heugh, who was born in Denmark and was sister of the Danish consul in Cape Town.

Another family tree in possession of the Chiappini family claims that *Antonio Baldazar Melchior Casper Chiappini arrived in the Cape in 1803* .

This date is probably the correct one since the family possesses a letter of recommendation for the young Antonio as a painter dated 1800. There are other letters addressed to Antonio in the Cape by his father, dated from 1806. The discrepancies about dates and facts illustrate that there are minute difficulties in ascertaining the reliability of early documentary evidence as well as for later oral testimony.

Such details of the Chiappini family's history have survived precisely because of their class position. They were literate and occupied an important position in Cape settler society. However, none of the children married Italians; one may assume that either they had little social contact with Italians or that none was suitable, possibly because most Italians at the Cape at this time were working class, as can be seen in the relevant General Directory of the Cape of Good Hope. Antonio started a merchant's business and was active in establishing the Cape Town Commercial Exchange and the Chamber of Commerce, and he became chairman of the Commercial Exchange in 1829. (3) One of his sons, Peter, born in 1810, trained as a doctor. Cape Town's Chiappini Street was named after him. Peter's own son, Antonio Lorenzo, born in 1841, followed his father's footsteps, becoming one of one of the leading surgeons in the Cape. Other members of the family prospered in commerce, industry, and farming.

Most of these early bourgeois or skilled artisanal Italians were rapidly absorbed into local colonial society. Often their names disappeared, or became unrecognisable under a new spelling. A typical example is the case of Rocco Catoggio, of whom we have unusual testimony in the form of an original letter preserved in the Huguenot Museum at Franschoek. (4). In this letter of 1833, still written in good Italian to his old family at Armento, in the then Neapolitan Kingdom, he gives details of his life and

career at the Cape. Previously a soldier in the Napoleonic wars, Rocco Catoggio arrived at the Cape in 1818. He settled and married a Catharina Theron. A shoemaker by trade, he later set up a milling business at Paarl, with a *becharia* (a bakery ? or a butchery, = *beccheria*, in old Italian). He also owned grain and wine farms. His only daughter married into the De Villiers family and the Catoggio (or Catorzo, as it is spelt on his local marriage certificate) name disappeared from the Cape scene. Another example of absorption by the host society is the Napoleonic soldier who set up the first hotel, or tavern, at Houwhoek on the top of Sir Lowry's Pass, quoted in one of the earliest guidebooks to the Cape Peninsula, written in 1825. (5)

For several decades, the Italian presence at the Cape of Good Hope was scattered and nearly invisible. This was underscored in the report of an Italian journalist, Cristoforo Negri, who visited the Cape Colony several times in the 1860s'. (6) An article of September 1863 written for Turin's *La Stampa*, mentions that on his first Cape visit, he hoped to find a thriving Italian community, but found none. *Cerco poi gli Italiani nella Citta' del Capo e nella Colonia, ma nessuno ve n'è, nessuno vi trovo.*

(I then look for Italians in Cape Town and in the Colony, but there aren't any, I cannot find anyone there .) He went on to say that out of 976 ships which he saw in the harbour in 1861, none flew the Italian flag. However, he did report the existence of an Italian Consulate in Cape Town since 1854.

Just over twenty years later in 1886, only the following 37 possible Italian names were recorded in the General Directory of the Cape of Good Hope: (7)

Biancki Giuseppe
Buissinne C.J.
Bussinne W.T.

turncock
attorney
(Firm VanZyl Bussinne and Leonard)
38 Dorp Street
Church Street
Church Square

Busco Francis	baker	79 hanover Street
Camerea		132 Caledon Street
Camese Jakoef	tailor	8 Stone Street
Capito Philip	wheelwright	93 Butengracht Street
Cappuccio Joseph	hotel keeper	in Waterkant Street
Christiani Casper F	carpenter	Ashley Street
Christiani William	carpenter	17 Clifton Street
Cicero Peter	mason	1 Barrack Street
Cippolla Frank	hotel keeper	23 Riebeeck Street
Dantu Moses J	fisherman	6 Waterkant Street
Dantu Pieter A	fish dealer	5 Long Street and 5 Rose Lane
Del Ponte Gaetano	hotel keeper	57 Waterkant Street
Del Ponte L	publican	2 Wicht Street
Del Ponte Ralph	grocer	61 Waterkant Street
Elario Henry	shoemaker	Roger Street
Ferrandi Anthony	grocer	78 Sir Lowry Road
Ferrandi Diederick C	grocer	11 Bouquet Street
Ferrandi Jacques A	grocer	11 Caledon Street
Finzi	commission agent	75 Loop Street
Franca Eva		Aspeling Street
Grisanti Leopold	plasterer	46 Harrington Street
Lamara	mason	off Clifton Street
Manzoni Fracisco	hairdresser	38 Loop Street
Morta John	coachman	Tyne Street
Nannucci O and Co	dyers	60 Long Street
Pedon Peter	tailor	5 William street
Rolando C	artist	
Scipio Mrs S	laundress	off Rogers Street
Sordo Frank		23 Riebeeck Street
Spargo William	mason	3 Ebeneser road
Talata	fisherman	Reform street
Tappan John H	water police	Napier Street
Valderon		29 Stuckeris Street
Villa Joseph	hotel keeper	5 Leeuwen Street

There are 7 additional names mentioned in the Suburban Directory:

Chiappini A L, Sea Point

Marchiano G, grocer, Sea Point

Mentore M, Claremont

Molteno Sir J C, K.C.M.G., Claremont

Orlando Chas, Wynberg

Russo J, Green Point

Russo W, Green Point

Particularly noticeable in the list is the presence of at least two groups of people with the same surnames, doing similar activities (the three Ferrandi grocers and the three Del Ponte, with two hotel keepers and one grocer). All we can surmise, however, is that these people were related. Not necessarily all individuals represented Italian nationals. They could, in some instances, have come from other countries . For example, we know of the case of the prominent Cape liberal Molteno family, originally one of the leading families in Milan. They originated in Brianza, in a small town named Molteno, but had settled in England about the middle of the 18th century.

John Charles Molteno arrived at the Cape from England in 1831, as a seventeen year-old , and was the founder of the prominent Molteno family branch in the Cape Province. When Molteno arrived as a young man he had received an English education and was very likely more Anglicised than Italian. He started working as a shipping and export clerk and by 1837 had gained sufficient knowledge and accumulated sufficient capital to set up Molteno and Co. and begin exporting wines. As he prospered and expanded he bought a farm at Beaufort West, introduced more intensive agricultural methods and was the first to bring Saxon merino sheep to the area. He was eventually elected to represent Beaufort West district, and thus began his political career. Eventually John Molteno became the first Prime Minister of a self-governing Cape Colony in 1872 and was subsequently knighted. Sir John Molteno also kept a large estate in Claremont, Cape Town, where most of his children grew up. His son, Percy Alport Molteno, was active both in politics and in shipping as well as in farming. (8) Kathleen Murray, granddaughter of Sir John, was later to be a pioneer magnate of the fruit industry in the Elgin area in the Cape.

Oreste Nannucci, a Florentine, (mentioned as a "dyer" in the 1886 Cape

Directory) who for many years was a leading figure in the Italian community, started a laundry business, which still carries the same name today. Born in Florence in 1854, Nannucci's father had a prosperous dyeing and cleaning business. Oreste was restless, and decided to emigrate to Argentina. He opened a dyeing and cleaning business in Buenos Aires, but competition forced him to move on. He went to Rio de Janeiro, but fell ill and moved to Porto Alegre where he intended to remain. But he was eventually persuaded by acquaintances in South Africa to come to the Cape in 1879.

He struggled for a few years but by 1883 had saved enough capital to buy his own premises in Long Street, Cape Town. As Nannucci's business prospered, his father came to the Cape for a year to help him. His father's entrepreneurial spirit and experience further expanded the business which reached its peak by 1897. A few years later the business was converted into a Limited Company with a capital of £ 25,000; no shares were sold as no capital was required. Soon after Oreste Nannucci retired. Six years later Nannucci opened a branch in Johannesburg. Nannucci Limited was eventually sold in 1922. Its founder is mentioned several times in the life stories presented in Chapter Five as well as in other sources (9).

No further details are recorded of the other people listed in the Directory. Two of them are still listed eight years later among 14 other Italian names in the Cape Directory of 1894, namely Nannucci himself and L. Del Ponte, the owner of the Imhof Hotel on Wicht Street. Del Ponte's brother, Ralph, still had his grocery shop, which supplied pasta (*maccheroni*) and other Italian food to the local community, at least until World War 1. (10)

Other Italian immigrants and their achievements are mentioned in the only book written on Italians in South Africa, that by Adolfo Giuseppe Bini. Adolfo Giuseppe Bini came from Montevettolini in the province of

Pistoia, where he had been a cabinet maker, decorator, and a photographer. He arrived at the Cape in 1902 and was an active member of the *Società Italiana del Mutuo Soccorso* (Italian Mutual Aid Society) founded to help the needy of the community. Oreste Nannucci was the President of the Society on Bini's arrival, and Bini succeeded him in the presidency in later years. In his book, *Italiani in Sud Africa* (Italians in South Africa) Bini provides a detailed account of the Society. It was founded in 1890 at the suggestion of the Italian Consul in Cape Town, Agostino Carpani, who was given active support by Oreste Nannucci and Giuseppe Villa who, with a few others, were co-founder members. Villa was elected first President of the Society, a post held from 1890 -1895. An example of the Society's social work was an initiative at the outbreak of the First World War, when its members organised an "Italian Day" and collected £ 5000 in the Cape peninsula alone. The money was sent to Italy in aid of the Italian Red Cross (11) In 1909, Bini opened his own workshop, making furniture. During the First World War, because of scarcity of work, he started a photographic studio. In 1930, he became *Segretario Amministrativo del Fascio* (Fascist Party Secretary) a post which he held until 1940. In 1938, he gave up his studio and went to work with his son-in-law, A. Bergamasco, until he retired in 1948. After his retirement, he decided to write a history of the Italian community, illustrating the achievements of individuals and the community as a whole in South Africa. This book, published in 1957, was the result of several years of research but unfortunately it had no bibliography and his original notes, which were handed to the Italian Consulate in Cape Town, have been lost.

Bini's book recalls the beginnings of Italian fishermen as they were remembered among the Cape Town community. (12) According to him, some of the ships arriving at the Cape in the 1880s' carried Italian sailors

among their crew. Fishing folk of poorer Southern Italian coastal villages often embarked as sailors to earn a living on ships. Many of these sailors deserted their ships when they reached Cape Town, hoping to make a new start in life. Some succeeded while others were caught and sent back. (13) Many Italians arrived at the Cape informally in this way, surviving on whatever employment they could find; some found work in the Cape Town docks or on local fishing vessels, while others migrated inland or up the west coast as far as Velddrift where a certain Stephan, who owned a large fishing fleet, was reportedly always willing to employ Italian fishermen on his boats. Accustomed to hardship, these men customarily saved earnings in order to try to escape wage dependence to work on their own account. After a few years, many had accumulated sufficient funds to acquire their own boats, and now began competing with the local Coloured fishermen. (14) As they prospered, and demand for their fishing skills increased, particularly in the crayfish industry, a number of these fishermen arranged for family members and fellow villagers to join them from Sicily.

According to Bini, at the end of the nineteenth century there were about 60 Italian fishermen. By 1910 they numbered in all about 70, altogether manning 90 boats, (some sail and others with auxiliary engines) and approximately 200 dinghies. Even though these Italians lived in the mutualism of a community, they worked independently with the individualistic spirit of a "self-made" status. It appears that about one in every three fishermen owned at least two boats.

The history of these tough Sicilian fishermen is essentially that of their struggles, their family ties and way of life; attitudes towards one's fellow fishermen, where the Sicilian code of minding one's own business and that

of one's family prevailed, shaped community spirit. Relations could be both fraternal and competitive. Immigrant fishermen often worked in adverse conditions, competing against one another and against their Coloured and Malay counterparts. They lived in the same neighbourhood, firstly for convenience, because of proximity to the harbour, and secondly because many came from the same villages and regions. As often happens with new immigrants, they were cut off from social interaction with local populations because of differences of language and culture. These fishermen and their families neither spoke local languages nor knew local laws. Labouring people who could hardly read or write, Sicilians could not leave written records in which they described their lives and that of their community. Moreover, they were among the lower strata of society, and not considered important enough to be mentioned in official records. Their history can therefore only be an oral one. Information about individual fishing families and aspects of the fishing community can be found in at least four of the interviews contained in this study.

In 1900, several of these fishermen decided to move further afield and settled at Saldanha Bay, mostly supplying crayfish to the canning companies at nearby Velddrift. Bini provides some names of the Langebaan community: Francesco and Giacomo Marra, D. Sieni, M. Canestra and R. Florentino. The Marra family, from Reggio Calabria (on the Messina straits) later became a local power in Langebaan, by supplying fish to the interior, opening shops and by dabbling in land speculation.

Apart from Bini's book, there is no other published secondary source on Italians. Although consular reports provide some useful information, they usually deal with specific issues such as immigration laws. The community is normally described only in very general terms. A few publications, such

as *Giustizia per il Lavoro Italiano in Africa*, however, dedicate some chapters to the achievements of Italians living in South Africa.

The decade of the 1880s' saw the beginning of a massive flow of labour from Italy, induced by a severe agricultural crisis. The crisis affected smallholders and large estates alike, both in the South and North of Italy and caused widespread unemployment. There was overpopulation as better sanitary conditions and improved health facilities had favoured a sharp population increase, mainly in the countryside; those who found work were only paid a subsistence wage, and, as a result when jobs were lost, many were forced to seek work in towns or to emigrate to other parts of Europe such as France, or overseas. (15)

The United States, and the Argentine were the main recipients of this immigration influx, which peaked between 1900 and 1914. Conditions in the U.S.A at the turn of the century were, however, far from rosy. Italians who outnumbered all other European immigrants were one of the most socially despised groups, called the *Chinese of Europe, just as bad as as the negroes*, and in the South, some Italians were forced to attend black schools. (In the years 1891-1900 about six hundred thousand Italians emigrated to the USA, this figure reaching two million in the years 1901-1910)(16). In Argentina, however, Italians entered every field of commerce, industry and farming ; they scattered all over the country and numbers of them prospered, favourably quoted as being *workers of incomparable resistance, robust, sober, and persevering* (17) Local shipping companies offered cut-throat rates for the passage overseas, inducing workers and farmers to sell off their possessions or their land and emigrate. Unfortunately, in some cases, after the prospective emigrants had paid their ticket, the necessary medical fees, and the agent, they

were often left with very little money, if any, and upon arrival were compelled to accept any exploitative low-wage job they could find. (18).

Nevertheless, some immigrants eventually reached South African shores, often as a second choice after a failed first attempt in Argentina. They were mostly artisans, shopkeepers, builders, miners, a few missionaries, and even some middle class professionals. (19) Reasons for coming to the country were as varied as the immigrants, although all had one goal - the establishing of economic security and an improved standard of living.

In South Africa after the discovery of the main gold reef in 1886, the expansion of commercial activities at the Rand increased the demand for artisans and white labour in Cape Town. Emigrant information offices were set up in England and posters were circulated in Post Offices to spread the news of opportunities in the colonies. White female domestic servants were brought in, as they were considered suitable wives for artisans, who were officially discouraged from frequenting coloured women. Even though there was plenty of cheap labour for unskilled work drawn from the black population, or from India or China, farmers were still short of skilled labour to increase agricultural production to meet new produce demands from the mines. Various suggestions were made, including importing labour from Europe. Some experiments with immigration were at least discussed at this time by the Cape Colonial Government. There was discussion in 1897, and again in 1902-3, as we will see, about importing Italians as agricultural labourers in the Cape, recorded in the correspondence between Percy A. Molteno, who was working at that time for Donald Currie and Co., owners of the Union Castle shipping line and therefore with a vested interest in immigration policy, and John Merriman, the Member of Parliament for Wodehouse. But nothing

came of this project (20).

From the 1890s, specific documentary evidence on Italians at the Cape becomes available in the form of a series of official reports, dispatched at various intervals by Italian consular representatives in Cape Town to Rome. A small number of these reports were located in the archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Whether or not the series is complete is not known. Some seem to have been preserved only because they were selected for publication by the Ministry itself. Others were extracted from the official collection of ministerial circulars. These documents provide additional information on the immigration patterns and circumstances accompanying the development of the Italian community at the Cape, and the policies which influenced that development. They also supplement and confirm the statistical data discussed in the previous chapter.

The first of these reports was sent on 7 September 1891 by the Italian Consul in Cape Town, A. Carpani (21). According to Carpani, there were 210 Italian people in the Cape Colony, of whom 80 were in Cape Town, 70 in Kimberley, 20 in Port Elizabeth and also 40 in Natal. These numbers did not take into account a shifting minority of people moving around in search of better wages or opportunities, usually around the Kimberley diamond fields or at the goldfields on the Rand. The consul estimated this group at about 100 people, 30 of whom were then working on the construction of the Pretoria-Delagoa Bay railway.

Italian permanent residents, as the Consul explained in his report, had been in the country for many years. Some worked as shopkeepers, hotel owners (10 between Cape Town and Kimberley), although most of these hotels were just *osterie*, (pubs), fruiterers, fishermen, and also as various

professionals. There were no Italians who owned agricultural land, but some owned their own houses, which they also used as shops or boarding houses. The majority, except for those few who had taken Italian wives, married "respectable" English or Dutch girls but some lived with *donne di basso ceto* (women of low status). There was no shortage of manual work. The better wages were paid on the diamond mines and goldfields, where a white miner could earn from 8s to 10s a day, while unskilled whites could make from 4s to 5s. But the local cost of living was high, houses were expensive, and household goods were subject to high import duties. Immigration to South Africa was only routed through London, where a Government Emigration Committee (*Comitato Governativo d'Emigrazione*) offered special passage rates in 3rd class at £ 5, equivalent to L.it. 400, if the prospective immigrant already had a written work contract. While some Italians arrived with small initial capital, usually raised by selling all their possessions, most of them arrived with no money, and had to stay with those relatives or friends who had invited them to South Africa. Very few arrived of their own accord, without previous connections.

According to Carpani, foreigners were not highly regarded by the local English and Dutch residents, and often it was felt that they were barely tolerated. He indicated that Italians had a poor image among the local public, as well as in the local press. (22) We have already seen, in the previous chapter, that it was only after World War I, or about 30-35 years after Carpani's report, that Italian residents in South Africa really began to merge into local white society. In the first decade of the century, Italian migration to South Africa, as seen from the census reports, appears to have consisted of marginal contract workers rather than settling families like the Germans or the Jews, with an 81 % preponderance of males.

Moreover, even by 1918, most Italians had not yet acquired South African citizenship, as again indicated by census figures.

Most of these earlier Italian immigrants were working class or of peasant origin. Only about 20% of them, according to the consul, could read and write. He reported that few Italians sent their children to school, keeping them at home to work in their trade, as soon as they were old enough. However, the consul felt that too often children tended to speak English, rather than Italian, even at home. " National sentiment " was not particularly felt, in spite of the efforts of the Consulate to organize meetings at national days. There was, however, undoubtedly some organised and expressive community spirit, as is also evident from the memories of some of the older interviewees in this study. (23) For instance, the consul notes that in 1890 a *Societa' di Mutuo Soccorso* (Mutual Aid Society) had already been founded by a group of local Italians, as also recalled by Bini. This Society had a limited capital of L.it 2000 (or about £ 25. at that time), to cover possible hospital expenses. (24) For those without means, the Consulate itself had to guarantee payment of 3/6s. a day, or nearly an average day's pay. Altogether, the picture portrayed by this 1891 report is one of hard work and bearable, if not particularly rosy, conditions. Yet, the opportunities offered by the Cape Colony at that time were much better than life in Italy, especially for skilled craftsmen, peasants, and fishermen.

Italians also played an interesting role during the South African War of 1899-1902 when a contingent of about 200 Italian miners and labourers fought for the Boers in the so-called "Italian Legion", under the command of C. Ricchiardi. The initiative was taken without the support of the Italian Government, which made no comment and remained neutral. In November 1899, Ricchiardi, who had served as an officer in Abyssinia and

the Philippines, offered his services to the Boer High Command. He was received with some suspicion but was nevertheless given a Mauser and a horse and sent to join Gen. Botha at Krugersdorp. His military skill on the field did not go unnoticed, and he was soon joined by other Italians. Many of them had been working in South Africa for a long time; some were miners, while others were employed in the construction of roads, bridges and railways. This force was further augmented by several Italians who came from the Argentine to the Cape, accompanying mule and horse shipments to British troops, and paying their passage by looking after the animals. The successful participation and distinction of the Italian contingent at the Battle of Colenso in December 1899 was even cited in the local press in Pretoria and Johannesburg. The *Legione Italiana*, was joined during the following months by other foreigners, reaching a total force of 300 men. Although Botha used the Italian Legion mainly for reconnaissance, the legion took part in many daring raids, skirmishes and battles. Among these was the raid on the railway line between Olifantsfontein and Irene, where 30 men under Ricchiardi blew up the bridge and part of the road near the British Camp.

In September 1900, with the rank of Colonel, Ricchiardi was placed in command of all foreign fighting units (German , Austrian, Irish, French, American and International). But at the end of that month when Kruger ordered all foreign legions to disband and cross the border, Ricchiardi was arrested by the Portuguese authorities and only released upon promising that he would not re-cross the frontier. This was the end of the *Legione Italiana*. Its members were soon forgotten, and it is with bitterness that Biazzari writes : *Ora non un sasso nel Sud Africa ricorda il generoso e valido contributo italiano* (*Now not even by a stone is the generous and valid Italian contribution remembered*). (25)

At the end of the Anglo Boer War or South African War, many Italians, motivated by what had been written in the press about the wealth of the country, started to arrive at Cape Town and Durban. (26) This influx was, however, soon to be stemmed by the consular authorities, as South Africa rapidly moved into a period of recession during the first years of the century. It was severe enough to affect the large migratory movement pattern of the last decades of the 19th century, when the Transvaal's gold mines acted as an irresistible magnet. According to H.M. Robertson's analysis of the passenger figures of shipping lines, during the years 1893-1896, immigrants to South Africa outnumbered those to Australia. According to the annual guidebook of the Union Castle Line, which operated mail ships from Southampton to Cape Town, over 22% of the 26000 emigrants who left England for South Africa in 1895 were foreigners from Europe. In 1896, this figure increased to 31% of the 36 000 emigrants. At the end of the Anglo-Boer War, immigration into South Africa " was feverish", but it declined considerably during 1904-1910, when South Africa suffered its severe depression. In fact, according to Robertson, official figures for emigration exceeded the figures for immigration for the period 1904 -1910. (27)

Nevertheless, immediately after the war and before the onset of the recession, proposals were made to import Italian farm workers from Northern Italy, for wine growing districts in the Western Cape. In October 1902, John Merriman, M.P. for Wodehouse (who six years later became the Cape Prime Minister) suggested in the Cape House of Assembly that the Government should experiment with Italian migration to find appropriate White labour for undermanned Cape farms (28). With unskilled labour at a premium as the post-war reconstruction of the

country got underway, Merriman strongly favoured an Italian solution to the labour question. The following extracts convey the flavour of the parliamentary debates, and their concern with issues of race, class and culture in regard to labour relations.

Mr. MERRIMAN : Some of them [*the farmers*] had to throw away valuable grafted vines, because they had not the labour to plant them out. The farmer could not afford to pay 4s. 6d. a day for this class of work (**Hear, hear**). He could not compete with the mines. He could not compete with the military..... What were the farmers to do, because it was easy enough to tell what their grievances were. He [*Merriman*] was perfectly sure of one thing, and that they must look to what was done elsewhere. He cited what has been done by the Argentine Republic with regards to Italian peasants, and said he thought that that would be a source of labour that would be very valuable, for the farmers about here at any rate; and he would strongly urge upon the Government to, at any rate, make experiments. It need not cost much beyond the bare cost of bringing out the Italian families. Many people started out with the idea that Italians were simply ice-cream sellers, and people who had a knife concealed up their sleeves. There were Italians and Italians, and if they went to Lombardy they would find the best peasant population in the world, ground down in poverty, both the man and his wife; and they would be glad of the labour that we in this country could offer them. They [*the Cape farmers*] could provide them with wages and with cottages, if the Government would import them. Of course, it was a very difficult thing for a man with a limited capital to think of importing ten or a dozen families of Italians on his own responsibility. He believed that these Italians would do a great deal towards supplying the deficiency of labour, if they could only get the people. He knew that he himself, and a number of his neighbours would take a certain number of families. But there were a certain number of people who did not want Italians, but who wanted Mozambiques. He would far rather have an intelligent Italian than an ignorant Mozambique. As to Chinese and Japanese, he could endorse what has been said about these valuable people, but, unfortunately,

they were too valuable. They soon gave the good-bye to any White man below the rank of large proprietor. Natal was a striking instance in point. As to looking to England, he might say at once that it was no use looking there at all, because they would see that there they could not cultivate their own country properly. The Englishman whom they would get here would drift into Johannesburg as certain as the sun shone. As to Germans, they would have to pay them much higher than Italians and the German was certain to want to set up on his own account much more readily than the Italian.

He [*Merriman*] did strongly recommend the Government to try the experiment of shipping one cargo of Italian families, and he felt perfectly certain that if they did that it would prove a success, and it would be followed by other importations that would do a great deal toward relieving a certain class of requirements in labour, especially on the part of people in the district of Worcester.

Mr. VAN DER MERWE : In his district there were hundreds of coloured people who now wanted the same wages which the Government had given them during the war. Formerly they were satisfied with £ 1 monthly, but they persistently refused to accept that now. The magistrates could commit the farmers if they stopped the food to this people.

Mr THERON : Reference has been also made to the possibility of importing Italians. There was a grave difficulty to be surmounted in this connection and that was that a young European employed as a servant or assistant on a farm would not be able to mix with his employer; the tendency would be to mix the Cape boys and other servants.

Dr. BECK : As to Italians, he believed there was a good deal in what the hon. member for Wodehouse had said. When he was in Europe a few years ago, he found that the Italian labourers were regarded *par excellence* as the best labourers in Europe.

Mr. IMMELMAN : He was against the import of foreign labour, but expressed himself in favour of an Act whereby able bodied labourers could be forced to take service.

Mr FROST : With regard to the question of employing Asiatics, he knew that there was a very strong feeling against such being done.....There was an even stronger feeling against the employment of Chinese. Suggestions had also been made by Western Province farmers [*i.e. Merriman*] that Italians could be brought out here - wine farmers, who could be able to work cheaply and well. This suggestion commended itself to him and he was endeavouring to carry it in effect. On the Supplementary Estimates he was asking for a vote of £ 10,000 in order to introduce Italians to the country, also under contract, but not with the condition that they should go back. The farmers here were perfectly willing to pay a certain amount towards the expenses..... He thought the scheme he had outlined with regard to the employment of Italians would go a long way towards meeting the difficulty. (**Hear,hear**)

Mr. OATS : The Government so far had not grasped the situation, and the fact has not been recognised that it was impossible to get white labour in this country to do unskilled work. He was not opposed to the importation of Italians, as had been suggested, but if it was supposed that the Italians or any other nationality were going to undertake unskilled labour side by side with the natives, a great mistake would be made. The Italians would no more do than an Englishman would. (**Hear, hear**). He said they must swallow their prejudices. The Government of Natal did not hesitate to man its railways with Asiatic labour, and in this colony [= *the Cape*] they must recognize the fact that they had got to use Asiatic labour if they wished the country to go ahead.

The motion presented by Frost, in support of Merriman's idea, was approved and £ 10,000 was voted for the assisted immigration of Italian farmhands to the Cape.

Nearly a year later, in August 1903, the question was raised again, as nothing appeared to have been done to alleviate the labour shortage (29) :

Dr. HOFFMAN : Moved to reduce the item of £ 10,000 - introduction of agricultural labourers..... The hon. member said they had previously a plan to introduce agricultural labourers from outside, but so far as he could see they were none the better off; they saw no more agricultural labourers in the country. He was pretty sure that, even if they succeeded in introducing white labourers from abroad, the farmers would not employ them, as a general rule.

Mr FROST : the vote of £ 10 000 of last year was a special vote for the introduction of Italian labourers for the wine- growing districts..... Mr Currey, the Assistant Secretary for Agriculture, had been sent to Italy, but the terms stipulated by the Italian Government were not acceptable to the farmers here. Mr Currie had gone to Switerland, where he had been more successful..

Mr MOLTENO : He did not think that the negotiations with the Italian Government had been a failure; with a little more patience they would have got a stream of the best class of agricultural labour. The best labourers were to be found in Lombardy and Tuscany; from an agricultural standpoint they were the best educated people in Europe; they worked all day in harvest time, and they were not to be confused with the people of Southern Italy. That was the class of people he would like to see introduced. The Italian Government had, of course, made as big a show as possible, but he felt sure that, if they were left to their own choice, the peasantry would come out here in a stream. Annually a large number of the peasantry left Italy, and he felt sorry that they could not divert a small portion of this stream which would make the Western Province one of the richest countries on the earth.

Eventually, the whole scheme was abandoned, mainly because the Cape farmers were not willing to offer a living wage to allow European immigrants to maintain a commensurate white status.

Following a new law on emigration, the Italian Foreign Ministry formed a special agency in 1901. This *Commissariato della Emigrazione* (Immigration Office) helped prospective emigrants to obtain assistance and information on countries to which they wished to emigrate. The *Commissariato* collected consular reports from local representatives and Italian consular authorities around the world and then issued the relevant information throughout Italy in the form of circulars (30). There was enough interest in South Africa on the part of Italians to justify a direct inquiry into that country. In 1902, therefore, the *Commissariato* decided to send a special mission to see first-hand what possibilities and opportunities there were for Italian migration. An *Ispettore dell' Emigrazione*, (Immigration Inspector) Adolfo Rossi, an ex-journalist who had just joined the *Commissariato* and who was fluent in English, was the person charged with this mission. (31)

Adolfo Rossi left Southampton on 15 November 1902, arriving in Cape Town on 2 December. He stayed in the country for three months, returning to Europe in March 1903, after an extensive tour of the Cape Colony, Transvaal and Natal. His first meeting in Cape Town was with the Colony's Under Secretary for Agriculture, Charles Currie, who wanted to discuss with Rossi the possibility of bringing out about 500 Italian peasant families for the local fruit and wine industry. This, most probably, arose from the contacts that Currie is said to have had with the Italian Government, already quoted in the House of Assembly debate. Rossi reported that the conditions offered were shameful, *umilianti* (humiliating) both in terms of wages and working conditions. Men were offered 2s 6d a day (as we have already seen, this pay was only about half the average wage for local White workers, which was then about 4s 6d. a day), women 1s. a day, while additional work in the fruit season paid 1s 3d. They had to work from dawn to sundown. *Non c'è che dire :*

i negri erano assai meglio pagati. Ma purtroppo, nella opinione Sud Africana l'Italiano valeva poco piu' di un negro. (One can say: Blacks were paid much better. But alas, according to local opinion, an Italian was considered little above a Black). Rossi reported that local perception had been influenced by some Italians who had arrived from Argentina with mule shipments and had stayed in Cape Town working *con i negri come facchini, nel porto e nelle opere stradali.* (with Blacks as porters, in the docks, and on road works)

Rossi's first impression of the proposed farm labour scheme was certainly not very favourable. However, before committing himself, during the rest of December he visited certain farms, met farmers, discussed wages and viewed living conditions for both blacks and whites. His further findings were such as to discourage any employment of Italian farm hands on local farms. Many people agreed with him, including the governor himself, Sir Walter Hely- Hutchinson. At a typical meeting organized in Cape Town by the Trade and Labour Council to discuss the labour question, there were many loud objections when one of those present suggested offering 2s 6d to Italian labourers, as it was considered shameful to offer such pay to White labour. Moreover, Rossi was informed that Boer farmers were accustomed to treat Blacks like slaves, and would not treat Italians any differently. When discussions with the Ministry of Agriculture were resumed, since the local officials would not budge from the original offer, Rossi considered the matter closed and moved to Kimberley on 9 January.

While in Cape Town, Rossi made a point of meeting most of the prominent members of the local Italian community. He was particularly impressed by Oreste Nannucci, (*il più ricco italiano della città* (the richest Italian in the city) who in 25 years had accumulated great wealth and now owned many houses, a soap factory, a steam laundry, and various other business

interests. A figure of patronage and charity, he seemed always ready to help any fellow countrymen in need. Another prominent Italian businessman was Eugenio Dapino who was an agent for several companies. Rossi stressed the business opportunities available and encouraged Italian firms to send salesmen who could speak English and provide samples of their products. He also met a young (31 year old) self-made man, Giuseppe Rubbi, a Venetian from Marostica. (32) Rubbi arrived at the Cape at the age of 16, in 1877. A carpenter by trade, he easily found work in a construction company. In the evenings he studied English and design. After a short time, according to Rossi, Rubbi became a foreman, and then started on his own as a small building contractor. Gradually, he gained a solid reputation and also accumulated considerable wealth. His house-cum-office in Cape Town was worth £3,000. Rubbi told the Italian inspector that it was possible for Italians to obtain good jobs. In "Rhodesia", (*Zimbabwe*) for instance, Italian miners could earn 25s a day, and were highly regarded. In his report, Rossi also mentioned Father Aeneas Tozzi and the work skills and cultural activities of the Salesian Brothers institute, founded at Cape Town in 1897, where on Sundays and in the evenings, English classes were held free of charge for Italian adults. (33)

Before going to Johannesburg, Rossi visited Kimberley, Port Elizabeth, and East London. In Kimberley he found a small community of 27 Italians, mostly well-to-do shop keepers or hotel owners. (As already seen, fifteen years later, in the 1918 census, they were reduced to only 14 persons) He discovered that at the time of the diamond diggings, there had been about 250 Italians working in Kimberley, some earning as much as £7 or £8 a week. Rossi learned that the Italians in Kimberley had also organized themselves in a *Societa' di Mutuo Soccorso* (Mutual Aid Society). Finally he

reported that some time before a few stranded sailors turned diggers *marinai improvvisatisi minatori* (sailors claiming to be miners) had been caught dealing in illicit diamonds. This had unfortunately given the Italians a bad reputation. Nearly all of these miners had then moved to the Rand.

In Port Elizabeth, Rossi noted several shops with Italian names, and about 150 Italians working in the harbour, many of them having arrived from Argentina with mule shipments. In East London, he encountered other Italians from Argentina also working at the docks. In the Eastern Cape, Rossi met several Italian missionaries, but missed Monsignor P. Strobino, a Piedmontese priest who was later to become one of the earliest bishops in South Africa. He also learned that several Italians were working on the laying of the railway in the area.

When Rossi arrived in Johannesburg, he was surprised and impressed. He compared the local traffic to that of Paris, with streets full of carriages, motorcars, bicycles, *in certi momenti e in certi punti pare d'essere a Parigi, tanta è la folla di signore in carrozza a di uomini in automobile e in bicicletta*, (sometimes, and in certain places it is like being in Paris, with so many ladies in carriages and men in cars and on bicycles), According to the Italian consular representative there were between 600-900. Italians in Johannesburg and about 3000 in the Transvaal. The history of Italians in the Transvaal and Natal is outside the limit of the present study, but it is interesting to note that while in Johannesburg, Rossi met with representatives of the Chamber of Mines, to discuss the possibilities of employing Italian workers. The outcome was unfavourable, as the wages offered were too low and working conditions were not much better than those of black workers. According to mine officials, English manual workers were paid 10s per day and needed about 4s per day for their

needs. Italians, however, were supposedly thought to be able to live on less, and 2s 6d per day was considered more than sufficient, hence the lower wages offered. Furthermore, there was the problem that most Italian miners were not skilled drillmen, men able to earn as much as 25s per day. Rossi felt that as Italian labour was considered just above Blacks in the social scale, *nella scala sociale venisse immediatamente dopo il negro*, (in the social scale came immediately above Blacks) the wages offered were therefore too low, and negotiations for importing labour inevitably came to an abrupt halt. Similarly, a project for importing Italians as agricultural labour in the Transvaal and Natal was discussed, but nothing came of it.

Overall, the Italian inspector had the impression that both the public and the private sector in South Africa were only interested in the exploitation of Italian labour rather than in a policy of settlement and fair dealing, appropriate to the status of white immigrants. Moreover, the national sensibility of Rossi was often hurt by prejudices and ignorant remarks about the quality of Italian labour. The end result was a lack of enthusiasm by the appropriate Italian authorities for emigration prospects to South Africa.

Soon after the Anglo-Boer War, some restrictions were imposed on the entry of foreign labour into South Africa, and into the Transvaal in particular. In 1901, permits to enter the Transvaal, Natal and the Orange Free State were introduced. These had to be issued by the British Consul at the port of embarkation where the prospective immigrant had to prove he possessed sufficient means to support himself and his family. However, even with this permit, he was not guaranteed entry into the interior as the numbers were limited and only twenty Italians per month were

allowed to enter the Transvaal and Natal .

As this was a period of recession in the South African economy, there was widespread unemployment. (34) Its implications for migration were considered in the reports of C.W. Cousins, an officer in charge of immigration and labour in Cape Town. He stressed the severity of the unemployment crisis in the Cape for both white and coloured labour, yet equally pointed out that farmers were in desperate need of reliable labour. As always, local Europeans were considered *unfitted* for farm work, as those capable would not labour, and those willing, were unsuitable. Coloured people were unwilling to leave the towns and to give up what place they still held in semi-skilled and skilled trades. (35)

Cousins explained further that Cape Town was at a particular disadvantage as far as labour supply was concerned. The reason for this was that in more prosperous times, immigrants who landed in Cape Town moved inland almost immediately in such numbers that local employers even offered a premium of 1s. a day to encourage people to stay. Yet, in time of depression, the situation was reversed : *all the men flock back to the coastal towns and to Cape Town more than any*. (36)

In 1906, at a meeting of the Social Democratic Federation, a radical labour group formed mostly by recent British immigrants, it was said that people arrived in Cape Town, *full of energy and hope only to fall into poverty and degradation*. (37) As British workers were usually given preference over Italians, if it was difficult for them to find work it would have been almost impossible for Italians. According to Consular Reports in 1904-1905, local firms gave employment *quasi esclusivamente ai sudditi inglesi, perchè anche fra questi si contava un forte numero di disoccupati*. (almost exclusively to English subjects, because even among these

there was a large number of unemployed)(38)

The circulars that the *Commissariato dell'Emigrazione* in Rome sent to local authorities throughout Italy, presented a rather gloomy picture of the South African situation. Information was supplied by the Italian consuls in Cape Town and Pretoria, who strongly advised prospective immigrants to South Africa not to go to that country. But in spite of their advice, it appears that there was still a relatively strong influx of Italian immigrants to South Africa, as already noted in earlier discussion.(39)

According to the report presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Commissioner for Immigration, there were five thousand Italians in South Africa in 1905, although as the depression worsened many left the country.(40) Yet, despite these signals, people continued to arrive, as is indicated by the repeated appeals by Italian and South African authorities to discourage immigrants at source. These authorities were doubtless weary of having to take care of the inevitable stranded individuals without money, a common accompanying feature of large migrant bodies. The lack of a common immigration policy between the two countries also contributed to such a negative approach. Circulars painted an unfavourable picture.

Circular 55 (August 31, 1902): *Ogni persona che intenda recarsi nell'Africa del Sud deve provvedersi di un certificato rilasciato dal console inglese del porto d'imbarco, dal quale risulti che essa possiede almeno 100 sterline (2500 franchi) o è in grado di provvedere al proprio mantenimento..... Il numero degli Italiani che possono entrare in Transvaal e' limitato a 8 (otto) individui al mese....* (Every person wishing to come to South Africa must first obtain a certificate from the British Consul at the port of embarkation, declaring that he owns at least £ 100 or is able to mantain himself adequately..... The

number of Italians allowed to enter Transvaal is limited to 8 (eight) individuals per month..)

Circular 60 (October 4, 1902) : *Le condizioni attuali del Sud Africa sono assolutamente sfavorevoli ad un qualsiasi movimento migratorio.....Attualmente non possono entrare nel Transvaal piu' di venti Italiani al mese, ne' si ritiene che per ora questo numero venga aumentato.....* (Present conditions in South Africa are absolutely unfavourable to any migratory movement.....Presently, no more than twenty Italians per month can enter Transvaal, and it can be expected that this number will not be increased...)

Circular 65 (November 24, 1902) : In spite of the great difficulties in obtaining permits to the Transvaal, the Italian Consul to Pretoria reported that many Italians were still arriving at South African ports looking for work. He confirmed that the number of Italians allowed into Transvaal was 20 per month, and that there were 102 Italians already waiting to enter the British Colony. and it would take several months before these people would be allowed to move on . Besides arrivals from Italy, there were also some Italians coming from Argentina, usually arriving at the port of Lourenço Marques. Here too they had to have a sum of £20 (500 francs) deposit and prove to be persons of good behaviour. He warned that Italians who come to South Africa hoping to work in Transvaal or Natal were wasting their money to undertake such an expensive journey, and they would have to return at their own expenses, as the Consular authorities would not pay the return passage. Local authorities in Italy should warn prospective emigrants to South Africa, explaining the danger and the damage that they will face. *persuadendoli del pericolo e del danno a cui si espongono* (persuading them of the dangers and harm to which they expose themselves.)

Circular 67 (December 20, 1902) : From December 1902, entry permits for Transvaal could only be obtained by applying in writing to the South African port of entry, not to British authorities in Europe. Immigrants must obtain these permits before leaving for South Africa, as without them they could be fined or even imprisoned.

Circular 70 (March 15, 1903) : The previous warning was obviously disregarded, because the Consul in Pretoria reported that 404 persons had been prosecuted, in January alone, for illegal entry and sentenced to one month's hard work. A renewed appeal was made to try to discourage Italians from coming to the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.

Circular 79 (June 1, 1903) : *Continua nei porti dell'Africa del Sud l'arrivo di Italiani diretti in Transvaal, in numero superiore a quello cui, per disposizione del Governo locale, e' permessa l'entrata in quella colonia.* (Italians on the way to the Transvaal continue to arrive at South African ports , in numbers exceeding the limit allowed for that colony by the local Government). Moreover, a new law passed in January prohibited any immigrant who could not write or read. Once more the circular stressed that people without a proper entry permit would be prosecuted, attaching a copy of the permit itself.)

Circular 88 (September 18, 1903) : The Laffan agency published the following notice from Cape Town : *Il Governo della Colonia del Capo ha arruolato un grande numero di contadini svizzeri per aiutare gli agricoltori durante il prossimo raccolto, che avviene in Gennaio. Per l'arruolamento di questi emigranti sono destinate 10 000 sterline .* (The Cape Colony Government has recruited a large number of farmers from Switerland, to help local farmers with the coming harvest in January. £10 000 has been set aside for this recruiting operation). The circular warned Italians working in Switzerland against taking up this offer, as wages offered by the Cape farmers were 2s 6d per day, which was inadequate for White labour.)

Circular 91 (November 21, 1903) : A telegram from the Italian Consul General in Cape Town, dated November 3, advised that Italian workers and farm hands should be dissuaded from coming to South Africa, where all manual labour was done for the most part by Blacks at very low wages, and where *i nostri braccianti troverebbero la miseria* (our labourers would only find abject poverty). The Consul in the Transvaal reported that in the local mines only Blacks were employed and the few posts as foreman were already taken. There was no demand for labour and, according to the Consul, bricklayers, stonemasons, and carpenters were out of work. Again, the permit issue was stressed and

the local (Italian) authorities were advised to make known the fact that South Africa was not a country suitable for Italian emigrants.

Circular 94 (January 14, 1904) : Both Consuls again reported worsening economic conditions. There was no possibility whatsoever of finding employment in accordance with the cost of living, which was very expensive (*costosissima*). The railways had reduced their labour force, the Consolidated Reef Mine had dismissed many workers, and the building trade, which had started a boom soon after the (Anglo-Boer) War, was also going through a crisis. As far as the Cape Colony was concerned, the Cape Town Consul General advised that the proposed scheme to import farm labour from Switzerland had never materialized. Employment was scarce in Cape Town, too. In the previous December, 10 White workers were needed in the docks, and 300 Englishmen applied ! Many Italians arriving from Argentina found no work and only a few of them had enough money to return to Argentina. The others had to struggle for a living in Cape Town, while hostility towards foreign labour was increasing. Many slept in the open at night and had nothing to eat. The Immigration Commission was getting stricter regarding people who could not read and write. During the voyage, many tried to learn to write their signature, thinking it would be sufficient, but the English authorities required that everyone be able to read and write fluently in their own language (*sappia leggere e scrivere chiaramente nella propria lingua*), having to write several lines correctly under dictation. People from other nationalities as well had been sent back because of lack of education, and intervention by the consular authorities was to no avail. The Consul once again stressed that people had to be persuaded not to emigrate to South Africa, as there were no possibilities of employment. The Government in Cape Town had approved the introduction of Chinese labour on the mines at very low wages, insufficient for any European.

Circular 108 (November 5, 1904) : *Ve' sempre esuberanza di mano d'opera* (there is still a labour surplus) in South Africa, while Chinese were by now working in the mines for " meagre wages " (*misere mercedi*). The entry quota for Italians in Transvaal and Orange Free State was only 35 permits per month, so that new arrivals had to remain at the landing port for months awaiting their turn at great expense.

Circular 124 (May 25, 1905) : Among the usual indications of worsening employment opportunities, the consular report notified that the immigrant arriving at a South African port often had to wait several months before being allowed to reach his destination, and therefore had to have at least 1000 francs, or £ 40, to support himself for some time.

Special Report (November 1905) from *Rapporti Consolari Emigrazione e Colonie (Possedimenti Inglesi)* : The report was sent by a local regent of the vice-consulate in Cape Town, a certain Mr Clifford Knight, the position of Consul being vacant. *Le condizioni economiche della Colonia del Capo sono attualmente tristissime e vanno sempre peggiorando* (Economic conditions in the Cape Colony at present are very bad and continue to get worse). There was widespread unemployment and preference in jobs was given to British subjects. Italians without work had no hope of finding employment, and those who had some money were leaving for Argentina or West Africa. The situation of the others was strained. "A fair number of Italian fishermen" (*un discreto numero di pescatori italiani*) still led a relatively easy life, taking into account their limited needs, even though they were unable to save money as before. The number of Italians working at Simonstown's harbour was greatly reduced, because their risky work was inadequately paid, and some had already lost their lives. There were a number of Italians scattered in the Colony but as soon as their contracts expired, they were unlikely to find other employment. Before things could improve, the South African Government had to support a real policy of agricultural development, with extensive works of irrigation and improvement, which could provide jobs for many of the unemployed. But before these policies could be implemented, it would be necessary to break the usual apathy of Boer farmers, who were opposing every innovation. *Occorrerà prima scuotere l'apatia dei farmers boeri, contrari a qualsiasi idea di innovazione* (one must first shake the apathy of the Boer farmers against any idea of innovation) . Should this occur, the immigration of Italian peasants could become feasible. *Per ora e' dunque da sconsigliare assolutamente qualunque immigrazione italiana in questa Colonia!* (For the time being it is advisable to discourage any Italian immigration to this Colony)

Since there were few employment possibilities in the Cape, a number of Italians moved to German South West Africa where there were better work opportunities, while yet others returned to Argentina. Those who stayed in Cape Town survived as best as they could in an unfavourable atmosphere of job competition and anti-immigrant resentment. *Tutto questo serviva ad esasperare nei lavoratori locali il sentimento di ostilità contro la mano di opera straniera.* (All this served to aggravate the hostility of local labour against foreign workers) Some Italians went to Simonstown to work on the new harbour, but the pay was not proportionate to the dangers involved . It is no surprise that the Consular authorities tried their best to dissuade prospective new immigrants from coming to South Africa.(41)

The Italian Consul in Pretoria reported in January 1907 that unemployment was rife in both Pretoria and Johannesburg, particularly in the building sector and that immigration should be discouraged. The same circular reported on the number of Italians on the Rand, estimating that there were about 300 miners, mainly from the Veneto and Lombardia, earning from 25s to £1 per day, and in some cases, possibly more with overtime. Accommodation was free, and expenditure for food and clothing amounted to about 25s per month. These Italian miners came mainly from communities already settled in Australia or California and had similar mining experience. By contrast, Italian miners arriving from Italy were not suitable as they did not have the necessary mining certificates and were unfamiliar with South African mining methods.(42)

In circulars distributed by the *Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione* for the years 1906-1914, there is no further mention of South Africa. The only exception is a single Circular in 1910 (no. 24, of April 15), where the limitations on entering the Transvaal were again repeated, and emigration

<i>Italian-born residents</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>males</i>	<i>females</i>
1918 Census	1627	1212	415
1921 Census	1649	1198	451
1926 Census	1521	1073	448

It is strange that the calculations conducted by the Italian consular authorities indicated a lower figure for males and a much higher (over 37% higher) figures for females. There is no ready explanation for this discrepancy.

In spite of previous unsuccessful planning attempts to introduce Italians as a labour force in South Africa, the idea still persisted. According to a report from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Hertzog, then a South African Cabinet member, declared, during his visit to Italy in 1930, that his country would benefit from Italian immigration, particularly in the agricultural sector. Hertzog maintained that there were *nessun ostacolo legale esisteva in Sud Africa contro l'emigrazione Italiana e neanche opposizione, comunque manifesta, da parte della popolazione locale e del Governo; anzi, in una frazione della popolazione abbastanza numerosa e formata dai migliori elementi esisteva, in favore della nostra immigrazione, una tendenza marcata e spesso entusiastica che a volte si era espressa perfino nelle discussioni parlamentari* (45) (no legal obstacles and no opposition whatsoever by the local (white) population, and by the Government, to Italian immigration. Indeed, quite a large section of the most prominent (white) element was openly, often enthusiastically, in favour of such immigration, as confirmed even in discussions in Parliament). The report went on to say that the only opposition came from the Dutch Reformed Church, which was perturbed by the possible presence of a strong Roman Catholic element in the country. But, if Government policies were in favour of such an immigration, there was nothing to fear.

Nothing came of this declaration of intent by General Hertzog, and his sentiments were in any case overtaken by the Great Depression. Once again

consular authorities warned that no opportunities were available to prospective Italian emigrants to South Africa. The Depression hit the business-oriented Italian community in South Africa particularly hard. Many Italian entrepreneurs faced extremely difficult times and Italians often found themselves discriminated against in the labour market.

In 1931, the Immigration Quota Act No. 8 was passed by the South African Government, placing further restrictions on prospective immigrants. Immigrants now had to pass a written and oral test to prove their ability to read and write in their *native* tongue. In 1932, the deposit necessary for an entry permit to South Africa was increased from £100 to £250. These restrictive measures were passed following a series of disturbances and strikes by protectionist trade unions, which wanted to limit the immigration of foreign skilled workers as there were insufficient jobs available. The Aliens Act of 1937 introduced further restrictions on immigration, even though this Act was mainly aimed at reducing the increasing flow of Jewish refugees from Germany and other European countries to South Africa. (46)

The year 1927, however, had already marked a change in Italian emigration policy, and rigorous controls were imposed on expatriation. Mainly for nationalistic reasons, the new Fascist Government of Mussolini discouraged emigration and suspended the activities of the *Commissariato dell' Emigrazione* (47) Its aims were to protect national communities abroad and to strengthen their links with the mother country, so as to create a possible nuclei of support for the new regime and its nationalist and expansionist policies for Italian "greatness". Many Italians abroad, in European countries, in North and South America, in Australia, as

well as in South Africa, responded enthusiastically to these new policies from Rome, as a new positive image for the Fatherland was created by means of propaganda .

An interesting testament to the social changes and the gradual politicisation of the resident community during the 1930s' can be gleaned from the transcripts of some of the interviews presented in Chapter Five. There, Mrs Norfo and Mrs Peroni recall gatherings of the Italian community on festive occasions, while the Fascist era is also discussed; the Black Shirts, the local structures of para-fascist organizations, and the people who became involved in them, are all recalled, often with microscopic detail and sharp personal observations.

Furthermore, established Italian immigrants were now attracting more favourable comment. A. Giordano, in *Lavoro Italiano nell' Africa Meridionale* (The Work of Italians in Southern Africa) in the 1930s' mentions prominent Italian businessmen and their achievements. Among them we read of R.Monzali, whose construction firm had erected works throughout South Africa, including the Athlone railway bridge, and the bridge over the Umgeni river. Italians were prominent in agriculture, particularly in the Transvaal, such as the Tonetti brothers in market gardening; there was M. Zoccola who introduced the first vines to the Transvaal, and who also owned the large Railway Hotel in Johannesburg ; L.Fatti who manufactured pasta, the *Panificio Rondi* (Rondi Bakery).(48) In the mining sector we again encounter R.Monzali of Pietermaritzburg who owned coal mines, copper mines, and who had mining interests in Natal and "Rhodesia".

At the Cape, G.Rubbi was well known in construction, building many

schools, hospitals and public works for the Provincial Administration, and employing many Italians in his business. F. Costa (49) developed olive groves. Italian fishermen are also mentioned, and Giordano writes that at the outbreak of the war, they numbered about three hundred, coming mainly from Sicily. In Natal, Italians owned sugar cane plantations; later these were taken over by English settlers before the Second World War. According to Giordano, in 1936 there were 326 Italians in the Cape Province, this number increasing to 405 by 1940. We can assume that the majority of the Italians in the Cape at the time were fishermen.

The 1930s' also saw a marked development of Italian maritime trade between Italy and South Africa. As early as 1913, there were shipping lines operating between Genoa and Durban, but it was not until 1926 when the *Fiera Campionaria Viaggiante*, (Travelling Trade Fair) organized by the N.L.T. (Navigazione Libera Triestina) reached South Africa on board the ship *Sistiana*, that South African businessmen came into contact with Italian products and opportunities of business with Italy. The export and import figures for the following years are revealing : export figures from Italy to South Africa increased from 300,000 lire in 1921 to a yearly average of 882,972 lire from 1925-1929, and sales from South Africa from 150,000 lire to 1,083,509 lire. (50) The activities of the N.L.T. were so successful that when the South African Government wanted to increase its markets and stimulate exports in 1932, it turned to the Italian shipping line. Count Labia, then Italian Minister (*Ministro Plenipotenziario*) in Cape Town was instrumental in signing a shipping trade agreement, and the express ships *Giulio Cesare* and *Duilio* came into service. (51) Unfortunately when the agreement expired in 1939, the British Government exerted pressure on the South Africans not to renew the contract as it had caused considerable damage to the Union Castle Shipping

line, which was reputed to be less efficient. According to the Rome newspaper *La Critica*, of March 1939, the efficiency of the Italian shipping line was instrumental in forcing the refurbishing and updating of the Union Castle service; and a reduction in the crossing time between Britain and South Africa from 23 days to 17. *Piaccia o no.. all'armamento Italiano spetta il merito di aver promosso la riorganizzazione ed il progresso dei servizi di navigazione tra l'Europa e l'Unione del Sud Africa.* (Like it or not, Italian shipping deserves the merit of having promoted the reorganisation and the progress of the shipping services between Europe and South Africa). (52)

Although many Italian residents had by now taken South African citizenship, when Italy aligned herself formally with Nazi Germany, some Italians were regarded with suspicion. When Italy entered the war on the side of Germany in 1940, about 1000 Italian citizens residing both in South Africa and in the East African Colonies were interned in a concentration camp at Koffiefontein, in the Orange Free State. (53) Included in this number were also the crews of two Italian ships who were in Cape Town harbour at the time, the *Timavo* and the *Sistina*, so that the number of local Italian residents who were interned was probably only around 750. Very few civilian prisoners were interned for the duration of the war. Some whose skills were needed by civilian interests were released at the request of their employers, while others applied to be released for various personal reasons and many were allowed to leave. Only those active in the Fascist Party and those who did not press to be released were detained for the whole war period.(54)

In April 1941, the first Italian prisoners of war landed at Durban, and were interned at Zonderwater POW camp, situated near Johannesburg. (55) During the war years, about 90 000 POWs passed through Zonderwater.

Some of them were later sent to a supplementary POW camp in Worcester, in the Cape. (56) In order to alleviate the labour shortage in South Africa, during the war period, particularly in the agricultural sector, Italian POWs from Zonderwater were offered the choice of work as labourers outside the camp for a wage of 1s. per day. Some, about 10-12% of the total, accepted the offer. These men were usually contracted in groups of a dozen or less to local farmers as agricultural labour. Some farmers, however, hired entire labour gangs of up to 100 prisoners. Many others were employed in the construction of the new mountain road over DuToitskloof Pass, linking Paarl to Worcester. Several interviews cited in Chapter Six deal with life in the POW camps, which was often hard. For instance, Giovanni Carnevale recalls typically that he had to catch guinea fowl to supplement his daily rations. Conditions outside the camps were mixed. For instance, working conditions, especially on local farms, varied considerably. Some farmers treated POWs well, obtaining good collaboration and excellent productivity. Others exploited them and treated them as *Kaffirs*, a complaint often expressed in various interviews. Whenever possible, local Italian residents helped the prisoners. (57) The work of Italian prisoners is also mentioned by H.M. Robertson in discussing labour during the war period: *In war time South Africa, Italian prisoners of war were given considerable freedom. They were put on roads, in farming and in building. The experience was that whether the Italian was officially a builder or not, he was good by South African standards. It was not possible to keep the Italians, but there was no doubt that, at that point, the Italians could have been easily assimilated with great benefit.* (58)

Generally, the work of the Italian labour force left an imprint in South Africa. In the farming community those who had been farmers in Italy

contributed not only with their labour but also with know-how and introduced ways and methods of planting and pruning which continued well after the war. A number of the POWs' were treated as members of the family by some farmers, and some even married members of the family for whom they had worked, as was the case with Giovanni Suatti at Worcester, and Cleto Saporetti at Lemoenkloof. Saporetti later became one of the pioneers in battery chicken farming not only at the Cape but in the whole country. Others, like the labour force used in the building of The Du Toitskloof Pass contributed with their skill and sweat, and have been honoured and remembered for their work.

On 23 October 1984 a plaque to commemorate the work of these Italians was unveiled about halfway up Du Toitskloof, in the presence of South African and Italian dignitaries as well as many ex Italian POWs. On the bronze plate designed and engraved by M.Pagliari, a well known Cape Town personality and a master engraver, an inscription written in Afrikaans, English and Italian reads: **During World War II some 1500 Italian POW's were encamped on the farm Keerweder directly below. Their task was to help build the Du Toitskloof Pass. The cross which was erected on February 2, 1945 on Huguenot Peak to the left above, was to commemorate both their creative presence and remarkable friendship which existed between them and the people of Paarl.**

The general feelings of official enthusiasm could perhaps be summarized in a declaration that the Minister of Defence made in Parliament in March 1945, just before the end of the war: *without doubt there are excellent workmen among the prisoners of war and I must say this, as regards the Italian prisoners of war, that they helped us out of a surprisingly great*

difficulty as regards labour; on farms and in other directions they did much good work. (59) Although many POWs' wanted to stay in South Africa rather than return to Italy where they were unlikely to find work, the official policy was that all prisoners were to be repatriated. It was only the remaining few at the end who were allowed to remain. Answering a question in 1947, the Acting Minister of the Interior advised officially that 829 Italian ex-prisoners of war had been allowed to remain in the country after the cessation of hostilities. (60) Others were allowed to return to South Africa in the following years, especially if they already had a local working contract. According to Luigi Ghibbaro in *Aspetti dell'Emigrazione Italiana, Italiani in Sud Africa* the immigration figures for 1949 reflect that out of 14,780 Europeans who arrived in South Africa, 466 were Italian with the number increasing to 679 out of 12,806 in 1950; during the first five months of 1951, among the 7041 immigrants who arrived in South Africa, 494 were Italians.

Yet not all South Africans were in favour of Italians. Opposition came mainly from Afrikaners, as the following speech made in the House of Assembly in 1945 by a Nationalist MP, S.P. Le Roux, indicates: *In connection with immigration, in the future we must see to it that only those immigrants are admitted who can be absorbed in our national life. We should chiefly get people who belong to the original elements of the nation, and as we know that the Italians do not belong to these elements, they cannot be regarded as the most suitable type of immigrants... We do not want to tempt immigrants here, who will later cause another problem to loom upon our country. Already we have many race problems in the country and we should not act so that we will have an Italian problem in the country to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow.* (61)

This racist ideology of an exclusivist *volk* was soon implemented, for as much as the immediate post-war government under Smuts tried to stimulate immigration to South Africa, the Nationalists did the opposite, being afraid not only of losing their Afrikaner identity, but also of endangering the job security of Afrikaner workers. (62) The new immigration policies which followed changed the whole flow of immigrants, affecting all foreign communities. According to H. M. Robertson :

In August 1946 General Smuts announced a radical change in immigration policy, to meet demands for development which the Union's human resources were too small to meet. He set up active missions in different parts of Europe to hunt for suitable emigrants, and voluntary Immigration and Employment Committees at various centres throughout the Union based on highly successful Demobilization Committees.

Two 20,000-ton liners were set aside solely for the transport of immigrants under government guarantee. Immigration was running at the highest rate ever known in South Africa's history.

To the opposition, this was just Milner's plan again-designed to drown the Afrikaner people and the Nationalist Party in an Uitlander flood. By it, Dr. Malan complained, "immigrants by tens of thousands are being invited ...while for thousands of South Africa's own sons... ..the door to apprenticeship and wage earning labour remains closed".

The change of government brought this massive immigration policy to an abrupt end. The ships were returned to their owners, the committee disbanded, and the whole scheme was wound up by the end of 1948. Instead, a stricter screening of immigrants was instituted. By 1949 net immigration had been cut by four-fifths. By 1950 there was a net emigration of 1800. (63)

It is clear from both documentary evidence and interviews that more ex-prisoners would have liked to stay and to settle in South Africa. During the interviews, when ex-POWs' were asked why so few of them remained in South Africa, they invariably replied that it was because the government would not allow it.

Once repatriated, many POWs' started a new life in Italy and only a few returned to South Africa to settle permanently. In a letter to the *Cape Times* on 27 August 1973, (Mrs) G.M. Prinsloo (widow of Col. Prinsloo, who was the commander in charge of the camp at Zonderwater during the war) recalled: *when the time for repatriation came, thousands of prisoners petitioned to be allowed to stay here but in spite of the dire need for skilled artisans, only about seven hundred were allowed to remain. Nationalist opposition to General Smuts' pleas and fear of the "Roomse Gevaar" won the day, so South Africa was all the poorer for the loss.*

Thus far we have seen that documentary evidence on Italians is sparse and fragmentary. In both Italian consular reports and South African records, Italians in South Africa are often not mentioned as a social presence. A different approach and alternative sources of information have therefore been necessary to gather the history and achievements of the immigrant community and to fill the large gaps left by written documents. The choice turned to the most challenging and most readily available source of information: interviews. In the following chapters, I shall attempt to show the value and application of Oral History as an alternative source of historical evidence and also consider its pitfalls and problems. And in the three interviews transcribed, the reader can obtain a glimpse of the information that can be extracted to illustrate the social structure of the

immigrant community and the involvement of Italians in business, and the potential use of such oral information for more detailed studies of historical aspects of community evolution and definition.

Notes to Chapter Two

- 1) R.J.Vecoli quoted in the Introductory Note by F. Cordasco in R.F. Foerster. *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Russell and Russell, New York, 1968)
- 2) Sir Ralph Payne Gallway. *The Mystery of Maria Stella, Lady Newborough*. (Edward Arnold, London, 1908) p.41
- 3) R.F.M.Immelman, *Men of Good Hope, 1804-1954* (The Cape Town Chamber of Commerce, Cape Town, 1955) pp. 29,30-3, 319
- 4) Original displayed in the Huguenot Museum, Franschoek.
- 5) F.Ferrario, *An Evaluation of the Tourist Potential of South Africa*, Dept. of Geography), University of Cape Town, Publication no.1, 1978. p.19
- 6) C.Valori,G.Miglietta,C.Cesari,A.Giordano,G.Barlantina, *Giustizia Per il Lavoro Italiano in Africa*,(Edizioni GEA, Roma 1958), vol 2, p.101. In actual fact the 1863 Cape of Good hope Almanac records 10 possible Italian names.
- 7) *The Cape of Good Hope General Directory*, Cape Town, 1866.
- 8) See V.Solomon (ed), *Selections from the Correspondence of Percy Alport Molteno, 1892-1914*(Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1981)
- 9) Information on Nannucci is also given by A. G. Bini, *Italiani in Sud Africa*,(Milano , Scuole Arti Grafiche Artigianelli, 1957), pp. 33- 167. The Nannucci business in Cape Town was already quoted in the 1902 issue of *S.A. Manufacturers' Record*. available at the S.A. Library in Cape Town. He is also mentioned in the interview with H. Katzin, who took over the business from the Nannucci family in 1960.
- 10) See I.Peroni interview, Chapter Five
- 11) Bini, *Italiani*, p.130
- 12) Bini, *Italiani*, p .17; see also P.Stohr, *The Fisheries Development Corporation and its influence on the South African Fishing Industry*, M.A. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1977 ,p 77. In 1892 the Committee of Fisheries reported 148 boats operating in the Cape Town district; in 1900 there were 7 trawlers and 361 sailing and rowing vessels in the Cape Town district.
- 13) See A.Introna interview, Chapter Five
- 14) See I.Peroni interview, Chapter Five
- 15) G. Luzzato, *L'Economia Italiana dal 1861 al 1914* (Banca Commerciale, Milano, 1963) p.231; also see Foerster *Italian Emigration* , pp.117-18
- 16) L.Dinnerstein and D.M.Reimers, *Ethnic Americans, A history of Immigration and Assimilation*, (Harper Row, New York,1975) ,p.77.
- 17) Foerster, *Italian Emigration* p.266

- 18) Regione Siciliana , *Studi sul Lavoro degli Italiani all'Estero* (Palermo, Centro Emigrazione Sicilia , 1970), p. 107.
- 19) V. Briani, *Il Lavoro Italiano Oltremare*, (Roma, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1957), p. 353.
- 20) V. Solomon(ed.), *Correspondence of Percy Alport Molteno* , pp. 45-6,49
- 21) Ministero Affari Esteri (Emigrazione e Colonie), *Rapporti dei RR. Agenti Diplomatici e Consolari*,(Tipografia Nazionale, Roma,1893), pp. 330-35.
- 22) Mrs. Ida Peroni's second interview, 2 April 1984 : (about prejudices common in the Cape Town area before the 1914 war), *I must tell you this: when we were children, whatever happened or whatever went wrong, it was the Italians (who) were blamed for it. They were rotten, they were no good. they were this,if you bought a piece of material and it... perished, it must be Italian stuff....."*
- 23) See transcripts in Chapter Five
- 24) Bini, *Italiani* , p.125.
- 25) Valori, *Giustizia* , p.109-12.
- 26) *Ibid.*, p.112-13
- 27) H.M Robertson, Chapter 12 (South Africa) in Brinley Thomas,(ed), *The Economics of International Migration* ,(MacMillan, London, 1958), pp.177-81.
- 28) *House of Assembly Debates*, (Cape Town, Hansard), pp. 471-4 (October 15, 1902).
- 29) *Ibid.* pp 639-41 (August 24, 1903).
- 30) Valori, *Giustizia* , p.113; see also G.Parenti, Chapter 6 (*Italy*) in Brinley Thomas, *Migration*, pp. 85-87.
- 31) Valori, *Giustizia*, pp. 115-33
- 32) Additional information about the personality of Rubbi and his activities is found in some of the interviews
- 33) See Introna interview, Chapter Five
- 34) R. Hallett, *The Hooligan Riots; Cape Town , August 1906*, in C Saunders (ed.), *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, Vol 1, University of Cape Town, 1979, p.46
- 35) See I Goldin, *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa* , (Maskew Miller, Longman, Cape Town,1987)pp.16-19.
- 36) R. Hallett, "The Hooligan Riots" , *Cape Town History Conference*, University of Cape Town,1978, p.4
- 37) *Ibid.* , p.13
- 38) Valori, ,*Giustizia* , p.134.

- 39) According to information extrapolated from early census data, most of the members of the Italian community arrived at the Cape between 1895 and 1905
- 40) *L'Emigrazione Italiana dal 1910-1923*, (Ministero Affari Esteri.) Vol 2, p.383.
- 41) Valori, *Giustizia*, p. 136.
- 42) *Ibid* p.141
- 43) Circular 25, 16 January 1918, advised all persons embarking for South Africa first to obtain a visa from the British consular authorities at the port of departure
- 44) Valori, *Giustizia*, p. 144
- 45) *Ibid* p.146
- 46) *Ibid*. p.147
- 47) G. Parenti, in Brinley Thomas, *Migration*, p. 87
- 48) See De Nobrega interview, Chapter Five
- 49) G.Bini, *Italiani*, pp. 53-8
- 50) C.Masi,R. Rossetti,A.Sammarco, *Giustizia per il Lavoro Italiano in Africa*, (Edizioni GEA ,Roma,1958), Vol.1,pp. 306-13
- 51) The *Duilio* and *Giulio Cesare* are mentioned in the Peroni interview.
- 52) Masi et al. *Giustizia* ,pp.31,32,330-33
- 53) In 1939 there were over 3000 Italians who had taken South African nationality and about 700 with Italian nationality. V.Briani, *Il Lavoro Italiano Oltremare*, (M.A.E., Roma, 1975), p.355
- 54) J.D'Oliveira, *Vorster the Man*, (Stanton, Johannesburg 1977), p. 73
- 55) L. Blumberg, "Italian Prisoners of War in South Africa (Medical Services)", in *Military History Journal*, 1, 4, (1969) pp. 15-8.
See also the special issue of the prisoners' own publication with the title : *PANORAMA, Numero Unico sulla Vita del Concentramento*, published by the Welfare Office (Italian) at Zonderwater POW Camp, 1946.
- 56) *House of Assembly Debates*, Vol. 47, p. 1023 (January to March, 1944) : In reply to Mr Nel, M.P. for Wonderboom, who had asked how many Italian POWs were at the Worcester camp, the then Minister of Defence gave the following statistics : 80 (March 1942), 2072 (October 1942), 3410 (January 1944).
- 57) Mrs Vanzaghi in both interviews, 10 May 1982 and 8 October 1984, gives vivid details of the lives and conditions of POWs in the Worcester area
- 58) Brinley Thomas, *Migration*, p.404
- 59) *House of Assembly Debates*, Vol 52, p.4154 (March 26, 1945).
- 60) *Ibid*, Vol 60, p. 1919 (March 28, 1947).

- 61) *Ibid.* Vol 52, p. 4173-74 (March 26, 1945).
- 62) See generally, D.O'Meara, *VolksKapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism.* (Ravan, Johannesburg,1983) pp.233-39
- 63) Brinley Thomas, *Migration.* pp.182-83

Appendix: Chapter Two

Random Representative Sample of the Presumed Italian Presence in Cape Town : 1827-1842

Source:

Cape of Good Hope Annual Registers/Directories/Almanacs

1827

Capon Samuel: ship's chandler, 26 Burg Street
 Chiappini Anthonio: merchant, 3 Berg Street
 Dantu Barend: fisherman, 4 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Dirk Johannes: fisherman, 6 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Hendrik: fisherman, 4 Visch Steeg
 Destroo Mathew, barber, 17 Boom Street
 Pero, widow Jacob Joseph : 12 Kerk Street
 Piton Johan David: 3 Bouquet Street
 Ruberti, widow : sempstress, 30 Dorp Street
 Sala Michael: painter, 41 Keerom Street
 Sanassa van Batavia: fisherman, 38 (letter F) Bree Street
 Sanna van de Kaap, fruiterer, 29 Loop-Street
 Semso William: boatman, 6 Zee Street
 Ventura, widow : sempstress, 4 Lely Street
 Ventura Wilhem: retail shop, 14 Roze Street

1828

Bianchi L.I : chronometer maker, 8 Boom Street
 Chiappini Anthonio: merchant, 3 Berg Street
 Dantu Barend: fisherman, 6 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Dirk Johannes: fisherman, 4 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Hendrik : fisherman, 4 Visch Steeg
 Pero, widow Jacob Joseph: 12 Kerk Street
 Piton, John David, 3 Bouquet Street
 Sala Michael: painter, 44 Keerom Street
 Sanassa van Batavia: fisherman, 38 (letter F) Bree Street
 Vioroni Willem : shoemaker, 14 Kasteel Street

1829

Bianchi L.J: chronometer maker, 9 Boom Street
 Capon Samuel: ship's chandler & C, 26 Burg Street
 Chiappini A.& Co: merchant counting house, 10 Kerk Street
 Chiappini A: merchant, Berg Street
 D'Estro Mathew : barber, 17 Boom Street
 Pero, widow J.J : 12 Kerk Street
 Ruperti & Co: retail store 17 Loop Street
 Sala Michael : painter 44 Keerom Street
 Ventura, widow : sempstress, 25 Lange-Market Street
 Ventura W : retail shop, corner of Hout and Roze Street
 Virgo William: 38 Waterkant Street
 Vioroni Willem: shoemaker, 14 Kasteel Street

1830

Bianchi Louis : 11 Boom Street
 Capon Samuel : ship's chandler, 26 Burg Street
 Chiappini A : merchant, 3 Berg Street, and counting house, 27 Church Street
 Dantu B : fisherman, 6 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu D : fisherman, 4 ditto
 Dantu H : fisherman, Lely Street
 Destro M : barber, 24 Boom Street
 Pero, widow: 26 Church Street
 Piton J : 3 Bouquet Street
 Sala M : gilder painter, 10 Keerom Street
 Valentin J : 59 Wale Street
 Ventura, widow: sempstress, 50 Longmarket Street
 Ventura W : 15 Roze Street
 Vioroni W: shoemaker, 28 Castle Street

1831

Bianchi Louis : Keerom Street
 Chiappini & Co: merchant, St Georges Street
 Chiappini A : St Georges Street
 Chiappini E : Caledon Square
 Dantu, widow B : 6 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu D : fisherman, 4 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu A : fisherman, 4 Fish Steeg

Dantu H : fisherman, 3 Fish-Steeg
 Destro M : barber, 24 Boom Street
 Pero, widow : 26 Church Street
 Ruberti F : retail shop, 72 Loop Street
 Sala M : gilder, painter, & C, 10 Keerom Street
 Salato of the Cape: sempstress, Berg Street
 Sanna of the Cape: laundress, Coffy Street
 Ventura, widow: sempstress, 28 Longmarket Street
 Ventura W : 15 Roze Street

In the same directory under Paarl :

Bernhardi F: retail shop
 Bernhardi C : joiner
 Bernhardi, widow C
 Bernhardi J : retail shop

1832

Chiappini &Co: 14 St Georges Street
 Chiappini A: 3 St Georges Street
 Chiappini E : 18 Graves Street
 Dantu A : fisherman 5 Riebeeck Steeg
 Dantu D : fisherman 4 Riebeeck Steeg
 Dantu H : fisherman 4 Visch Steeg
 Dantu J : fisherman 2 Riebeeck Steeg
 Dantu P : fisherman 3 Riebeeck Steeg
 Destro M : barber, 24 Boom Street
 Dinio : shoemaker, Coffee Lane
 Pero, widow: 26 Church Square
 Pozin R : 29 Keerom Street
 Sala M : gilder, painter, 10 Keerom Street
 Ventura, widow: sempstress, 28 Longmarket Street
 Ventura W : 15 Roze Street
 Veroni, Mrs : 13 Kloof Street
 Veroni W : shoemaker, 28 Castle Street
 Virgo W : 26 Castle Street

In the same directory under Paarl:

Bernhardi J : retail shop
 Bernhardi C : retail shop
 Bernhardi F : retail shop
 Bernhardi, widow C: winegrower

1833

Capon S: general dealer, 26 Burg Street
 Chiappini & Co : merchants, 14 St Georges Street
 Chiappini A : 3 St Georges Street
 Chiappini E : 86 Loop Street
 Dantu M: fisherman, 17 Sea Steeg
 Dantu D : fisherman, 4 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu A : fisherman, 5 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu P: fisherman, 3 Riebbek Steeg
 Dantu J : fisherman, 2 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu H : fisherman, 4 Visch Steeg
 Destro M :barber, 24 Boom street
 Maletto: coolie, Leeuwe Street
 Pero, widow: 26 Church Street
 Piton D : 3 Bouquet Street
 Pozin R : 29 Keerom Street
 Sala M : gilder and painter, 10 Keerom Street
 Valentin J : wholesale store, corner of Strand and St Georges Street
 Ventura, widow: sempstress, 28 Longmarket Street
 Ventura W : 15 Rose Street
 Vergo W : 26 Castle Street
 Verioni W: shoemaker, 28 Castle Street
 Virgo W : Riebeek Street

In the same directory under Paarl:

Bernhardi C : retail shop
 Bernhardi, widow C. C.
 Bernhardi F.J. retail shop
 Bernhardi J.H. ditto
 Bernhardi C. C. ditto
 *Catorza R shoemaker

*This could be the Catorzo mentioned at the Museum in Franschoek (p.45 in this chapter)

1834

Bianchi Louis Johannes : St Helena Cottage, Albertus Street
 Buissinni Wilhelm Susius : notary, Church Square
 Chiappini & Co, merchants: counting house, 14 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Anthonio: merchant, 3 St Georges Street

Chiappini Edward : merchant, 86 Loop Street
 Chiappini Alexander: Buitenkant, merchant, office 30 St Georges Street
 Dantu Moses : fisherman, 17 Sea Street
 Dantu Pieter Daniel : fisherman, 3 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Andries : fisherman, 5 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Hendrik : fisherman, 4 Visch Steeg
 Destro Matthys: barber, 24 Buitenkant Street
 Drago Anna Maria: Morrison building
 Pero ,widow: 26 Church Street
 Porsia of Cape Town, Waterkant Street
 Piton Johan David : 3 Bouquet Street
 Ruberti Ferdinand : retail shop, Shortmarket Street
 Valentin Johan Philip : wholesale store and dealer in iron, corner of Strand
 and St Georges Street
 Ventura," Misses" : sempstress, 25 Longmarket Street
 Ventura Willem Abraham : retailshop,15 Rose Street
 Vioroni Willem : shoemaker, 28 Castle Street
 Virgo William : Riebeeck Street

1835

Bianchi Louis Johannes: St Helena Cottage, Albertus Street
 Buissinni ,widow Petrus Stephanus : Stalplein
 Buissinni Charles Cornelius : notary public,3 Church Square
 Buissinni Wilhelm Susius: Bouquet Lodge, looyer's plein, notary public
 attorney at law and sworn translator, office 3 Church Square
 Chiappini & Co: merchants, counting house, 14 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Anthonio : merchant, 3 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Edward : merchant, 32 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Alexander : broker, 20 Buitengracht , office 30 St Georges
 Street
 Carella J: shoemaker, Sea Street
 Dantu Moses: fisherman, 17 Sea Steeg
 Dantu Andries Pieter: fisherman, 5 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Pieter Daniel: fisherman, 3 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Hendrik: fisherman, 4 Visch Steeg
 Pero, widow: 26 Church Street
 Piton Johan David: 3 Bouquet Street
 Ruperti Ferdinand: retail shop, Shortmarket Street
 Sala Michiel : gilder, painter & c, 10 Keerom Street
 Valentin Johan Philip : 13 Shortmarket Street, merchant, St Georges Street
 Ventura" Misses" : sempstress, 25 Longmarket Street

Ventura Willem Abraham : retailshop, 15 Rose Street
 Vioroni Willem : shoemaker, 28 Castle Street
 Virgo William : Riebeek Street

1837

Bianchi Louis: St Helena Cottage, opposite Roman Catholic Chapel, Chapel Street
 Bruson Elizabeth : 110 Loop Street
 Chappini Antonio : merchant, 8 St Georges Street
 Chiappini & Co: mercantile and shipping agents, 14 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Edward: merchant, 32 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Peter : physician, surgeon and accoucheur, 8 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Alexander : broker and shipping agent, 26 St Georges Street
 Dantu Pieter Daniel: fisherman, 3 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Pieter widow: fisherman, 2 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Moses Johannes : fisherman, 17 Zee Steeg
 Dantu Jacobus : fisherman, 1 Roze Street
 Destro Matthys : 6 Peper Street
 Lario Anthonio: carpenter, corner of Castle and Loop Street
 Moli , junior, Cornelius : printer & stationer, 12 Shortmarket Street
 Pero, widow Joseph: 55 Dorp Street
 Piton Johan David: 3 Bouquet Street
 Ruperti Ferdinand : grocer, 13 Plein Street
 Valentin Johan Philip: merchant and commission agent, 13 Shortmarket Street, counting house and stores 17 St Georges Street
 Ventura, widow Willem: 50 Longmarket Street
 Ventura William Hendrik : grocer, Roze Street

1838

Bianchi Louis : St Helena Cottage, Harington Street
 Buissinne Charles Cornelius: notary public, 3 Church Square
 Buissinne Willem Susius: Bouquet lodge, looyer's plein, notary public attorney at law and sworn translator, office 3 Church Square
 Chiappini Alexander: broker, Rondebosch Office, 59 Long Street, corner of Castle Street
 Chiappini Antonio: merchant, 8 St Georges Street
 Chiappini & Co: mercantile and shipping agents, 14 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Edward : merchant, 1 Church Square
 Chiappini Pieter: M.D., surgeon & accoucheur , 8 St Georges Street

Dantu Andies Petrus: fisherman, 4 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Daniel Jacobus Johannes: cooper, Hilligers Steeg
 Dantu Moses Johannes : fisherman 17 Zee Street
 Dantu, widow Pieter: 5 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Pieter Daniel : fisherman 5 Assurance Alley
 Destro Mattys, barber: 7 Oranje Street
 Drago Anna Maria: Musselburg Mount, behind the Castle
 Orri, widow Nicolaas: 46 Castle Street
 Pero, widow Joseph: 26 Church Street
 Piton Johan David : 3 Bouquet Street
 Ruperti Ferdinand: grocer, Longmarket Street
 Valentyn Johan Philip: merchant and commission agent 13 Shortmarket
 Street counting house and store 37 St Georges Street
 Ventura Sara: 50 Longmarket Street
 Ventura, widow William Hendrik : 15 Hout Street
 Ventura William Hendrik: grocer, Rose Street

1839

Bianchi Louis: St Helena Cottage, Harington street
 Buissinne Cornelius Johannes : notary public 3 Church Square
 Buissinne Willem Susius: notary public attorney at Law, sworn translator,
 Bouquet lodge, looyer's plein, office 3 Church Square
 Chiappini Alexander: broker, 98 Loop Street
 Chiappini Antonio: (of the firm Chiappini & Co, merchants and shipping
 agents) 8 St Georges street ; office 14 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Edward:(of the above firm) next to garden Wildhof Oranje
 Street
 Chiappini Peter: M.D., surgeon accoucher, 19 St Georges Street
 Dantu Andries Petrus : fisherman 4 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Daniel Jacobus Johannes: cooper, Hilligers Steeg
 Dantu Moses Johannes : 17 Zee Street
 Dantu, widow Pieter: Riebeek Steeg
 Destro Matthys: barber, 7 Oranje Street
 Drago Anna Maria: Boom Street
 Molteno John Charles: (of the firm Molteno & Co merchants) corner Castle
 Street and St Georges Street
 Orri, widow Nicolaas: 46 Castle Street
 Pero, widow: 26 Church Street
 Rosa Daniel Johannes jun : tailor, 5 Zee Street
 Ruperti Ferdinand : grocer, (marked 56) Loop Street
 Valentin Johan Philip : merchant and commission agent , Somerset Road;
 counting house and stores 39 Shortmarket Street

Ventura William Hendrik: grocer, Roze Street
 Ventura, widow William Hendrik : Roze Street

1840

Bicorni Hendrik : mason, Hilligers Street
 Buisinne Cornelius Johannes: notary public, 3 Church Square
 Buisinne Willem Susius: notary public, attorney at law, sworn translator
 St Johns Street; office 3 Church Square
 Chiappini Alexander: broker, St Georges Street
 Chiappini Antonio : (of the firm Chiappini & Co, merchants and shipping
 agents) 8 St Georges Street , office 14 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Edward : (of the above firm) next to Garden Wildhof, Oranje
 Street
 Chiappini Peter: M.D., surgeon & accoucheur, 19 St Georges Street
 Dantu Abraham Petrus : fisherman, Waterkant
 Dantu Andries Petrus : fisherman, 4 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Daniel Jacobus Johannes : cooper, Hilligers Steeg
 Dantu James: cooper, Hilligers Steeg
 Dantu Leendert : fisherman, Waterkant
 Dantu Mozes Johannes: 17 Zee Street
 Dantu, widow Pieter: Riebeek Steeg
 Destro Matthys : barber, 7 Oranje Street
 Drago Anna Maria : Boom Street
 Mangin Mrs : teacher of music and singing, 5 Plein Street
 Molteno John Charles: (of the firm Molteno & Co, merchants,) corner of
 Castle Street and St Georges Street
 Orri, widow Nicolaas: 46 Castle Street
 Rosa Daniel Johannes jun : tailor, 5 Zee Street
 Ruperti Ferdinand : grocer , 3 Castle Street
 Valentin John Philip : merchant , Somerset Rd; counting house and
 stores 39 Shortmarket Street
 Ventura William Hendrik : grocer, Roze Street
 Ventura, widow William Hendrik : Roze Street

1841

Bicorni Hendrik: mason, Hilligers Steeg
 Buisinne Cornelius Johannes : notary public, 3 Church Square
 Buisinne Wilhelm Susius: notary public, attorney at law and sworn
 translator, St Johns Street; office 3 Church Square

Chiappini Antonio: (of the firm Chiappini & Co, merchants and shipping agents) 8 St Georges Street, office 14 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Edward: (of the above firm) next to the garden Wildhof, Oranje Street
 Chiappini Peter: M.D., surgeon and accoucheur, 19 St Georges Street
 Dantu Abraham Petrus: fisherman, Waterkant
 Dantu Andries Petrus: fisherman, 4 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Daniel Jacobus Johannes: cooper, Hilliger Steeg
 Dantu Leendert: fisherman, Waterkant
 Dantu Mozes Johannes : 17 Zee Street
 Dantu Pieter Daniel : fisherman, Assurance Street
 Dantu ,widow Pieter: Riebeek Steeg
 Destro Matthys : barber, 7 Oranje Street
 Drago Annamaria : 3 Zieke Dwars Street
 Molteno John Charles: (firm of Molteno & Co , merchants,) Castle and St Georges Street
 Orri, widow Nicolaas: 46 Castle Street
 Rosa Daniel Johannes jun : tailor, 5 Zee Street
 Ventura ,widow William Hendrik: Rose Street

1842

Buissinne Cornelius Johannes: attorney at law and notary public, 20 Loop Street ; office 5 Church Square
 Buissinne Wilhelm Susius: notary public, attorney at law and sworn translator, 20 Loop Street, office 3 Church Square
 Chiappini & Co: merchants and shipping agents, 56 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Antonio: (of the above firm) 43 St Georges Street
 Chiappini Edward: (of the above firm) 4 Hof Street
 Chiappini Peter: M.D., surgeon and accoucheur, 29 St Georges Street
 Dantu Andries Petrus : fisherman, 4 Riebeek Steeg
 Dantu Leendert: fisherman Zee Street
 Dantu Moses Johannes : 17 Zee Street
 Dantu Pieter Daniel : fisherman, Assurance Street
 Dantu, widow Pieter: Klipvisch Steeg
 Destro Matthys: barber, Oranje Street
 Drago Annamaria: 72 Wale Street
 Mangin Mrs: professor of music, 22 Long Street
 Molteno(John) Charles: (of the firm Molteno & Co wine merchants) 21 Roeland Street
 Orri, widow Nicolaas: 58 Castle Street
 Rosa Daniel Johannes : tailor, 5 Zee Street

Notes

In terms of class composition, this early cluster of fishermen, skilled artisans, professionals and small merchants shows interesting social continuities with later nineteenth century and early twentieth century Italian immigrants.

One of the key reasons for quoting these entries as an appendix to discussion is further to illustrate the point that written evidence is often filled with discrepancies and inaccuracies, and is not necessarily an adequate basis for the forming of valid conclusions or identifying observations. For example:

1) The names selected are those which were familiar to me as Italian names. There is no indication that these people were in fact Italian nationals. Thus, the constantly featuring Dantu fishing families would appear to have at least been on the borderline between Italian and "Coloured" identity; indeed they may already have been assimilated into Cape Town's non-European labouring classes, as would seem to have been the case with "Maletto, coolie" (1833)

2) Some names disappear for years only to reappear later without any apparent reason. For example, Drago Annamaria, is listed in 1834 and only reappears in 1838.

3) There are inconsistencies in the spelling of names, for example: Ruperti (1829), Ruberti (1831), Ruberti (1834), Ruperti (1835); also Valentin (1833), Valentyn (1838), Valentin (1839) and D'estro (1829), Destro (1830).

Similarly Bernardi is spelt with an "h". The spelling of street names also varies, for example, Rose and Roze Street, Waterkant is written without "Street", Harington is spelt with only one "r".

4) In the same year, occupations are given for some and not for others; the same people are sometimes mentioned and sometimes not ; for example: W. Ventura's occupation is not mentioned for the years 1830-1833. The raw census data is already uneven.

5) While many people appear to change address very often, it is difficult to establish whether the moves actually took place, and if so, whether they were caused by changes in economic conditions or other practical considerations, or whether they merely reflect inaccuracies in reporting. For example Rupertti appears to have moved an extraordinary five times in nine years(1829-1838). Perhaps these immigrants constituted a markedly shifting population. Yet what is already clear is the way in which Italian Capetonians were reflecting the city's emerging geography of class: merchants and professionals such as lawyers or doctors were grouped in areas of wealth and high status such as St Georges Street or Church Square, while fishing labour joined other low class workers or artisans in poorer streets, such as Sea Street or Riebeek Street. Later evidence of this continuing trend is found in both Ida Peronis' and Antonio Intronas' interviews, when they recall the streets where most Sicilian fishermen used to live: Sea Street, Prestwich Street, Amsterdam Street, Riebeek Street.

Chapter Three

ORAL EVIDENCE :

Methods, Problems, Applications

Our observations now turn from the context of Italian settlement to the question of oral sources and their value in advancing historical understanding. A first and obvious point is that oral history is not new, oral historians being essentially the oldest form of historian. In agreeing with Henige's basic definition of an oral historian as *anyone who seeks to learn about the past by word of mouth*, (1) one can fairly say that oral history is essentially as old as history itself. Indeed, early Greek and Roman history written by Herodotus and Thucydides was based on oral tradition and in the Middle Ages monkish and Muslim chroniclers also worked directly with oral data.

This scholarly reliance on oral sources lasted until roughly the eighteenth century, when historians tended increasingly to abandon oral testimony in favour of the written word. Voltaire, for instance rejected oral tradition, claiming it had no value. *From modern historians he demanded more*

details, better ascertained facts. (2) It was an era of new historical enquiry and a multitude of new historical publications. Yet, except for a few moral philosophers and folklorists, little continuing interest was shown in oral history until the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Anthropologists were probably the first to discuss the merits and pitfalls of oral retrieval. In 1915, Robert Lowie argued that he *could not attach to oral traditions any value whatsoever*, (3) but a few years later in 1920, his colleague W.H. R. Rivers disagreed with this view and argued in favour of using oral traditions and testimony. Some years later, sociologists began using oral testimony when researching migrants' problems in the 1930s', although the majority of historians and social scientists continued to ignore the potentialities of oral history. It was really not until the 1950s that *many anthropologists had begun to agree with Rivers that traditions recounted in oral societies could have historical value.* (4) In much the same period, interest in oral history at last began to grow as historians researching the past of newly independent Third World, particularly African countries, became increasingly aware of the shortcomings of conventional written sources. By the 1960s oral historiography had entered a distinctive new era. Previously, oral sources were only perceived as a possible working tool for anthropologists or folklore students interested in oral literature, rather than for historians. Even in special fields where no other "internal" material was available, such as in African history, many scholars had still preferred to rely wholly on outside documentation from European colonial written records. (5) But with the publication of Jan Vansina's seminal *Oral Tradition*, a study of African societies with no written records, *the use of oral traditions as historical sources* now became *an increasingly technical exercise.* (6)

As interest in oral history grew, more and more societies and associations were formed. The Oral History Society was formed in Britain in 1973, for instance; and its journal, *Oral History, the Journal of the Oral History Society* (still edited through the Department of Sociology, Essex University) remains the major specialist academic journal outlet for such studies in Britain. Two similar institutions are also to be found in the United States of America and in Canada. The Oral History Association of the U.S.A was actually established as far back as 1948, operating from North Texas State University with a *Newsletter* and the *Oral History Review*. The *Journal* of the Canadian Oral History Association was established in 1974 and is based in Ottawa. Then, there is *The International Journal of Oral History* (U.S.A.) which was established in 1980. And finally there is *Life Stories*, a British/French journal launched in 1985.

The new growth in oral history raised an important issue for practitioners: the status of testimony as a source. Oral testimony became increasingly divided into two broad categories: oral history and oral tradition. Oral history *refers to the study of the recent past by means of life histories or personal recollections, where informants speak about their own experience*, whereas oral traditions *are those recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture.* (7)

Yet tradition and testimony can still serve complementary purposes. Oral historians using personal recollections, reminiscences, hearsay, and eyewitness accounts of events which occurred during the lifetime of informants, and oral historians using oral tradition which has been transmitted by word of mouth for a period beyond the lifetime of

informants, both have a common goal. While their precise methodology may differ, they both use oral evidence as a historical source. Tradition, after all, is a continuing process of testimony, and testimonies drawing on traditional historical perceptions eventually become traditions.(8) Oral testimony gathered for this research could be considered to fall into both categories: informants not only tell their own histories, but also those of their parents and of other members of the community. In some cases, individual testimony goes back several generations.

Another important methodological aspect, and one not to be underrated, is that working with oral sources is creative historical research of intrinsic worth. Historians become fieldworkers, exploring the historical process away from their desks, and sharing and validating experiences on a human level. *Oral evidence tends usually to be collected in a situation in which the initiative for the collection, its scope and purpose, comes from the historian rather than from respondents. As a consequence, the historian often initially faces the task of convincing sceptical potential respondents that their memories are real history and thus worthy of systematic collection.* (9)

Oral evidence, collected through interviews, is material that a researcher has not just discovered, but in a sense has helped to create, and it is thus quite different from any other document. Alert students can gain personal insights into the unpredictability and difficulty of historical research. They might formulate an interpretation or a general theory, only to find exceptional evidence on custom or beliefs which is difficult to reconcile with a preconceived "model". They might discover that people whom they interview do not necessarily fit easily into the social types or economic

classes presented by preliminary readings. They will need more data, through knowledgeable people, or documentary records, which might often prove highly elusive. They will encounter the pervasive problems of bias, contradiction, and uncertain interpretation of evidence. Above all, they will be *brought back from the grand patterns of written history to the awkwardly individual human lives which are at its basis....The immediate environment also gains, though the sense of discovery in interviews, a vivid historic dimension: an awareness of the past which is not just known, but also felt*(10)

All too often, economic historians of whatever ideological persuasion have tended to deal with abstract categories or with generalised business history information, such as gross census figures. The ensuing monographs have often been dull and arid. By contrast, oral testimony provides a point of entry for "real" people into the past. By listening to the voices of people from all sections of society : from the homekeeper to the shopkeeper, from the small businessman to the worker, one can gather information that could be of long term historical value in helping us to understand economic and social experiences that have affected individual and communal lives, and to appreciate how particular communities were constructed.(11) Such history, therefore, has essentially a social purpose. It is a democratic tool in its wider sense, (12) bearing in mind that the voice of the rank and file, of "barefoot" history, differs from the history of the "elite". In the final analysis, it is up to the oral historian to listen to the evidence from both levels and to attempt to produce as comprehensive an account as possible.

Historians, especially in the field of conventional economic history, try to

achieve specific explanations leading to a set of basic general concepts, in which material information is reduced, standardized, and simplified (sometimes selectively) to fit the initial concepts and general theoretical models. John Tosh, for example, argues that *more and more economic historians since the 1960s' have become essentially quantitative historians, for whom both questions and methods of research are increasingly set by economic theory rather than history.* (13) More generally, quantitative history has also played a major role in the last twenty-five years; as historians became more interested and involved in social studies, economic growth and the history of communities, *questions of numbers and proportions assumed critical importance.* (14) Extensive use has been made of statistical techniques, which non-quantitative historians regard with little trust. (15) Other historians, who specialize in specific branches of history, sometimes tend to narrow the area of study to such an extent that they consider only limited factors when expostulating their theories. For example, in economic history, those would be historians who consider only direct factors of production. As J.H. Hexter points out, these historians suffer from *tunnel vision.* (16)

Many scholars have tended to assume rigid conceptual frameworks, losing imaginative sight of the multifaceted, often incongruous, and even anecdotal, face of the past. Paul Thompson discusses passages from a work on the history of American unions, in which such methodological limitations are clearly identified: *labour historiography, which has tended to assume the presence of a modern, individuated, rational worker, has usually viewed the process of unionization in narrowly rational, institutional, and goal-orientated terms. The problem of culture and praxis is passed over in silence.* By using too narrow a conceptual and

methodological framework, therefore, the tendency has been for a whole section of society to be *conceived of as an individual, and the problem is then to explain the institutional formation as the outcome of a rational process within the consciousness of this "quasi" individual.....* as a result, *a gap is seen between the abstraction of the political economy of work and the concrete reality of individual, peer group, gang, clique, family, and neighbourhood, of character and culture..... the basic problem of historical thought is to study the nature of relationships among these many layers of social reality.* (17) The message is clear. By concentrating on generalities and conceptual models, many students of economic and social history, and in this case, labour history, have lost sight of how people made their own history, how they shaped decisions and influenced events. One could say, generally speaking, that orthodox *Marxism, like sociological theory in general, is deliberately concerned with minimizing the role of the individual, as opposed to the social group* (18)(or economic class), but ultimately treats the group (or the class) just as an individual, with personalized traits and rational behaviour. In all too many instances, the resulting scholarship has lacked a sense of humanity, as now made clear by the decline of more rigid, and structuralist theoretical approaches, in favour of a greater concentration on the experiential structures and actions of social life.

Historical writing is obviously subject to shifting intellectual currents and the constant revision of values and ideas. *What one age finds worthy of note in the past may well be different from what previous ages found worthy.* (19) For example, there is the shift in importance from the idea of the state as a principal agent for historical change and where human destiny was dictated by the balance of power, a notion which

began to change after the First World War. (20) Similarly, African history thirty years ago was treated mostly as the story of colonial expansion with little thought given to the perspectives of colonised people. Written information was scarce, as African societies were overwhelmingly preliterate. What was written by outside observers was justified as being no more than a necessary process of generalization and interpretation, usually the thoughts of white commissioners who mostly recorded specific events, such as "unrest", authority problems, rights and distribution of land and the lineages of chiefship. But the mass of the people, their spontaneous and less formal institutions and constructions, the cultural circumstances which affect and eventually help to determine attitudes, perceptions, and choices, are usually missing from these studies, with the occasional exception of certain more sensitive missionary records. Today, a new historical trend and awareness has emerged in Africa and people are trying to record pre-colonial history as envisioned by ordinary Africans, as well as colonial history seen from the inside and from below. And in order to do this many historians and researchers have turned to oral history. (21) As Jan Vansina has aptly stated, : *Where there is no writing or almost none, oral traditions must bear the brunt of historical reconstruction.* (22)

By examining individual life-stories, connections can be made between the general system of economic and social structures and the personal figures and individual elements that make these structures function. Among the few nineteenth century figures in Southern Africa to attempt to write systematically about "common" people, was James Stuart, born in 1868, a government official in Zululand. During his career he progressed from an interpreter in 1894 to acting British Consul in Swaziland and Secretary for Zululand in 1895, to magistrate for the Colony (Zululand, Natal) in 1902.

His interest in the African peoples matured into a plan for seeking out well-informed persons for the purpose of recording their knowledge of the history, social customs, language and oral literature..... of the Zulu and neighbouring people .(23) His vast collection of oral testimony is recorded in more than one hundred notebooks and so far four volumes have been published recording his research. It should be noted, however, that the authenticity of this particular record has been recently questioned by the historian Julian Cobbing, who has declared it to be an example of colonial myth-making.(24) More recently, Motlasi Thabane's thesis records and comments extensively on an interview with a migrant worker. He stresses the important economic, social and political role played by migrant workers in South Africa and through this life history example, illustrates the shape and difficulties of their working lives. (25) In brief, it is necessary to bring back the basic relationship between individuals and the making of history, in all its complexity. In this way, analysis of the past can move beyond a mere conceptual arrangement between theories and history.

Yet, for all the manifest potential of oral evidence, it remains broadly true that the mainstream of the historical profession prefers to construct its interpretation from specific pieces of written evidence. These historians are suspicious of oral sources and tend to be sceptical of individual interviews as a method of research; the classic dismissal is that by A.J.P. Taylor, terming it *old men drooling about their youth*. (26) Irrelevance, bias and subjectivity are seen as debasing the possible scientific value of oral information, especially when compared with written documents. Because of the fallibility of personal memory, oral evidence has been perceived by many researchers as being inferior to recorded sources or

archival documentation. Thus, at best, it might be used as supporting, inferior information, to be employed as a last reluctant resort when all other evidence is missing. Such historians forget that conscientious oral history researchers use many of the checks and balances which they themselves use in archival research. Indeed, whenever possible, they try to compare all oral evidence to available written or printed information. Moreover, written evidence itself is not free from bias, as *many primary sources are inaccurate, muddled, based on hearsay or intended to mislead.* (27) Tosh further adds that *most publications are issued with little thought for posterity; they are rather intended to inform, influence, mislead or entertain contemporaries.* (28) For, as Thompson explains, *documents and records certainly do not come to be available to the historian by accident. There is a social purpose behind both the original creation and their subsequent preservation.....It is always necessary to consider how a piece of evidence was put together in the first place.* (29)

The overall reliability of basic memory processes, even with ageing, is discussed in detail by such eminent oral historians as Thompson, and in the work of the University of Birmingham Popular Memory Group (30). Interviewing elderly people is not fundamentally different from, or more problematic than, other interviews, as many decades of recorded sociological fieldwork have by now amply demonstrated. It has often been noted that after a certain age, and especially after retirement, people have the time and desire to assess their lives and the past, with *even a special candour which goes with the feeling that active life is over, achievement is completed.....an increased willingness to remember, and commonly, too, a diminished concern with the need of fitting the story to the social norms of the audience.* (31) There are many inevitable

problem areas, of course: over time, many incidental details may be forgotten, or perhaps even reconstructed from other occasions or other sources. Some people can even believe that they actually witnessed an incident, which they have in fact experienced second hand, either through newspapers or local talk. Professional people, and others in public life often believe they have an image to preserve, and purposely omit or include facts according to the preferred image they wish to have projected. (32)

An interesting view of another problem of oral testimony is portrayed by Alessandro Portelli in his paper, *Uchronic Dreams: Working-Class Memory and Possible Worlds*, delivered at the Sixth International Oral History Conference, in Oxford in 1987. Portelli focuses on the notion of Uchronia: the refusal of existing history, which *is the amazing theme in which the author imagines what would have happened if a certain historical event had not taken place.* (33) His area of study was Terni, the oldest industrial town in central Italy, and his interviewees were active members of the old Communist party before and after the Second World War. The uchronic concept is present in all the interviews, as all those interviewed refused to accept the actuality of historical events as they happened and only discussed what should have happened or how events ought to have developed in relation to ideal Communist party conduct. Portelli states that the *uchronic motif removes the presence of social and political adversaries; reduces complex historical processes to single events, complex situations to yes-or-no dilemmas. Thus, it saves the narrators' self esteem and their sense of their own past, but makes it much more difficult to evaluate the party's actual role in those crises and its long term identity, culture, strategy.* (34)

Elements of collective memory (i.e. events and occurrences that are generally accepted by all) are often found embedded in personal memories. One of the oral historian's chief tasks is to understand and disentangle the elements of this process, and to identify which recollections are second hand, mainly by checking for internal consistency and by testing the information and its background with other supplementary sources. Such sources of uncertainty over the status of evidence underline the ever present difficulties any historian faces in penetrating past or present social realities.

The chief rule to observe is that we must be aware of the fallibility of historical evidence in general, not merely on points of detail, but especially as regards its unstated hidden assumptions. In other words, because of the extent to which all types of sources are moulded by individual perception and reflected through social bias, it is important to crosscheck evidence from a range of different sources. In addition, we must remember that a different, more implicit, impetus can often qualify the 'objectivity' of much conventional historical research. In recent times, the scope and concern of history has increasingly widened, even though its original political administrative frame has been largely retained in many scholarly quarters. In every period, the raw documentary material from which history is written, has not only been created, but also selectively retained or destroyed, by elite persons with similar political or official backgrounds and equivalent priorities to the leading contestants and protagonists of historical events.

An obvious consideration are potential difficulties peculiar to oral history itself. One of the key problems to be encountered when conducting

interviews is the problem of language. Sometimes the interviewee is not fluent in the language used for the interview, and prefers to use his or her mother tongue. This naturally provides a much richer and more informative testimony, as when people do not have to search for words their histories are less likely to be subject to distortion or bias arising from the interviewer providing words and interpretations which do not really express what the informant wants to say. But this in turn raises another issue, which is the translation and transcription of interviews. Here, one has to rely not only on a translator or interpreter who could also introduce new nuances and concepts, but the impact of the recorded voice, with its pauses, and possible dialect, can also be difficult to transcribe, and literal translations are often clumsy and difficult to understand.

The original evidence is filtered through a process which extinguishes emotional expression. (35) This issue is particularly pertinent to historical work in South Africa, where not only do we have many foreign immigrant communities but also many different African societies and languages, often combined with low levels of literacy. There are also other constraints to consider. Sometimes the local oral historian may be obliged through legal, political or critical artistic circumstances, to edit carefully oral testimony and interviews before publication. If this proves unavoidable, it ought to be done with great caution, so as not to impair or even destroy the key authenticity of the oral testimony. Certain oral historians, however, insist that oral testimony should in no way be corrected or edited, particularly as far as scholarly publications are concerned, where testimony has to be cited in a pure, unedited form.

As already noted, some academics accustomed to written documentation have often shown an instinctive reluctance to accept oral evidence as a

historical source, especially when relying on interviews with people less educated or less informed than themselves. But this view has long been questioned. As early as 1910, Stephen Reynolds in his *Alongshore : where man and sea face one another*, an account of the working conditions and attitudes of fishermen in Devon, criticized what he considered was : *the general mistake of supposing that those who lack the means of ready expression have nothing in their minds to express.* (36) Thompson, in his pioneering methodological work on oral history, has also noted that recordings can demonstrate the rich ability of people of all walks of life to express themselves : *Educationists..... were assuming that working class speech was a fatal handicap, a constraint which imprisoned all but the simplest types of thoughts.* (37)

Another crucial consideration, the relationship between ideology and oral history, has been rigorously conceptualized by a group of radical British historians and social scientists, who have constituted themselves as a *Popular Memory Group* in the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. (38) This group, whose approach is materialist, is mainly interested *in the historical work in the field of (British) Labour studies.....and the more informal modes of working-class self organization and forms of cultural identity.* They have therefore felt the *need to expand the idea of historical production well beyond the limits of academic history-writing*, to which they feel there are obvious limitations and inherent cultural biases. *Even left historiographers have not been immune from this process. Socialist and feminist histories have developed with at least one foot in universities or polytechnics .* This group, has thus looked for what they call *popular memory, as an object of study* " trying " *to amplify or generalize subordinated or private*

experience.(39)

Their research relies on the same formal methods and procedures as other scholars who have studied oral sources to gather 'objective' historical information rather than to explicitly illustrate political ideologies. Their studies have been specifically confined to certain subjects, like Party history, the growth of women's issues or the documentation of past labour struggles. The Popular Memory Group's contribution has helped to confirm the general validity and reliability of the oral technique in revisionist historical research and has illuminated ways of making oral evidence more acceptable and effective, especially to illustrate points where written records are thin. Radical students using popular memory sources have also been operating in other countries, such as France and Italy, although most of their output is not available in English translation and has consequently had relatively little influence on research studies in this field in English-speaking countries.

The practical side of such studies, according to this new explicitly radical Popular Memory group, is the political relevance of "making history".

What we may insist on.....is that all political activity is intrinsically a process of historical argument and definition, that all political programmes involve some construction of the past as well as the future, and that these processes go on every day, often outrunning..... the preoccupations of historians..... The past is present today in particular social structures with determinate origins and particular histories. Therefore, private memories cannot, in concrete studies, be readily unscrambled from the effects of dominant historical discourses or, in other words, from political use. The formation of a popular memory that is socialist, feminist and anti-racist is of peculiar

*importance today..... Generally, as Gramsci argued, a sense of history must be one element in a strong popular socialist culture. It is one means by which an organic social group acquires a knowledge of the wider context of its collective struggles, and becomes capable of a wider transformative role in the society. Most important of all, perhaps, it is the means by which we may become self-conscious about the formation of our own common-sense beliefs.....In this way a popular historiography, especially a history of the commonest forms of consciousness, is a necessary aspect of the struggle for a better world. In this sense, History Workshop (a popular social (and socialist) history movement) is the nearest thing we have to an **alternative historical apparatus**.... (40)*

Thus, the Popular Memory Group, does not see oral history as professional "objective" research, which they see as overly intellectualised, but mainly as political action, as an active "educative" process, aiming at making informants from proletarian classes or from minority groups increasingly more aware of their poorly understood struggles (41) Not everybody would easily subscribe to the frame of reference of such an overtly political approach, or even accept its results in terms of research output (42), but it would be difficult to deny the genuine feeling for a more practical and relevant orientation in our historical studies, one which brings the boundaries of history closer to ordinary working people.

The Popular Memory Group insists particularly strongly on the need for direct testimony to reconstruct feminist history, mainly because women are perceived as a minority group still struggling for adequate recognition. *Much feminist history also draws on oral material, sometimes using them in innovative ways.....The aim is to render private feminist oppressions*

more public and more shared, thereby challenging dominant male definitions and the silencing of women. (43) It is easy to underestimate or misconceive the varied role of women in patriarchal communities in earlier times, which was not merely domestic, as contemporary records usually report. Nevertheless, historians need to exercise caution, as memories may be distorted by a sense of grievance which might have taken root later in people's lives. (44) Only through widely-spread personal interviews and reminiscences with **both** sexes can a satisfactorily comprehensive account of gender-related socio-economic relations be attained.

Another possible distorting element that must be considered is retrospective reassessment of the past by the informant. Memory can be a very active process, in which past events are worked and reworked in the mind, influenced by successive experiences and present day situations, eventually acquiring an importance which they did not necessarily have before. Thompson, on the basis of his extended professional experience with this kind of problem, argues that identifying retrospective reassessment in life history accounts, is *less difficult than it might be imagined, since it is often conscious and, when it is not, may be identified through the anachronisms with which it is conveyed.* (45) A somewhat different emphasis is placed upon this problem by the Popular Memory Group, for whom this *past-present* inter-relationship must be "organically" utilized, not just to reconstruct how people have acted, but essentially to make them understand, and act upon, their past actions. Informants are not seen as mere sources of information, but rather as persons to be made aware of the past in order to strengthen and fertilize their own present struggle. *The past is understood, in this practical framework, not as a given "thing" which we must preserve, but as*

a force constantly resonating in the present, producing new layers of sound and meaning. Therefore, Popular Memory advocates *an active mutual incitement* (between interviewer and informant) *to "rethink" experiences and understandings, to struggle to see the world differently.....an active 'educative' process..... Older constructions may be preserved, but they will be overlaid by new thinking.* (46) Through such active retrospective rethinking, historical work becomes an aspect of political strategy, helping to develop individuals' own political views and vindicating their claims. According to their perspective the past should be reworked, rather than merely recorded, to sharpen understanding of present needs.

Writers of contemporary history have to rely heavily on the *living material* (47) of oral evidence if they wish to penetrate behind the public façade, and if, through their research and writings, they are to try to enhance awareness and understanding of relations between social classes and between generations, as well as between sexes or ethnic groups. Especially important is the testimony of new witnesses, different from - and often opposite to - the usual documentary sources which feed conventional historiography. Too often, these witnesses have been *not only unrecorded, but actually silenced..... for most working-class people were also robbed of access to the means of publicity..* (48) Hence, the historian comes to the interview to learn. The reconstruction of history itself becomes a much wider collaborative and "democratic" process, in which non-professionals must also play a critical part. Even more important, such an approach is made for suggesting, rather than solving, historical problems. It opens new paths, and it suggests new avenues for research.

Since the nature of most existing written records is to reflect the standpoints of different and unequal dominant protagonists, it is not surprising that the judgement of history, even in recent times, has more often than not vindicated the main contemporary power structures. By contrast, oral history can provide a more crisp and penetrating vantage point : witnesses can also be taken from the underprivileged, from the often silent majority of citizens, like workers, from marginal or socially deprived groups, and generally from people with confined opportunities like women. *All too often in this type of study women are left aside, almost ignored.* (49)

By opening up a different, less formal but individually illuminating approach, oral history can produce a quite different reconstruction of past problems and situations, often providing a challenge to established accounts. All too often, historians, especially traditional economic historians, have passed over the point of view of the anonymous citizen, the labourer, the minority group or the migrant worker, unless they were identified as being particularly "troublesome" in labour relations or social relations. It may not necessarily always have been conscious discrimination, but it was frequently the outcome of an easy choice, dictated by the limitations of research time and the type of existing documentation. By contrast...*many oral historians are not content with being grist to the mills of professional history. They see oral history rather as a democratic alternative, challenging the monopoly of an academic elite. Ordinary people are offered not only a place in history, but a role in the production of historical knowledge with important political implications.* (50)

The documentary sources from which history has largely been written at least since the middle of the nineteenth century, are far from being ideal providers of empirical information. Among the classic sources for socio-economic history are census enumerations and other types of statistical records supplied by government departments or other authorities. Often this data simply consists of compilations, resting to a considerable extent on either an inadequate documentary scope or on considerable guesswork, despite the authoritativeness with which they are normally presented. Moreover, such data does not necessarily represent actual figures, but sometimes no more than estimates, or evaluations that have been determined through contemporary interviews or other human exchanges. Socio-economic statistics, in short, do not always represent absolute facts, but arguably also the social perception of facts, subject to social pressures from the context in which they have been obtained. Researchers who regard such figures as absolute truisms, like objective measurements of economic activities or social realities, simply invite self-deception. The inevitable inaccuracies of census returns are well known, and disparities between census figures and post-enumeration surveys are not uncommon. Today, however, advanced computer technology has enabled the researcher to make detailed probability and projected studies and to reduce distortions. Historical censi in the past were usually much less accurate and reliable; they relied on questionnaires not always understood or correctly compiled, and the accumulated information, when not properly analysed, could in some cases be seriously misleading. Nevertheless, quantitative historians have played an important role in historical research since the 1960s'. By using a statistical approach and gathering large bodies of quantitative data, major descriptive generalizations *have been fatally undermined*, for example the notion that

slavery in the southern states of the USA had not ceased to be profitable to slave owners at the onset of the Civil War. (51)

On this aspect it is interesting to read Portelli's comments on Louise A. Tilly's *Peoples History and Social Science History*. (52) He criticizes the scientific approach to history, as it dehumanises human experience, and quotes as an example, the quantitative analysis of Robert Fogel and D.Engerman in *Time on the Cross*, where we are informed that the average number of times a slave was whipped was 0.7 times a year. Portelli notes that *responsible historians have disagreed with Fogel and Engerman's methods and results*, (53) as their figures are based on hypotheses and approximation. Similarly, he criticizes Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Le Carnaval de Romans* where, on the second page, we are informed that the population of Romans in 1357 numbered *about 6,013* inhabitants. Ladurie arrives at this *approximate exact figure* by a very complicated yet valueless method of calculation and coefficient. (54)

Few researchers, moreover, would accept without questioning what they find in today's governmental documents or in the press, but in using administrative or newspaper sources in reconstructing the past often much less caution is shown. This is because researchers are sometimes unable to discover all sources of distortion in old newspapers, official correspondence, or private records. We may know the political orientation of a Cabinet, of a local administrative body, or of a newspaper editor, and may even identify their particular biases, but we do not know if the anonymous bureaucrat or the individual journalist who collected this material or prepared that particular report, shared that bias. *Thus, evidence that historians cite from official documents or from newspaper reports suffers not only from the possibility of inaccuracy at its source, which is normally either an*

eyewitness account or an interview report. It is also selected, shaped, and filtered to a particular, but to the historian, uncertain bias. (55)

Some scholars prefer to use individual correspondence, diaries or autobiographies to gain enhanced insight into the private feelings of protagonists. These particular primary sources are clearly subject to the same kind of distortion as are interviews. A letter is usually shaped by the writer to meet the particular expectations of the recipient, whether a political enemy or a political friend, a collaborator or the tax inspector. In published autobiographies, the problem of bias is even more easily understood. As a public confession, it is inevitably controlled and contrived, and only rarely includes anything that the author feels is really discreditable. Autobiographical writings are seldom unashamedly frank and truthful, for the writer will tend to emphasize particular events and facts related to his life and career and omit compromising material. Without doubt, certain cosmetic changes would be introduced, and from the very outset there would be a well-defined outline of the image he or she would want to project to the reader. *Nevertheless, just because they are printed rather than recorded on tape, many historians would feel happier citing a published autobiography than an interview..... In A.J.P.Taylor's view written memoirs are a form of historical evidence set down to mislead historians, and are useless except for atmosphere. (56)*

This type of documentation lacks most of the advantages of the interview, and offers little in compensation. If the author is dead, or alive but uncooperative, he or she cannot be cross-questioned or asked to expand on points of special interest. The printed autobiographical source is only a one-way communication. Biographies on the other hand, have since the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries utilized oral history and interviews. However, it has not been until the early twentieth century that the notion of *frank* biographies, as opposed to concealing life stories, became a more popular form. (57) In these "confessional" biographies, not only are achievements recorded but also facts of a personal and confidential nature, and interviews are used not merely to gather information but also to help the biographer to judge an individual's character. With this frankness, however, comes the danger of misinterpretation. *For the sake of an apparent scoop*, (58) biographers may convey a distorted impression of facts. Yet leaving aside the question of how evidence is read, even with posthumous biographies, oral research and interviews have played a major contribution (59) in attempts to portray a more realistic account of an individual's life.

As already noted in initial discussion, the use of interviews as primary sources is not new. In Britain, the first questionnaire has been attributed to David Davies, a rector in Berkshire who investigated farm labourers' budgets in the eighteenth century. Also in the 1790s, Sir Frederick Eden sent out one of the first commissioned interviewers to research *The State of the Poor*. (60) As early as 1906, the economic historian J.H. Clapham, stressed the need to train interviewers *to collect the memoirs of businessmen which were in his view, the best original authorities for recent economic history: and with them often die some of the most valuable records of the nineteenth century*. (61) Clapham's appeal, however, fell on deaf ears, and it was not until almost twenty years later that historians began to realise the value of interviews in historical enquiry.

In the USA, an amateur pioneer in the field of interviews was H.H.Bancroft, a wealthy publisher who in the 1860s' had the foresight to collect material to record the history of the Pacific coast of California. Over a period of fifty years, using his private wealth, he employed six hundred assistants to collect written and oral testimony which amounted to two hundred volumes of original narratives. The first professional attempts at using oral sources and focusing on personal life histories to attain a more complete and realistic understanding of migrants' experiences, were started in the 1930s' by the sociologists of the the so-called "Chicago School". (62) Probably for the first time, several scholars tried to examine the ordinary experience of immigration, the process of finding work and the assistance of kin and neighbours. (63) This investigative oral approach to history has been kept alive by the writings of individuals like the journalist and oral historian Studs Terkel, who, in *Working*, interviewed 130 Americans from all walks of life on their job experiences, and in *Hard Times*, conveyed remembered experiences of unemployment in the Great Depression. (64) In *Division Street*, following the Chicago sociological tradition, he represented in minute detail life in Chicago during his boyhood, making the book *one of the masterpieces of oral history*. (65) Terkel's most recent 1980s' study, *The Good War*, is a detailed oral collection of American experiences of World War II.

The Chicago sociologists developed a special interest in the life history method, based on direct interviews. Personal reminiscences and family traditions, rarely committed to paper because most people do not think them of much importance to others, was the standard type of oral evidence collected by many researchers inspired by the Chicago experience. By setting the direct evidence of personal experience against the generalized

public perception that then, like now, coloured most of the available official records on the subject, it became possible to achieve a more nuanced and fuller viewpoint. It also became possible to explain immigrant social patterns and economic behaviour in terms of different value systems or cultural inheritance rather than solely in terms of the simple economic interplay of class factors. (66)

A different contemporary approach, more scientific in occupational sample and more explicitly analytical, is displayed in the work of Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame. For example, basing her analysis of migration into Paris on individual experience, Bertaux maintains that *a life story is a narrative constructed along the way by a person, who at the same time is recalling events and experiences and giving them meanings.* (67) Thus, in her penetrating study of artisanal bakery in France, when asking interviewees about their common working conditions as apprentices, the answers varied according to whether the person was still a bakery worker or had now become a bakery owner. The former had a more vivid recollection of the hardships endured, whereas the latter accepted the hardships as a matter of course, minimising them as a necessary step for success. In the same way, differences of approach by the historian and the analyst *result in assigning a different status to life stories.* (68) And, according to Bertaux *the analyst should (instead) focus on what lies between the narrated lives: recurrent descriptions or anecdotes should be indicative of the existence of patterns of structural relationships or processes.* (69)

Until recently, economic history, with few exceptions, has tended to be constructed from administrative and governmental sources, such as

centralized statistics of production, market prices, or employment, or the documentation of policy interventions in the economy. Yet, when business history was still at an embryonic stage, social historians were already clamouring for the voice of the rank and file to be recorded in the spheres of employment organisation and labour relations. Here, researchers found that institutional accounts of trade unions, or even of smaller labour political parties, tended to be rather uneven. Only the larger and more established organizations had systematic records, or had commissioned their own internal chronicles. And this documentation, by its very contested nature, since it was dealing with controversial labour and political issues, is often subject to bias and is historically uneven. (70) This has been made increasingly clear by the growing number of corrective or revisionist publications on labour questions by social and economic historians, in which more and more use has been made of oral evidence.

When particular industries have been studied, information has been taken from the records of the bigger or more prestigious firms. Yet Thompson shows, for instance, how *Allan Nevins' massive social and industrial biography of Henry Ford, his company, and the automobile industry* effectively used oral sources *to bring out more clearly than documents the working methods of a great innovator.* (71) In his study of *Henry Ford's development of the popular, mass-produced motor car, Nevins was able to make rich use of oral evidence in giving body to the story which he found in the company's documents.* (72)

In Britain, the importance of recording business history was only perceived much later than in the U.S.A. and only in the last twenty years have

companies been following Nevin's example. However, very few *have instigated and conducted interview programmes for the benefit of future books or projects*. ICI, as the first to use oral evidence and interviews to record its history, commissioned two volumes by W.J. Reader, taking its history up to 1952. *During the course of researching the volumes it became clear that talks with serving and retired staff were valuable in adding flesh to the dry bones of the written records.* (73) The first interview took place in 1966, and over forty interviews were recorded up to 1983.

Other pioneer historians in business history were Chapman and Wilson. Stanley Chapman, in his history of *Jesse Boot the Chemists*, (74) states that *the records relating to its early history are meagre*, and that apart from the usual records in the form of accounts, minutes and shareholders reports, *more detailed reports appear only as fortuitous survivals. Consequently I have had to rely heavily on oral evidence.* Chapman maintains that *this has not been an inferior source of information* and stresses the urgency and the need for recording interviews as *clearly these memories will not be available indefinitely and to rescue them now is to save an important British business from historical oblivion.* (75)

In his two volume history of Unilever, (76) Charles Wilson stresses the inadequacy of documentary evidence. In the oral testimony from many informants *where recollections can be checked and counter-checked one becomes acutely aware of the complexities of human motive, the fugitive nature of historical truth, the gaps in the evidence, the some - times tenuous relationship of word and deed* (77) Generally, the whole array of accounts, logbooks, equipment records, marketing systems and similar information on the productive process and policy decisions are

confidential, and, when available, can mostly only be found for the larger, and more technologically advanced, firms. The very existence of such records denotes an unusual degree of sophistication and development and, as they were written by and for the benefit of management, minutes and records of meetings and policies have often been edited for the official record. In a useful *Business History* pamphlet published in 1960 by the British-based Historical Association, it was pointed out that, *business policy records tend more and more to contain only what was decided and not how decisions were reached. Important discussions over a meal, on the telephone or during a game of golf, often pass unrecorded.* (78) Before the onset of the telephone and other methods of modern communication, diaries were sometimes kept by partners, and one is therefore sometimes more likely to find fuller documentation for earlier firms than for the modern business. (79)

Historical oral testimony can certainly be used to explore neglected fields in local economic history: that of large organisations in the business world; the history of the entrepreneur and the elites of society; the study of those smaller firms and family businesses that did not grow into great companies, while yet making a significant contribution to a developing economy. Interviews can provide information on how people worked, how they preferred to do business, and how partnerships and relationships affected policies and key developments. Interviewers can ask opinions about associates, about how individuals were regarded in business and within their community, and about the idiosyncrasies of personal relations. Regarding this last point, for the present study, during several interviews relating to the builder G.Rubbi, it emerged that he was a fanatical anti-smoker with none of his workers being allowed to smoke on site; if

they dared to do so and were caught they were dismissed on the spot. An apocryphal story relates that there are many pipes buried in the walls of buildings built by Rubbi .

As a result of interviewing Italians who owned small companies or workshops, I discovered that many were undoubted innovators in their field and developed new processes or improved existing methods of production. These small, and not always well known, entrepreneurs, brought specialisation and improvement to the local economy and often contributed to technological development. In the recent past, the biographical material for leading businessmen can sometimes be abundant, but only the barest, if any, written documentation exists for small enterprises or local activities dominated by family firms, corner shops, smallholdings, or seasonal labour. The same shortcoming holds for the entire system of interlinking micro-economies which dominated the middle and lower levels of society to which these people belonged. There are therefore entire sectors of the local economy, especially those dominated by smaller family firms or seasonal labour, whose history could be effectively written in no other way than through oral retrieval.(80)

This approach was sharply illustrated during my own interviews with small entrepreneurs. No one was able, or willing, to show company records, and all the information supplied was through oral testimony. Independent documentary material was thin. The Johannesburg-based Italian newspaper *La Voce*, and magazine *Azzurro* , which provide the Italian community in South Africa with local and Italian news, have, from time to time, published biographies of successful Italian businessmen and entrepreneurs, and have carried articles on the most prominent firms.

Most of the articles are written from contemporary evidence and cover the period after the Second World War, although the authorised histories of a few early entrepreneurs have been published, such as the history of the Fatti and Moni families. Similarly, the newspaper *Tra i Reticolati*, printed in Milan by the association of Italian ex-POWs in Italy, often reports case histories of people who had been interned at Zonderwater in South Africa during the Second World War, and covers events connected with, or relevant to, the war years.

Overall, the historian is left with few alternatives but to turn to oral testimony to supplement and fill in the gaps left by conventional historical records. Through interviews we discover much of what has been recorded in the memories of a variety of people, who worked for particular firms and in different environments, some of which have now ceased to exist .
(81)

Oral testimony has also proved an especially valuable tool in the reconstruction of the history of communities. For instance, the British historian, Raphael Samuel, would not have been able to reconstruct the life of a chosen community without oral testimony, as when he tried to portray the rural way of life at Headington Quarry, near Oxford, before it was developed by the expansion of the motor industry in the 1920s.' (82)

In a study of the social and economic history of any minority group or community, the limitations of written documentation are normally such that the use of oral sources introduces an entirely new dimension to the subject. These observations refer not only to persecuted minorities, like the Gypsies in Europe or North American Indians who have virtually been denied a history by a hostile contemporary white majority, but also to

specific immigrant groups, who still retain a strong national identity, preserving strong social cohesion and their own oral traditions. For instance, the Chinese or Japanese communities in North America can be better studied and understood through this particular approach. *It is a kind of history which must rely on oral evidence* (although documentary sources are used too) *for its effectiveness*, is the apt observation of a recent study of a Japanese fishing community in Canada. (83) Written accounts by immigrants of their own experience are rare, being often limited to the scattered records of small communal societies or organisations. Personal correspondence has also rarely been saved or been deposited in archives. But with the use of interviews, it is possible to explore from the "inside" the history of a large number of different immigrant groups, which all too often has previously been documented only from the "outside" as a social problem of assimilation, integration or of persistent "alien" identity.

Through personal life stories, it is possible to see how different influences and experiences are closely interwoven. The pressures of the wider local society are seen at work on both the individual migrant and the immigrant family, and it is possible to understand how new personal experiences in a new environment, and the still binding constraints of older traditions, can co-exist side by side. The processes of settlement, occupational choice, and acculturation are seen as patterns of individual or collective decision, not just as the practices of ethnic stereotypes. Moreover, the realities of individual lives provide access to largely undocumented areas of immigrant life: the departure from the country of birth, the journey to the new country, the search for lodging and work, the experience of the workplace, the utilization of the active network of family and friends, and the

individual class patterns of success or failure from similar starting points. Most of all, oral history leads away from a self-enclosed community history, towards a more layered explanation of such ordinary immigrant experience as the process of finding work and of developing new outward activities for continuing economic and social reproduction. (84)

Of particular relevance for "community history" is the fact that "myths and stereotypes" do not necessarily stand up well to the test of oral evidence. Bill Williams, in his work on Jewish immigrants in Manchester, for instance, shows that the well known argument explaining Jewish immigrant occupational choice as dictated by typical entrepreneurial taste or by religious practice, such as Sabbath observance, is not validated by personal experiences reported through individual interviews. Thus, *Sabbath observance, far from being sacrosanct, soon gave way before the necessity of earning a living. Nor was it by any means certain that Jewish immigrants would find the Sabbath observed in workshops owned or managed by co-religionists.* (85) As far as "entrepreneurial taste" is concerned, together with the strong sense of competitiveness so often attributed to Jewish immigrants, Williams witnessed from personal life histories a *fatalistic doggedness with which many immigrants retained their attachments to occupations in which they were clearly unsuccessful and often desperately exploited..... Many interviewees suggest that independence was their only alternative to exploitation* (86) Although in the study of personal life histories we may often come across much personal identification with the daily hardships of other immigrant families, there seems to have been little of the "exclusiveness" and "togetherness" that would characterise a really tight community, as usually indicated as a stereotype in most literature on the topic. (87)

Ultimately, articulating the voice of ordinary people would allow the original multiplicity of standpoints to be recreated. The economic historian can come closer to understanding the complexities of economic developments, with their qualifying features, controls and contradictions. By introducing new evidence from the underbelly of society, or simply from alternative experiences, by shifting the focus and opening new areas of inquiry, by challenging some of the more ingrained assumptions and accepted judgements, and by bringing recognition to a substantial group of people who had previously been largely ignored, it would be possible to make for a more realistic and informed historical reconstruction. Reality is, and was, complex and many-sided. A nuanced handling of oral evidence and the judicious use of personal life histories could offer, to a much greater extent than reliance on most other documentary sources, a potent antidote to the too common simplification of intricate social structures and economic processes. (88)

In South Africa, there have been comparatively few studies made of minority immigrant groups. E.A. Mantzaris, in a pioneering sociological study of the Greek community, argued that South African historiography has ignored overseas immigrant ethnic minorities, except for some Jewish attempts to maintain records of their community. Mantzaris was the first to try to trace a broad academic sketch of the local history of the Greek community. Hitherto, little was known about the Greek community, except for *a very difficult to find book written in Greek in 1923 by Costa Nicolaidis, a journalist and founder of the first Hellenic Newspaper in Johannesburg in 1913* (89) Mantzaris was obliged to resort to oral testimony as well as other sources in order to try to give a

representative voice to the entire Greek community. In his *Class and Ethnicity: The Politics and Ideologies of the Greek Community in South Africa circa 1890-1924*, (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1982) he uses several interviews to illustrate in considerable detail the history of the Greek community in South Africa. He describes the occupations and businesses of Greek immigrants upon their arrival in South Africa; why they migrated and where they settled. He recalls *family solidarity*, for as Greeks prospered, they sent for their relatives, to join them in business or to start on their own; he discusses the social and economic struggles of these new immigrants, focusing on how they formed a close knit community, wanting to uphold their own language, traditions and religion and fighting for their rights. Sometimes Greek immigrants worked side by side with Italians, both as miners and railway workers, and had to endure comparable discrimination and hardships. It is interesting to note that Greeks and Italians were faced with similar situations when trying to make a living in a new host country, being often commonly exploited and socially despised.

Another, though less significant, social study of an immigrant community, was that by T.A.Mursalo, *In Search of a Better Life*, his story of Croatian settlers in Southern Africa (90) When Mursalo began his research he also discovered that there was no available information on Croatian immigrants. In his book, he used for the most part primary evidence from archives, libraries and Government institutions, while private diaries and letters were also explored. Even if there is no direct mention of specific systematic interviews, he states in the preface to his work, that, *Pieces of information were obtained from members of the Croatian community and these served as leads for further investigations.*

For example, in part 3, when discussing immigration from the discovery of gold and diamonds to the end of the South African War(1875-1902) Mursalo notes, *interviewing the first generation descendants, one learns that the mine workers in the 1880s' had to live in closely guarded compounds. If a miner wished to leave the compound he had to apply for a permit at least 24 hours earlier. Upon receiving such an application the mine management would insist that the miner should swallow a strong laxative to make sure that diamonds were not "spirited " away in his stomach .(91)*

Alan H.Winquist has researched *Scandinavians and South Africa*, a work dealing with their impact on cultural, social and economic development before 1900.(92) This is again a study which draws informally on oral reminiscences ; as Winquist notes, *an extremely important informational source came from numerous interviews conducted not only in South Africa but also in Sweden, Denmark and Great Britain; particularly valuable were contacts with people related to early Scandinavian settler or missionaries.(93)*

Graham B. Dickason has also undertaken two studies of minority immigrant groups, one relating the history of the Clanwilliam 1820 settlers from Cork Harbour, *Irish Settlers to the Cape*, published in 1973, and another on *Cornish Immigrants to South Africa*, published in 1978. (94) The research on the Irish settlers was apparently undertaken out of personal curiosity, and in his Preface Dickason stresses the wider need to record the past of minority groups, urging that, *it is to be hoped that others will attempt to add to the somewhat slender information presently available on particular groups and various parties of settlers.*

This is a neglected field and I would urge something be done before much unknown and valuable information becomes altogether lost with the advance of time. In his subsequent book on the Cornish miner's contribution in South Africa, not only did he use documentary evidence but he also utilized interviews. Dickason identifies people and places of note, quotes from diaries and paints a full picture of working people and their way of life.

The local Jewish community has always kept records of its past, and in one of its first community history publications on the Western Cape up to 1902, *The Birth of a Community*, (95) Chief Rabbi Israel Abrahams made limited use of informal interviews to augment other sources. Abrahams declared, *I have drawn, in a few instances, on data gleamed in the course of discussions that I have had with individuals who possessed special knowledge of given events and persons.* (96) Mendel Kaplan, in one of the most recent publications, *Jewish Roots in the South African Economy*, which deals with the history of the main Jewish businesses and entrepreneurs in South Africa, has also made explicit and extensive use of oral testimony. Kaplan is particularly aware of the need to record business history and stresses its importance, suggesting that his book is meant not merely *to fill a gap in the historiography of South Africa*, but also to *fulfil a secondary role in drawing attention to the need for businesses in South Africa to maintain some sort of archives.* (97)

There are dimensions other than those of elite business history to consider. In South Africa, as well as in countries like Britain, *the re-emergence of radical history, has made a significant impact onintellectual development and historiography. The study of experiences of "ordinary*

schools. The History Workshop at Witwatersrand University attempts to produce progressive history, as comprehensively and as objectively as possible, raising critical questions about union and working class history and exploring various labour and cultural themes and topics in its several post-conference books.(100) Many of these groups have been employing oral history extensively in their research, and all question more "official" varieties of history. At the same time, these orally-based social histories help to strengthen the value of the voice of the dominated, or of minority groups, and try to bring a new self-awareness to the mass of people. For an informed knowledge of the struggles of the past can help the oppressed and underprivileged of South African society to look to the future with renewed confidence and a sense of pride.

Oral history has also been used in South Africa for some time by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) Thus, a series of thirty interviews were conducted with activists involved in political and labour organisations in the 1940s' and 1950s'. These interviews, apart from providing useful background political material, have been used by historians who have wanted to conduct more detailed research. There were certain weaknesses in these interviews; some were heavily anecdotal and in others there were inaccuracies, discrepancies and distortions. But, despite this, fresh historical evidence has entered the general record.

The historical value of this initial research has encouraged the SAIRR to pursue three further projects based on oral testimony. The first of these was an investigation of experiences of mobilisation against the imposition of passes on black women in the Zeerust area in the 1950s', while a second project set out to explore the experiences of Durban dockers,

concentrating on their working conditions and wages. The third project focused on the living and working conditions of Indian hawkers in Johannesburg. (101)

One of the problems which confronts oral historians and researchers, is that the use of oral testimony and history is invariably locally specific and does not easily lend itself to broader historical generalisation. Even though it is ideally suited for research into local and regional aspects of domestic life or popular culture, it can basically stress only certain specific aspects and explore particularistic areas of research. Yet the local oral historian has opened up unexplored territory in the varied study not only of African labour or of white working class culture, but also of foreign immigrant communities as already discussed in this chapter, and to which one may add specific studies related to particular sectors or events within a community. For example, there is the study of social and cultural aspects of the District Six population in Cape Town by Bill Nasson, and research by Howard Phillips on the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918. (102) And last, but not least, on the question of the historical role played by women, there have been three recent publications, : *Factory and Family, Vukani Makhosikazi*, and *Working Women* (103) These books represent women's struggle, as blacks, as workers and as women. Conditions of work and the way of life of the domestic worker in South Africa is an important facet of the lives of ordinary labouring people which is too little documented; oral research can serve not only to provide valuable information on historical experience, but also by highlighting struggles can help to stimulate possible change and reform.

Similarly, oral history methodology could be used on a much wider scale to

study whole communities in black townships, or the emergence and working of contemporary political resistance. These issues have been the source of research undertaken by increasing numbers of postgraduate students. For example, one can cite the now published research carried out by Josette Cole on the squatter element of *Crossroads* (104) and the unpublished work of Jeremy Seekings (105) or Andrew Borraine's dissertation study of popular contemporary community organisation in South Africa. (106)

Traditional academic historians have often criticised popular history writers for inaccuracies, gaps, distortions, subjectivity or inherent bias in selectivity and social purpose. But these writers, even though drawing knowledge from orthodox academic history, go beyond conventional forms to try to provide new ideas, new perspectives, and to pose new questions. There is a constant attempt to give the reader new ideas for consideration, as they write about people to whom the reader can relate, and usually there can be *a rich and creative relationship with this audience, for in a sense, all men and women are historians..*(107) This is true even though not all have the skills and formal training of "intellectuals".

Thus far, we have seen that oral history in South Africa, as elsewhere, has been used extensively for social or political purposes, often using workers' experiences and testimonies to explore questions of social change and to impart new perspectives to old problems and concepts. But little effort has been made to use oral history to record how the life of the entrepreneur has emerged from the ordinary people, particularly among minority migrant groups, foreign communities, and people with no written history.

A new dimension can be unveiled by recording the struggles, problems and the eventual successes and failures of various small and medium enterprises, the reasons for their existence and their various contributions to a developing South African economy. This is a field that could be usefully explored through oral testimony and the educative result might well influence understanding, co-operation and economic transactions among all the presently divided races and nationalities of South Africa .

Notes to Chapter Three

- 1) D.Henige, *Oral Historiography*, (London, Longman, 1982), p.2
- 2) However even he did not ignore oral evidence completely, and consulted eye witnesses. *Voltaire stood, however, at the edge of a period of great change in the nature of historical scholarship.* P.Thompson., *The Voice of the Past*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978), p.25
- 3) D.Henige, *Oral Historiography*, p.17
- 4) *Ibid*, p.19
- 5) Thompson, *Voice*, p.57
- 6) C.A.Hamilton, *Ideology and Oral Traditions: Listening to the Voices From Below*, Unpublished paper, Workshop on Precolonial History, University of Cape Town 1986.
- 7) Henige, *Oral Historiography*, p.2
- 8) Hamilton, *Oral Tradition*, p. 4
- 9) International Brigade Reunion - Loughborough Co-operative College, 31 July to 7 August 1976 in *Oral History*, 5,1, (1977) p. 17.
- 10) Thompson, *Voice*, pp. 9-10.
- 11) P.Thompson, T.Wailey, T.Lummis, *Living the Fishing*, (Routledge, London, 1983), illustrates this point.
- 12) Thompson, *Voice*, pp. 1-2
- 13) J.Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, (Longman, London, 1984), p.82
- 14) *Ibid*, p.152
- 15) *Ibid*, p.154
- 16) *Ibid*, p.89
- 17) P.Friedlander, *The Emergence of a UAW Local 1936-1939*(1975), Introduction, quoted in Thompson, *Voice*, pp. 217-18
- 18) Thompson, *Voice*, p.220
- 19) Tosh, *Pursuit*, p.118
- 20) *Ibid*, p.118
- 21) *Ibid*, pp.118,174
- 22) J.Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, (James Currey, London, 1985), p.199

- 23) C.de B. Webb and J.B.Wright, *The James Stuart Archive*, Vol 1, (University of Natal Press, Durban, 1976), p. xiv
- 24) J.Cobbing, *Jettisoning the Mfecane*, Unpublished Afrcan Studies Seminar Paper, University of Cape Town, 1989.
- 25) M.Thabane, *Personal Testimony as a Historical Source in Lesotho: Towards a Methodology*, B.A.dissertation National University of Lesotho, 1982.
- 26) A.J.P.Taylor, quoted in Thompson, *Voice*, p. 62
- 27) Tosh, *Pursuit* pp.29-30
- 28) *Ibid*, p.32
- 29) Thompson, *Voice*, p.97
- 30) *Ibid* pp.100-13; and R.Johnson and G.Dawson, Popular Memory; theory, politics, method, in R.Johnson et al *Making Histories*, (Hutchinson,London,1982), pp.223-24 and pp.241-46.
- 31) Thompson, *Voice*, p.113.
- 32) *Ibid*, p.93
- 33) A.Portelli, *Uchronic Dreams; Working Class Memory and Possible Worlds*, Unpublished paper, 6th International Oral History Conference, Oxford,1987,p.7
- 34) *Ibid*, p.13
- 35) T.Sideris, *Recording Living Memory in South Africa*, Critical Arts, 4, 2, (1986), p.48
- 36) R. Turner, "The contribution of Oral Evidence to Labour History" in *Oral History*, 4,1, (1976) p. 25.
- 37) Thompson, *Voice*, p.16.
- 38) Johnson, *Making Histories* pp.205-52
- 39) *Ibid* pp. 206-11
- 40) *Ibid*, pp. 211-16.
- 41) *Ibid*, pp. 243-44. This point will be discussed in more detail in the last chapter of this thesis.
- 42) It must be noted that the research of several radical scholars, as represented in *Making Histories* and as is shown in the publications by Luisa Passerini on Italian workers in Turin during the Fascist period,(see Thompson *Voice*, p.145) are often biased. These studies adopt a one dimensional Marxist view of historical reality
- 43) *Making Histories*, pp. 217-18, quoting examples mainly from the series of autobiographies of British working women collected in the book by McCrindle and Rowbotham (eds.), *Dutiful Daughters* (Penguin, Harmondsworth,1979).

- 44) On this subject see P.J. Edwards and J. Marshall: "Sources of Conflict and Community in the Trawling Industries of Hull and Grimsby Between the Wars" *Oral History*, 5,1, (1977), pp.115-16.
- 45) Thompson, *Voice*, p. 112.
- 46) *Making Histories* p. 243.
- 47) A.Seldon and J.Pappworth, *By Word of Mouth*, (Methuen, London, 1983), p.170
- 48) *Making Histories*, p. 210.
- 49) Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame, "The Life History Approach To The Study of Internal Migration," *Oral History*, 7,1 (1979), p. 29, where the author also states : " *The difference between men and women, respecting the (past) social logic underlying their lives, shows up both in their life stories and the way they tell them.*"
- 50) Tosh , *Pursuit*, p.177.
- 51) *Ibid* p.167. Also see R.Floud's spirited defence of the potential of statistical history for social historians in his " *Quantitative History and People's History* History Workshop Journal 17,(1984), pp.113-24
- 52) A.Portelli," Responses to Louise A Tilly," *International Journal of Oral History*, 6, 1, (1985) p. 32
- 53) *Ibid*, p.32
- 54) *Ibid*, p.33
- 55) Thompson, *Voice*, pp.91-3
- 56) *Ibid*, p.94
- 57) Thompson, *Voice*, (new edn) ,pp.78, 83-4
- 58) Seldon, and Pappworth, *Word of Mouth*, p.181
- 59) *Ibid*, pp.181-90
- 60) Thompson, *Voice*, pp.32-3
- 61) *Ibid*, pp.38-9
- 62) *Ibid*, pp. 52-3, pp.88-9.
- 63) More recently, these same themes have been analysed in an article by J. Synge, "Immigrant Communities - British and Continental European - in Early Twentieth Century Hamilton, Canada." *Oral History*, 4,2 (1976) pp.38-51. See also C.Erickson, *The Invisible Immigrants : the Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in Nineteenth Century North America*, (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London,1972.)
- 64) Thompson, *Voice*, (new edn.1988),pp.80-1
- 65) *Ibid*, p.92

- 66) Thompson, *Voice*, p. 89
- 67) Bertaux-Wiame, *Internal Migration*, p.26
- 68) *Ibid*, p.26
- 69) *Ibid*, p.27
- 70) Seldon and Pappworth, *Word of Mouth*, p.153
- 71) Thompson, *Voice*, p.67
- 72) *Ibid*, p. 133
- 73) Seldon and Pappworth, *Word of Mouth*, p.119
- 74) S.Chapman, *Jesse Boot The Chemists*, (Hodder & Stoughton, London,1974).
- 75) Seldon and Pappworth, *Word of Mouth*, p.155
- 76) C.Wilson, *The History of Unilever*, (Cassell, London, 1970)
- 77) Seldon and Pappworth, *Word of Mouth*, pp.155-56
- 78) *Ibid*, p.154
- 79) *Ibid*, p.154
- 80) Thompson, *Voice*, pp. 68-72.
- 81) Seldon and Pappworth, *Word of Mouth*, pp.153-58
- 82) Tosh, *Pursuit*, p.176
- 83) D. Marlatt (ed.), *Stevenson Recollected*, Provincial Archives, Victoria B.C., 1975, reviewed in *Oral History*, 4.1, (1976),pp. 98-101.
- 84) B.Williams, "The Jewish Immigrant in Manchester - The Contribution of Oral History", *Oral History*, .7.1 (1979), pp.44-5
- 85) *Ibid*, p. 45.
- 86) *Ibid*, p. 47.
- 87) P.J.Edwards and J. Marshall, Sources of Conflict and Community in the Trawling Industries,of Hull and Grimsby between the Wars, *Oral History*, 5, 1,(1977) pp. 117-18. For a further example J.P.Roos, of the University of Helsinki, who has done extensive work on oral testimony, claims "that life stories are really the material providing all a scholar needs for most purposes. Life stories make sense of several problems simultaneously, such as class, way of life, or family relations. In fact, one can use the same data over and over again for different purposes." Life Stories of Social Changes: Four Generations in Finland, *International Journal of History*, 6, 3, (1985), p.179

- 88) On the scope of oral evidence available to historians see, for instance, G. Ewart Evans, *The Days That We Have Seen*, (Faber, London, 1975), a study of changing working experience in South Wales and the review by Thompson *Oral History*, 4,1, (1976) pp.101-03.
- 89) E.A.Mantzaris, *The Hellenes in Cape Town 1900-1923*, *Socio-Historical Review*, Unpublished paper, Cape Town History Conference, University of Cape Town, 1978 p.1,
- 90) T.A.Mursalo, *In Search of a Better Life*, (T.A.Mursalo, Epping, 1981)
- 91) *Ibid*, p.56
- 92) A.Winquist, *Scandinavians and South Africans*, (Balkema, CapeTown, 1978)
- 93) *Ibid*, p.11
- 94) G.B.Dickason, *Irish Settlers in the Cape*, (Balkema, CapeTown, 1973) and *Cornish Immigrants to South Africa*, (Balkema, Cape Town, 1978),
- 95) I.Abrahams, *The Birth of a Community*, (CapeTown Hebrew Congregation, CapeTown, 1955), see also L.Herrman, *A Centenary History*, (Cape Town, 1941)
- 96) Abrahams, *Community*, p.xv
- 97) M.Kaplan, *Jewish Roots in the South African Economy*, (Struik, Cape Town, 1987) p.7
- 98) L.Callinicos. "The People's Past: Towards Transforming the Present", *Cultural Critique* (special issue) 3, (1986), p.21.
- 99) *Ibid*. p. 28.
- 100) See, for example, Belinda Bozzoli(ed) *Class, Community and Conflict*, (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1987)
- 101) A.Manson et al, "Oral History Speaks Out", *Social Dynamics*, 11,2, (1985), pp.1-12
- 102) Thabane, *Person Testimony*; E. A.Mantzaris, *The Social Structure and the Process of Assimilation of the Greek Community in South Africa*, M.A Thesis, University of CapeTown, 1978; Dickason, *Cornish Immigrants*; B. Nasson, *Oral History and the Reconstruction of District Six*, Unpublished paper, Roots and Realities Conference, University of Cape Town, 1986; H.Phillips, *Oral Evidence and the Historian*, Unpublished paper, Cape Town History Conference, University of Cape Town. 1978.
- 103) *Factory and Family*, edited by Fatima Meer, was published in 1984 by the Institute for Black Research in Durban, and funded by the Ford Foundation of America; *Vukani Makhosikazi* South African Women Speak, edited by I.Obery, was funded and published by the Catholic Institute of International Relations, London, 1985; *Working Women* was published by Sached Trust/Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985.
- 104) J.Cole, *Crossroads*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987)
- 105) J.Seekings, *The Anvil Politics of Township Conflict, 1976-1986*, University of the Witwatersrand, Honours Dissertation, 1986

- 106) A. Borraine, *Mamelodi: From Parks to People's Power*, Honours Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1987
- 107) Callinicos, "The People's Past", p. 33

Chapter four

INTRODUCTION TO THE TAPES : the Unpacking of Interview Material.

Of central importance to an understanding of interview material is a constant awareness that recall is an active process. Oral testimonies do not in themselves form an accurate or more or less accurate record of past events. They need to be seen as complex cultural products. Inevitably, people interpret their experiences within the framework of their present cultural values. Facts and events are reported in ways which give them social meaning. Therefore, there is a need for understanding the different forms and conventions which shape not only stories, but any communication among people, especially when informants from a different background, or even a different age group, are used. It can be opportune, if not essential, that chosen interviewers be conversant with the cultural norms and social conventions of their informants.

To take only one example arising from this thesis, it was of crucial importance that the researcher not only spoke the same language, but also shared a similar background and, in part at least, was able to empathise with the values and experiences of the people with whom he had to work. It is evident in the transcript of Mrs Ida Peroni's interview in Chapter Five that there was little inhibition during the recording. The informant was not asked frequent leading or controlling questions, but merely to relate the story of her family, its involvement in the fishing industry, and to recall any other families connected to fishing or any other aspect of the economy. Peroni spoke in her natural conversational way, sometimes in Italian, sometimes in English. Specific questions were interposed about people, facts and events, but in general the informant was allowed to recall her history in the way she instinctively wanted.

An open-ended informal approach was employed, rather than a planned questionnaire. Because the latter basis frequently contains implicit or explicit biases, and preset inclusive and exclusive categories, it was hoped that fuller information would flow from open ended questions. While questionnaires are undoubtedly more suitable for certain topics, specifically those of a technical and numerical nature, they are not always the best method of research for studies of a more personal and social kind, particularly when questions frequently have to be asked about particularistic economic involvement, social position, and third parties. Structured interviews tend to narrow the field of expression, with answers that tend to be short and simple; there is also the greater danger of imposing the interviewer's personal outlook or preconceived range of responses. While this may be a factor in all forms of oral enquiry, the rather more restrictive nature of the planned questionnaire could result in

a more limited exchange of meanings.

The key issue is to be flexible and alert to nuance, for *the same person will tend to respond quite differently to the same general enquiry when it is phrased in two different ways.* (1) This was very relevant to the present study. By encouraging informants to talk freely at the beginning of the interview, guided only by a few general questions, and later by asking specific questions to elucidate further what was said, the information obtained still varied as people sometimes interpreted a question differently, and attached varying importance to different issues. Innovation was essential, as sometimes questions had to be varied according to the informant's background and knowledge. Through interviews one also had the opportunity to learn and understand linguistic details and expressions, some archaic in form, and sometimes even the informant's knowledge of Italian geography would contribute as a check upon the empirical authenticity of the narrative. When informants sometimes lapsed into triviality and gossip it was also possible to steer the oral exchange towards more direct or relevant historical points, always trying to do so with respect for free and unimpeded self-expression by the respondent. Interviews conducted using free expression, essentially encouraging people to tell their story, nevertheless have their drawbacks, as comparison and standardisation with other interviews becomes more difficult, requiring much more sifting work by the interviewer.(2)

How, in practice, has it been possible to check the general, as well as the specific, reliability of the oral testimony gathered for this study? (3) First, each interview has had to be assessed for internal consistency. It has, therefore, had to be listened to (and read) as a whole, in order to judge the

overall reliability of an informant as an historical witness. With practice, after the direct experience of several interviews and especially after listening to taped material several times, it became relatively easy to pick up the main issues, themes, and repeated points of interest. Suppression of information revealed itself by repeated avoidance of discussion of a particular area, as well as through plain contradictions about details which could not be logically explained otherwise. It is true that certain inconsistencies and self-willed "silences" are quite normal in our memories of the past and do not necessarily affect the overall value of information which is freely given. However, any **extensive** suppression or invention will eventually produce obvious inconsistencies, contradictions, and anachronisms, especially if the interview takes more than one session.

A cross-check was always made whenever possible with other sources, and if no written documentation was available, by means of oral cross-references with other interviews. This can be a cumulative building process, as material is gradually gathered through successive interviews on the same subject. Fortunately, this was the case with the present enquiry into the Italian community at the Cape. Working with a cohesive, tightly-networked community provided for numerous factual cross-checks between each informant. Often, interviewees would themselves volunteer names of people who could expand knowledge or provide more detailed information about the same person. For example, Fr. Claudio Rossi, when relating his late father's life story, suggested that I contact people with whom his father had worked who could illustrate and supply the technical information that he lacked; the subsequent interview with Stanley Milford (who had worked for Irving and Johnson and with Angelo Rossi) clarified several issues raised in the original interview.

It was not enough to rely on one single interview: *Any evidence, written or oral, which goes back to (only) one source should be regarded on probation; corroboration for it must be sought.* (4) Details can similarly be compared with manuscripts and/or contemporary printed sources, like most of the historical background material provided in Chapters Two and Three and in the Conclusion. However it was discovered that there are some marked discrepancies between written and oral sources. For example, indications of the size of some local Italian communities in the Cape Province at a certain date, appear differently in census data, consular reports, or in personal memories. Thus Corrado Masi and others in *Giustizia per Il Lavoro Italiano in Africa, Vol 1*, state that in the Cape Province in 1936 there were 326 Italians. Yet, according to the South African census report for the same year, the nearest figure is under *Italian Birth Place*, 333, while there are only 231 under *Italian Nationality*. It does not follow that one estimate is necessarily more accurate than the next. But most historians would first choose the official record supplied by census reports, which on principle ought to be more accurate. Consular reports would be less reliable, as by custom consulates only have what records citizens themselves are willing to supply. Accurate consular records are often unobtainable because new immigrants do not always bother to register and those already on record do not take the trouble to update their personal consular files except when passports or other documents are required. Changes of nationality, births and the arrival of new Italian immigrants are often not recorded. The last source would be subjective personal memories, which would be the least reliable guide for numerical estimates.

essential qualities should be quietly mastered : such as an interest in, and respect for, people as individuals, an ability to show understanding, and even sympathy, for their points of view, and flexibility in response to them; and above all a willingness to sit quietly and listen, resisting the inevitable temptation to impose oneself or, worse, to contradict or push an older informant with one's own ideas.

It was interesting that, after only a few interviews, a certain code, with its own specific conventions, became established and gradually regulated the rest of the inquiry. Essentially, the interviewer was expected to show sincere interest in the informant, allowing him or her to speak fully without too many interruptions. But, at the same time, he was expected to provide some guidance on what to discuss. It was learned that an interview is not a dialogue, or a two way conversation. The whole point was to get the informant to speak, keeping in the background as much as possible, and simply making supporting gestures. It was often enough to nod, to smile, and to look encouraging. There was no need to feel uneasy at long pauses, for instance, or even at longer digressions. On the contrary, there was often the need for plenty of time and plenty of tape. Nearly all the informants were ordinary working class, or middle class people, often elderly, and sometimes frail or sick. To the normal, and expected, patterns of diffidence, embarrassment, or personal modesty (some people could not believe that their own memoirs might be of any interest) may be added the special vulnerability of old age, occasionally discomfort, and even a certain (hidden) anxiety. Therefore, it was important to create a relaxed atmosphere of trust, without pushing for answers and without setting an examinatory mood or uncomfortable "academic" standards.

Care was usually taken not to indicate too personal a view, not to

contradict, nor to reveal, explicit opinions which could influence the informant, especially early in the interview. The idea was to avoid inhibiting free self-expression, or inadvertently intimidating some frail or insecure respondent, or obtaining answers which the informant thought the interviewer would have liked to hear. This would have resulted in undesirable or misleading evidence. At the same time, it was necessary to be alert to the consistency of answers and to be aware of possible conflicts with other sources of evidence. When there were doubts about sweeping statements based on the personal experience of informants, not knowing whether the information given was accurate or not, it was necessary to approach the subject from another angle, or to suggest, as tactfully as possible, that there may be other perspectives. For example, Vito Bonafede in his interview claimed that he was the first to make *Blanc de Noir* wine in the Cape, at least fifty years before it was made commercially on a large scale by well known estates. Such a claim is not necessarily corroborated by wine industry histories. In some of the interviews related to fishing, certain of the informants claimed that the Sicilians were the first to introduce seine nets, yet there are records that an American schooner visiting the Cape in 1889-90, produced purse seine nets. It is difficult, however, to establish the exact date when they became widely used in the fishing industry and who were the first to use them commercially.

At interviews, the presence of others sometimes had a positive effect. Often the informants themselves invited friends or family members to take part in their interviews, whenever they thought they could be of knowledgeable help. Albina Bini-Bergamasco, a retired leading singer and pianist, invited Mrs G. Paganelli, the widow of the first Italian singer to be

appointed as a teacher at the S.A. College of Music in 1925, to her second interview. Each helped the other to remember details of the musical environment in Cape Town in the 1930s' and later. Similarly, husband and wife relationships like that of Mr and Mrs Iginio Tonin, and brother-and-sister pairs, like Mrs Maria Vanzaghi and Mr Luigi Caretoni in Worcester, or Mrs Dirce Bedin and Mr Dante Ferraris in Cape Town, stimulated each other's memories, corrected uncertain dates and names, and sometimes kept the other to the point, cutting short on his/her digressions. This double presence often tended to provide a fuller and more interesting flow of information.

On some occasions, however, the presence of another person acted as a brake, subtly increasing the tendency to conform, (or not so subtly, as when Mrs Erna Suatti (nee Du Preez) abruptly interrupted her husband's narrative several times with *Stop! This is family business.*) Tensions or inequalities in sexual relationships can commonly affect the quality of individual testimony. The result in these cases was dry factual narrative, without enriching detail, and often omitting direct information that could elucidate a certain course of events. The informant himself attempted to explain the necessity of detail to his wife during the interview. But this was to no avail, and her presence steered the interview towards a very cautious, non-committal account of personal history, purposely omitting detail essential for the full understanding of the family testimony. Giovanni Suatti suggested that I should return when his wife was absent ; unfortunately, he died before a further interview could be arranged. At other times, when a wife was more dominant in her eagerness to supply information, she spoke at the same time as the husband, making the recorded interview almost unintelligible, as was the case in the Armando

people is now considered academically worthy of pursuit, assisting in the analysis of past events and enriching the texture of history in general. (98) Interestingly, Luli Callinicos points out that in South Africa popular history is not new, and that there have in fact been many "popular" histories. But, some of the liberal and much of the radical writing from the turn of the century onwards has been subject to neglect and censorship and much of it has been left forgotten. In South Africa, repression and discrimination have often muffled the voice of the majority, and ethnic and class differences within society have produced wide gaps in the history of the country. Mainstream history in South Africa has been written almost entirely by a ruling white minority, frequently expressing a white supremacist point of view and until fairly recently, only marginally touching upon major economic themes relating to other ethnic and minority groups. Now, through historical enquiry based on oral and other testimony we can begin to broaden historical perspectives and understand historical process and interaction, and open up new areas for enquiry regarding social structure, the family, and the working structure and experience of different communities. This is an argument that has often been used by radical social historians but it holds true for the subject material of economic history practitioners as well.

Historians in South Africa have been especially prompted to look at oral history as a source of essential information because of the *dearth of documents written by ordinary people*. (99) Here the bearing on economic history is almost self-evident. For the "modern" economic history of South Africa is comparatively recent, major industrial developments having occurred only since the end of the nineteenth century. The relative speed with which economic progress and development has taken place, together

with the virtual silence imposed by legislation on the voice of workers, has done much to stifle the emergence of a group of working class people with the time and educated know-how to record their histories and those of their communities. Nevertheless, workers today are increasingly able to have their historical voice articulated through progressive popular histories which set out to document trade union and other labour struggles.

In South Africa, as already mentioned, a major interest in oral history has come from social historians concerned with issues related to African labour politics and trade union organisation. Recent growth has been comparatively slow but steady. For instance one has seen the painstaking emergence of institutions and small groups like the Labour History Group in Cape Town, started in 1981. Then there is also, for further example, the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) which produces a series of booklets "Workers of the World", the old FOSATU "Worker News," (the official newspaper of the Federation of South African Trade Unions, which has since 1985 merged into COSATU, the Congress of South African Trade Unions); and the educational magazine "Learn and Teach". This last publication, even though mainly produced for furthering basic education, also serves as a medium to impart information and stimulate an awareness of labour and social issues, taking special notice of the plight of migrant workers through recorded oral testimony.

The Environmental and Development Agency (EDA) provides information on agriculture, health and water, and also provides historical background through the use of interviews, attempting to help African communities to improve living standards. The Economic History Research Group, based in Cape Town, has produced a booklet as alternative education material for

Yet the interview may reveal another dimension behind the official record, or vice versa. In some respects, the divergences may represent perfectly valid accounts from different standpoints, which **together** can provide vital clues towards a balanced or more socially subtle interpretation. For instance: who can really be considered as the local Italians? People with Italian nationality? Italian-born people, even if they have been naturalized? Should children of naturalized Italian immigrants also be taken into account? For how many generations are people of Italian origin to be considered Italian? These questions convey the difficulties of penetrating social reality. And the guidelines for research are the same as those for documentary evidence from conventional written sources. All evidence is fallible and subject to bias, and each source has varying strengths in different situations : in some contexts, oral evidence is the best, in others it is only supplementary to other sources; and in yet others it can be wholly unreliable.

Obviously, there are no absolute rules to indicate the reliability of oral evidence, but rather a number of factors to be taken into account, depending on the inquiry's nature and the researcher's main aim. Individuals give, or receive, in their own way. Styles of interviewing vary, and can be more effective for some purposes than for others. There are, naturally, some quite common pitfalls to avoid, such as imprecise questioning, the wrong sampling of respondents, or asking those sorts of questions which direct people to think and respond in your way rather than theirs. These are all factors that a direct experience of interviewing older Italians in the Western Cape has taught the present writer, uncomfortably but very effectively. The most important lesson was that some skill is required to interview successfully, and also that certain

Coscia interview. Some businessmen did not want their wives present when interviewed, as they did not want their spouse to know about their business activities, and insistently claimed that wives should not meddle in business, as was the case with Benito Fioravanti. On other occasions wives themselves would discreetly retreat to another room only to appear with refreshments. Yet, when husband and wife worked in business as a team, the wife would often be a less restrained and richer informant. Equally, whereas the presence of others may sometimes curb boasting or exaggeration, it may also encourage informants to conform. *Equally it is noticeable that a group of old people will often emphasize a common view of the past, but if subsequently seen separately much more individual pictures may emerge.* (5)

In a tightly-knit community, (such as that of early Sicilian fishermen) an outsider might also have difficulty in breaking through. If the interviewer has no intimate knowledge of the community, social nuances, cultural codes and other latent class or status relations can be easily missed. Sometimes, the opposite may occur where an "outside" interviewer can turn weakness to advantage as he can openly display ignorance and ask questions which an insider would be afraid to ask so as not to appear foolish.

Contrary to expected reaction, most people accepted the tape recorder with very little anxiety or discomfort, and quickly lost any immediate awareness of it. Often, special additional material was freely produced, such as photographs, correspondence, newspaper cuttings, original documents, and personal notes, which led to new insights into the community's internal history and into the way in which individuals related their personal history to that of the community. Further interviews were

sometimes arranged after several months to clarify points raised in the previous meeting, for example more than one interview was conducted with Ida Peroni, Maria Vanzaghi, Luigi Caretoni, Amedeo Traverso, Iginio Tonin, Giovanni Colussi, Giuseppe Ceccarelli, Vito Bonafede, Antonio Munna and Adolfo Lorenzi. Regrettably, because of the time elapsed between recording, listening and transcription, a number of the more elderly informants died before a second clarifying interview could be arranged.

A major problem in organizing the fieldwork for this study of the Italian community in the Western Cape, was the choice of whom to interview, or better, how to find a suitable and knowledgeable group of people. This inquiry was not intended as a basic sociological analysis, relying on carefully chosen samples, using a set questionnaire and designed to secure a statistically representative group of informants. Arguably, a survey that wishes to be fully informative, but whose number and type of interview subjects are pre-determined, while the actual persons are then chosen randomly among the available population according to a purely statistical cluster, *will collect material of intrinsically lower quality. Some of the best potential informants will be missed and others, often less willing, or less knowledgeable, chosen in their place.* (6) Whereas this may be valid for a sociological study, a less graded approach was needed here. What we can be sure of is that, *the selection of subjects for interviewing can materially affect the findings of any research project. Very few authors in fact appear to seek a representative sample when preparing their interview list.* (7) Not so much *representativeness* becomes the main issue, but the possibility of finding as much *direct knowledge and first-hand information* as possible. Here, there was the obvious danger of going in the opposite direction, *and recording only the exceptionally*

confident or articulate, or just those most willing to talk. Predictably, educated or professional people did not necessarily provide the best interviews; the more accustomed informants are to presenting a public image, *the less likely their personal recollections are to be candid*. (8) J.P. Ross, in his *Life Stories of Social Changes: Four Generations in Finland* has probably correctly suggested that *the life histories of educated people make dull reading. Either their lives were not very interesting or they kept back so much by way of self-censorship that the result became rather bland*. (9) Therefore, the ideal informant would perhaps be someone in between; literate but fairly uninhibited. In practice, a social and practical network developed so that both extreme and classically problematic oral history situations could as far as possible be avoided.

The first two interviews, organized through mutual friends, were with Capt. Victor Martinelli, a lawyer of Italian origin, who recollected many stories passed on to him by his mother, and Mrs Winnie Baretta, widow of an Italian ex-consul who had also been the local representative of the Lloyd Triestino shipping line and who, in the pre-World War Two period, had been involved in the organization of the Fascist Party among the Italian community in Cape Town. Both were very useful interviews, as each of them volunteered to provide names of other people who, according to them, were historically knowledgeable and could help with the research. Most of the persons contacted through them were willing to talk, mainly because of the introduction through a mutual friend. Thus, the whole project started snowballing, through a network of friends, relatives and neighbours, all introduced, *and in a way pre-selected and guaranteed*, by the previous informants.

The clear disadvantages of this selection was that people tended to select

informants from within their social group or from the same regions in Italy. Methods of contact can themselves introduce social bias. Informants from a fishing background would know or remember other fishing families, for example the interview with Antonio Munna, was suggested by Antonio Introna. (10) The *Fogolar Friulan*, a society formed by Italians from the region of Friuli, who meet regularly at the Italian Club in Cape Town, also supplied some names of prominent members of the community. But, as the circle of informants widened so did the type of informant vary. Over a period of two years, sufficient informants were interviewed to obtain a satisfactory cross section of individual representatives of the economic and social activity of the community as a whole.

Different informants would know who had been in certain places, who had been in contact with certain people, or involved in certain activities, and would direct the interviewer to them. Sometimes, people came forward themselves, offering to be interviewed, while at other times no choice was offered, as some informants were the only family survivors and the interviewer had no other option. The final selection, according to the preliminary information supplied, was ultimately left to the interviewer. In practical terms, through this inner crisscross web of acquaintances and private knowledge, it was possible to approach many of the most socially representative older members of the Italian community in the Western Cape.

Some, fortunately very few, and usually among the "elite", mistrusted the tape recorder. There were refusals which were disheartening at times. A number of informants were too busy to grant more than very brief interviews, which did not lead to very much hard data. There were also

certain personal difficulties, especially with more prominent respondents, ex-professional people in most cases, who seemed more interested in testing the credentials of the researcher, giving the impression that *they* were conducting the interview. In general, however, the main organisational problem was not the unwillingness to talk, but the practicality in setting up convenient appointments, as the majority of these prospective informants were old, frequently in their eighties and often infirm. It frequently took a long time to arrange for a meeting or to come back for a second interview. A few, like Dr Emilio Pagano, Mr Enrico Mottalini, and Mr Cleto Saporetti, died before a necessary second appointment could be organized. But the project depended greatly upon persistence.

As already noted, no questionnaires or pre-set questions were used during the interviews. Usually the informants were asked to relate their life story, from their arrival in South Africa, the reasons for coming to the country, what they did, how they set up a business, its failures or its achievements or anything else of note which they had done, together with any information about other Italians whom they knew. One of the lessons of the whole exercise was to learn *the uniqueness, as well as the representativeness, of every life history*. It would have been practically impossible to have reduced the inquiry to a series of pre-determined questions, which would have missed an immensely rich and still untapped mine of unique material. An open, unrestricted, and very flexible approach was called for. Conversation, or better, personal memories, was allowed to predominate, and was followed wherever it usefully led. This approach occasionally turned up unexpectedly useful information, which triggered completely new lines of inquiry. Nevertheless

this free flowing approach still had a core of standardising questions, among them :

Why did you come to South Africa?

Who told you about South Africa, did you know anyone there?

When did you arrive, and by what means?

Did you have any money when you arrived ?

Did you have a profession?

For whom did you work when you arrived?

What wages did you earn?

Where did you live?

Were there any other Italians working with you / for you?

Did you have members of your family with you, brothers sisters etc?

Did you start a business on your own?

Describe your business?

Did you introduce any innovations ?

What was the competition?

Did you marry an Italian or a South African?

What have your children done?

What other Italians do you know that you think are important or have been outstanding in their field of business ?

It was necessary carefully to avoid degenerating into anecdotal gossip, which could produce hours of tape and, later, heavy problems of selection and transcription. Yet, it was true that the interviewer had also come to the meeting to learn, and to listen to others who, because they were older, or came from a different milieu, or had been exposed to lengthy or more specific social experiences, obviously knew more about the subject in which he was interested. The reconstruction of the community's inside story

became an interplay of people in which professional (the interviewer) and non-professional (the interviewee) played critical complimentary parts. The older people in particular, apparently benefitted as well. The interviews gave them a new sense of purpose, even of dignity, in going back over their lives and handing on valuable information to a younger generation and to a new, interesting project on the private and public history of Italian immigrant experience.

Furthermore, there was the problem of presentation and transcription. All the interview material had to be sifted and condensed into a reasonable report. Since, for the purpose of this theses, the reproduction of full transcriptions would have proven too time- and space-consuming, only three have been chosen to illustrate the variety of information that can be extracted from interviews. Only Antonio Introna's interview is fully transcribed, whereas extracts are quoted from two other transcriptions, one from interviews with Mrs Ida Peroni, and one from interviews with Amedeo Traverso. It was not an easy task. The real art of transcribing is in reproducing the material truthfully and meaningfully, often using punctuation and phonetic spelling to convey the character of speech and the personality of the speaker. The transcript has preferably to include everything, as there is no other efficient substitute for its, authenticity. (11) *Even the best shortened version is like an intelligent historian's notes from an archive rather than the original documents.*(12) We know that the structure and the rhythm of the spoken word is quite distinct from the written word. Only when making a formal telephone call, do we perhaps talk as a written text. The interviews, mostly spoken in a relaxed, informal atmosphere, often meandered into irrelevancies and returned to the point after unfinished sentences. Because it was necessary to remain as

faithful as possible to the original character and meaning of the speech, editing has been kept to a bare minimum. Hesitations and casual digressions have been eliminated when possible, but there has not been any rewording.

Finally, there was also the problem of the use of another language, which further complicated the issue. Some of the time the interviews were conducted in Italian, interspersed with English words and expressions, suddenly changing to English, interspersed with Italian words and expressions. Moreover, a few of the interviewees, living on farms, tended to use Afrikaans rather than English idiom. The Italian that was spoken was often poor and strongly coloured by regional dialects. For instance, Mr Vito Bonafede and Mrs Ida Peroni were unmistakably Sicilian, Mr Ivo Ciucci and Mr Giovanni Suatti spoke with Tuscan inflections, Mr Iginio Tonin spoke in strict Venetian, while Mrs Maria Vanzaghi and her brother, Mr Luigi Caretoni, showed clearly their Milanese origin. Sections in Italian were translated into English, trying to reproduce the colouring of the original version as much as possible. The reader is asked to evaluate the results of this transcription by reading the sections of the interviews with Ida Peroni, Antonio Introna and Amedeo Traverso in the next chapter. The inherent difficulties and limitations faced by the transcriber are self-explanatory.

Before moving on to Chapter Five, it is perhaps appropriate to provide a list of the interviews collected during the years of research, covering the period discussed in this thesis (1900-1950). Many other interviews are not recorded in this list, because they relate to a later period of South African history or were not recorded on tape. In total, there are more than

80 interviews, but only 54 are listed here. Each respondent has been identified by a concise content card, with some basic details that are essential for evaluating the length, content, and nature of the interview, as well as the characteristics of the persons themselves. No further data was added, because the aim of the present dissertation is also to present the actual potential of oral sources in the field of socio-economic history and to raise some of its related methodological problems, rather than to offer a "complete" historical development of the Italian community at the Cape. At both levels, this work represents more an exploratory interpretation than a conclusive survey.

List of Relevant Interviews

- Michele AGOSTINELLI** (age : 70+) PAARL 1982
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Ex POW, cheesemaker by trade, talks about his work under several employers before starting his own activity. Forced to close, he went to work on the mines in the Transvaal. His son resumed cheesemaking in the Cape.
- Leonardo ANGELICO** (age 60+) CAPE TOWN 1982
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Fisherman, and boat captain, and later boat owner, arrived in South Africa in the 1930s. Discusses later fishing industry from the 1930s; and also a new wave of fishermen who arrived in 1956, to fish in South West Africa.
- Achille ARMELLIN** (age : 70+) CAPE TOWN 1983-1984-1985
 (about 150 minutes on tape - 3 interviews)
 Discusses his experience as POW at Zonderwater and Worcester, and his various business activities in the Cape.
- Fiorino BAGATTA** (age : 70+) CAPE TOWN 1983-1984
 (about 150 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 Life history as hotelier and restaurant owner with information about the hotel and restaurant trade in South Africa.
- Iolanda BAGATTA nee Rossi** (age : 50+) CAPE TOWN 1983
 (about 100 minutes on tape)
 Remembers her father's history as a chef, and the several restaurants owned by the family, with additional general information about Italian restaurants in Cape Town.
- Stella Lady BAILEY nee Chiappini** (age : 80+) CAPE TOWN 1982
 (about 40 minutes on tape)
 Retraces the history of the Chiappini family in the Cape since the 18th century, mentioning names and listing facts about its various members.
- Winnie BARETTA** (age : 80+) CAPE TOWN 1982
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Discusses husband's activities as Lloyd Triestino representative and later as Italian Consul at Cape Town, and her connections with the Rubbi and Labia families.
- Dirce BEDIN nee Ferraris** (age : 70+) CAPE TOWN 1984
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Reports family history from her father's arrival in 1899, his business as building contractor, her husband's engineering firm, and her own activities.
- Albina BERGAMASCO nee Bini** (age : 80+) CAPE TOWN 1982-1983
 (about 90 minutes on tapes - 2 interviews)
 Talks mostly of her career as singer and pianist and recalls the musical environment in Cape Town before and after the two World Wars. Mrs Paganelli, widow of an Italian singer and teacher, also speaks during the second interview.

- Vito **BONAFEDE** (age : 80+) CAPE TOWN 1982
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Wine-maker in Paarl, speaks about his immigrant father's times, at the beginning of the century, and about his own many business activities in the agricultural field in Stellenbosch and Paarl.
- Luigi **BOTTEGA** (age : 70+) CAPE TOWN 1983
 (about 40 minutes on tape)
 Owner of a small engineering firm, he pioneered the "terrazzo"-making machines for the building industry in Cape Town, about which he provides some personal information.
- Luigi **CARETONI** (age : 60+) CAPE TOWN 1982,1984
 (about 120 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 Remembers the personal history of his Vanzaghi brothers-in-law, who emigrated to South africa in 1910 and set up as building contractors in Worcester, where he joined them in the business. He also speaks about the war years and the POW camp in Worcester.
- Giuseppe **CECCARELLI** (age 70+) CAPETOWN 1982,1984
 (about 90minutes, two interviews not recorded on tape)
 Discusses his arrival at the Cape, his activities in marine engineering and tool making and repairs, and the eventual formation of Petrel Engineering.
- Riccardo **CHIAPPINI** (age : 60+) CAPE TOWN 1982
 (about 50 minutes on tape)
 Reviews the complex history of the Chiappini family, who arrived in Cape Town in the 18th century and were variously involved in farming, industry and politics.
- Giuseppe **CHISIN** (age 70+) SOMERSET WEST 1988
 (about 90minutes on tape)
 Ex POW, discusses the development of chicken farming with Saporetti at Lemoenkloof.
- Ivo **CIUCCI** (age : 60+) STELLENBOSCH 1982-1983
 (about 120 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 Ex-POW, he became a farm manager and an agricultural expert in the Stellenbosch and Paarl area, introducing innovative methods for wine and fruit growing. Speaks about other Italians in the local wine industry.
- Giovanni **COLUSSI** (age : 75+) CAPE TOWN 1983
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Arrived from South America, discusses several Italian firms in Cape Town (Consani, Moni, Nannucci,) for which he worked as a fitter and turner before and after the Second World War; recalls his experience as an internee at Koffiefontein.
- Armando **COSCIA** (age : 60+) CAPE TOWN 1984
 (about 40 minutes on tape)
 Reports on his father's experience as a singer and music teacher in Cape Town in the early decades of the century and then relates his own story as jeweller.

- Philip COSTA** (age : 60+) PAARL 1983
(about 60 minutes on tape)
Discusses his father's pioneering efforts in the inter-war period, for the establishment at the Cape of a successful olive growing business, the management of which he later took over.
- Nino COSTA** (age : 60+) PAARL 1983
(about 90 minutes on tape)
Brother of Philip, he talks of his own experiences as wine expert working for the Moni family business since the 1940s', until he took over one of his father's olive farms in Paarl.
- Fritz FERRERA** (age : 50+) CAPE TOWN 1983
(about 50 minutes on tape)
Provides a full account of restaurants in Cape Town and of the various Italians in this line of business; also discusses changes in food habits and the introduction of Italian cuisine.
- Benito FIORAVANTI** (age : 70+) CAPE TOWN 1983
(about 60 minutes on tape)
A post World War II immigrant, he describes his immigration and labour problems before setting himself up as a building contractor in Cape Town, and recalls many other Italians with whom he had contacts.
- Lucia GATTI nee Ruggero** (age : 60+) CAPE TOWN 1984
(about 60 minutes on tape)
Remembers how her father came to Cape Town in the 1930s' to work in cold storage activities and how he taught her own husband (Gatti) the techniques of making icecream, out of which a large business eventually developed. Mrs Gatti collaborated fully in the business.
- Willie GROBLER** (age : 50+) CAPE TOWN 1984
(about 120 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
A South African national, with an import-export business in Cape Town, and frequently involved in Italian cultural activities, he speaks of his many business connections with other Italian firms and individuals over several decades.
- Antonio INTRONA** (age : 50+) CAPE TOWN 1982
(about 60 minutes on tape)
Recollects the early life of the Italian fishing community in Cape Town, of which his family was part, and speaks about the activities of the Salesian Institute, where he teaches carpentry.
- Herbert KATZIN** (age 70+) KINGSWEAR(U.K) 1982
(about 40 minutes not recorded on tape)
Discusses Nannucci's dry-cleaning business. He describes innovations introduced by Nannucci in dry-cleaning methods.
- Natale LABIA** (age : 60+) CAPE TOWN 1983
(about 40 minutes on tape)
Talks about family history and especially of his father's many activities as an Italian diplomat in Cape Town in the 1930's and during the war.

- Adolfo LORENZI** (age : 80+) **CAPE TOWN 1982-1984**
 (about 100 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 A sculptor and stone-mason by trade, recalls his personal history as an immigrant in Australia and South Africa in the 1930s' and how he was interned at Koffiefontein during the last war.
- David LOMBARDI** (age : 40+) **ELGIN 1983**
 (about 120 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 Comments on his father's early farming activities in the 1920's and how he gradually developed a large plantation of apple orchards in Elgin, out of which the Appletiser business was formed.
- Olinda LINDSEY SMITH** (age : 70) **CAPE TOWN 1984**
 (about 50 minutes on tape)
 Recalls the activity of her Italian husband, Fiorenzo Scaglia, as a chef in Cape Town in the 1930s' and how he was interned at Koffiefontein during the war. She also worked for a long time for an Italian firm, the Allorto Bakery.
- Giuseppe LUPINI** (age 80+) **CAPE TOWN 1982**
 (about 60 minutes not recorded on tape)
 Discusses business activities with his three brothers in the building trade. He was a pioneer in precast construction and an expert in cement products.
- Giuseppe MANCA** (age : 80+) **CAPE TOWN 1983**
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 A musician and a well known personality in Cape Town, he recollects his early life at the Cape in the 1920's and 1930's and how he founded the Eoan Group of singers among the Coloured community of District Six and brought it to prominence.
- Victor MARTINELLI** (age : 50+) **CAPE TOWN 1982**
 (about 120 minutes on tape)
 A Captain in the Navy, a lawyer, speaks about his father's history in Cape Town as maitre d'hotel in the inter-war period, and also mentions other Italians with whom his family was connected.
- Sofia MARTZ** (age : 70+) **CAPE TOWN 1983**
 (about 30 minutes on tape)
 For many years the housekeeper for the Rubbi family, she recollects stories and anecdotes about the various Italians who frequented the Rubbi's since the 1930s'.
- Stanley MILFORD** (age 60+) **CAPE TOWN 1984**
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Worked for I & J ; he discusses the achievements of Angelo Rossi and technological aspects of the Salnova business.
- Bruno MORI** (age : 70+) **PAARL 1983-1984**
 (about 120 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 Describes his long experience in the wine industry since the 1920s' as cellar master for the Fatti and Moni winery, and recalls other Italians he met and with whom he worked.

- Enrico MOTTALINI** (age : 60+) CAPE TOWN 1984
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Ex POW and president of the Zonderwater Block, recollects his experiences as a prisoner of war in South Africa and his later career as a businessman in Cape Town.
- Antonio MUNNA** (age : 70+) CAPE TOWN 1984
 (about 120 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 Evokes the climate in which his family and other Italian fishermen worked in the early part of the century, and also discusses the development of his own business as a motorboat builder.
- Emilio PAGANO** (age : 70+) CAPE TOWN 1982
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 An architect, he discusses his long experience as a building contractor in the post World War II. He traces his part in the development of Sea Point and his active support of Italian cultural activities in Cape Town.
- Mauro PAGLIARI** (age : 70+) CAPE TOWN 1982,1983
 (about 60 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 Describes his arrival in S.A. as a POW and how he became the best known engraver and medallist in the country.
- Ida PERONI nee Firmani** (age : 75+) CAPE TOWN 1982 ,1984
 (about 130 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 Reports the experiences of her own family and other Sicilian fishermen in Cape Town and Saldanha Bay in the early part of the century and gives a detailed account of community life. Her friend, Ida De Nobrega nee Norfo (70+) took part in the second interview, also contributing information about the Italian community in Cape Town and Johannesburg.
- Father Claudio ROSSI** (age : 30+) CAPE TOWN 1983
 (about 20 minutes on tape)
 Describes the working experience of his father, Angelo Rossi, a post World War II immigrant who, after attempting to establish a salami factory, became involved in the management of a salt processing plant and developed it into a major business enterprise.
- Giovanni ROSSI** (age : 80+) CAPE TOWN 1984
 (about 120 minutes on tape - 2 interviews)
 Provides his own life history from his arrival in South Africa in the 1930s' to the establishment of a new trade in recycling rags, and development a clothing business.
- Cleto SAPORETTI** (age : 70+) CAPE TOWN 1982
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Ex POW, settled in the Boland where he pioneered the battery chicken business. He later developed the well known Hydro health spa near Stellenbosch.
- Giovanni Battista Rosario SCALABRINO** (age : 60+) CAPE TOWN 1982
 (about 60 minutes on tape)
 Recollects the early history of the Scalabrino family and other Italian fishermen in Cape Town. He also discusses his personal career as a businessman.

Antonio VIETRI (age : 50+)

CAPE TOWN 1983

(about 40 minutes on tape)

Reports on the life story of his father, and describes aspects of community life among the Italians in Cape Town.

Notes to Chapter four

- 1) Thompson , *Voice* , p.27
- 2) See P.Thompson, *The Edwardians*, (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London 1975,) p.18
- 3) P.Thompson, *Voice*, pp . 209-213; R.Johnson, et al, *Making Histories*, pp.223-33 ;Jan Vansina, quoted by A. Roberts, " The Use of Oral Sources for African History" *Oral History*, 5,1, (1974) p.22
- 4) Thompson, *Voice* , p.198.
- 5) *Ibid*, p.116
- 6) *Ibid* p.122 .
- 7) Seldon and Pappworth, *Word of Mouth*, p.27
- 8) Thompson, *Voice* , p.126
- 9) J.P.Ross, "Life Stories and Social Changes-Four Generations in Finland " *International Journal of Oral History*, 3, 6, (1985) p.179
- 10) See Chapter Five ; interview transcripts of Antonio Introna and Ida Peroni.
- 11) Henige, *Oral Historiography* p.6
- 12) Thompson , *Voice* , p.198

Chapter Five

PERSONAL LIFE STORIES : **Interviews and Comment**

This chapter provides sample transcriptions of material collected in personal interviews with members of the Italian community in the Western Cape. Three sample interviews have been selected: Mrs Ida Peroni, Mr Antonio Introna, and Mr Amedeo Traverso.

1) Mrs IDA PERONI

Mrs Ida Peroni exemplifies an older generation of knowledgeable and self-aware informants, curious about the interviewer's research, and eager actually to shape the interview through her own queries and unprompted interventions, asking questions herself.

Mrs Ida Peroni, born Firmani, was the daughter of an Italian fisherman who worked in Cape Town in the first half of the century. She was born at Saldanha Bay on 12 March 1907, the second generation of an immigrant family from Ortona Mare, (Abruzzi). On 18 August 1934 she married an

Italian immigrant, Gaetano Peroni, born at Poroldo (Cuneo) on 28 September 1892, whose aspiration was to become an independent fisherman, and who eventually bought his own fishing boat. She spoke Italian at home; yet she was more familiar with English which she spoke with a strong South African accent. Living in Cape Town all her life, she ran a small boarding house, and had chiefly Italian friends. Her family followed the social patterns of most other comparable immigrant families; the children, after having been educated locally, moved more easily into local white society and, although habitually still married into the Italian community, ended up speaking mostly English and becoming, in some instances, virtually indistinguishable from other Capetonians. Mrs Peroni's South African grandchildren, the fourth generation, have retained little of their Italian heritage except the family name and have become fully assimilated, except for a nephew who because of his prowess as a footballer was invited to Italy to play, and later emigrated to Canada.

A widow in her late 70s', she lived alone in a small house in Greenpoint. Mrs Peroni gave two interviews which lasted several hours. The first one took place in October 1982, and the second almost two years later, in April 1984. The 1982 interview covered mostly the family history of the Firmani's and Peroni's, but digressed to discuss other interesting figures among Italians residing in the Cape and its environs in the period up to World War II. An old friend of Mrs Peroni's, Mrs Ida de Nobrega (born Norfo), visiting from Johannesburg, and also the daughter of an Italian immigrant from Cape Town, was then invited by Mrs Peroni for the second recording session in 1984, and participated in the first part of that interview. Although Mrs de Nobrega proved to be a valuable and interesting informant in her own right, the dominant voice throughout remained that of Mrs Peroni.

Mrs Peroni's style was informal and rather haphazard in structure with an impulsive use of language. She was, however, a commentator upon many events, which she reported quite vividly, often with a sense of humour, always with acute psychological observation. She also lived through the periods discussed in previous chapters, and met many of those involved in the economic, social and cultural development of the Italian community at the Cape, which she describes in expressive detail. She provided a great deal of original information about influential groups and individuals whose names have already been mentioned, such as Nannucci, Rubbi, and many of the Sicilian families which she remembered from childhood, some of whom were still her friends. She touched on people in business, like Fatti and Moni and raised other interesting topics of local socio-economic history, such as the process of Italian migration to South Africa at the turn of the century. This basically confirmed what had already been related by Bini and carried in consular reports, but has added imaginative detail.

Central themes include: how and where Italians lived and worked, the economics of fishing in that pre-mass production era, labour problems and co-operation - or the lack of it - among fishermen, the introduction of innovations in fishing techniques, the acquisition of new boats, the inevitable competition with local Coloured fishermen, and the gradual social incorporation of Italians into Cape society. Illuminating details of essentially cultural history also come to light, like the difficulty of making the general public accept different types of fish previously largely ignored as food, including crayfish and *calamari* (locally known as *Chokka* by the Coloured people). Calamari was used by the local fishermen only as bait, and they found it strange that Italians should eat it. Mrs Peroni explains how during the time when she ran her boarding house, where fish was one of its staple dishes, she encouraged South Africans to try new varieties

and so tried to popularise their use in the kitchen as well.

An interesting, and previously ignored, area of possible historical study, which is amply documented by oral information, is the importance of early Italian boarding houses in immigrant life experiences. These were mainly family houses, where unmarried Italians, contract workers without their families or new immigrants, could not only find a place to stay or to eat, but also a place to meet fellow nationals and often, through them, find work. This boarding experience also provided individuals with their first real introduction to the country and its different cultural and other ways of life. These old boarding houses, gradually diminished in number, probably as a result of immigration laws which restricted the number of aliens, as well as to changes in labour patterns, and few survived after World War II. Boarding houses also constituted a link with passing Italian ships (as clearly indicated by Mrs de Nobrega's testimony) from which came not only the necessary supply of contraband pasta, cheese, and other Italian products, but sometimes also deserting sailors, jumping ship to settle in a new country.

Oral remembrance provides informative glimpses of new patterns of bourgeois life within the immigrant community in the 1930s' and also provides evidence of the strong appeal of Mussolini's Fascist Italy, especially among its most well-to-do members, and of the effect of Fascist propaganda upon the immigrant communities in general. Mrs Peroni recalls the World War II period, when most local Italians were interned, the impact of war restrictions, and provides detail on how immigrants survived; she remembers the essential patterns of self-help among various community members. The experience of war left a deep mark, typified in the remembrance of the arrival of Italian prisoners of war at Zonderwater.

Family traditions occupy a particularly creative place in reminiscence. For example, there is the story of the doings of the Firmani brothers, looking for one another throughout the world; their history is portrayed as essentially the misadventures of a group of Milanese silk artisans, contracted to start a new silk industry in Knysna in the 1880s', but after being deceived, being forced to start again as woodcutters. Some wanderers returned to Italy, while others moved to the Cape Town area and found other employment. Roving is seen as a feature of an insecure material life. Mrs Peroni recalls the wanderlust of the young Peroni, who had been sent by his father as an immigrant to Argentina to avoid military service in Italy. There he became a chef, and subsequently left Argentina for South Africa, paying his passage by looking after horses shipped for British troops fighting in the Anglo-Boer War. Like many young Italians who arrived at the Cape, he went to work at the Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town, finally leaving his position as a young chef, and insisting doggedly on becoming a boat fisherman. There followed a basic economic story of patriarchal learning as Peroni begged old Antonio Scalabrino to teach him a craft.

Short tales, like small cameos, come alive in the colourful storytelling of the interviews: the Italian officer jumping ship for the love of a local girl; the young lawyer, son of a wealthy Italian merchant and a Coloured woman, who was not accepted as a lawyer because of his mixed parentage and falls back to taking over his father's businesses in a small rural community; or the many duties of the better educated persons in the community, like Nannuci and Villa who, being able to speak the local languages, often had to act on behalf of the other immigrants, settle their inevitable problems and liaise with local magistrates over legal issues.

In general, the narrative is expressive and highly coloured. Most of the first interview was in Italian, strongly accented with Sicilian dialect, as it would have been spoken in the Firmani home at the beginning of the century. The use of anglicized idioms and expressions was not uncommon, and often, as is customary in eastern Sicilian dialects, plurals, subjects and verbs were omitted. The syntax was crude, and sometimes incorrect. The vocabulary was often archaic *pastelleria* for the more modern *pasticceria*, (pastry-shop) mingled with Sicilian expressions (*imparare* (to learn) used for *insegnare* (to teach) or *pesche, pescherie* instead of the customary Italian, *pesce*, (fish) or *pesca* (fisheries) and with semi-English words (*fattoria* (factory) for the Italian *fabbrica* or *grosseria* (grocery) for *alimentari*). Even when the interview switched to English, the language rhythm remained as spontaneous and unvarnished. These linguistic irregularities have been left in the text, and punctuation and phonetic spelling used where necessary, to convey the overall character and texture of the interviews themselves.

The same feature applies to the Traverso interview where, for example, he calls farms *farme* instead of *fattorie*, and *Germanesi* for Germans instead of the normal form *Tedeschi*. Italians, in common with many foreigners living in a non-native language environment, here, frequently choose an English word rather than one in their own language, often because it comes more readily to mind and expresses exactly what they mean. This is the case even though the conversation is conducted in Italian. In language structure, to quote Thompson, *the words may be idiosyncratically phrased, but all the more expressive for that. They breath life history.* (1) The transcription of the following texts has been as faithful to the original conversation as possible, as have been the translations into English of the Italian sections.

Because of space limitations, it has not been possible to transcribe all three interviews in their entirety. These would have taken up about two hundred pages, excluding the necessary translations. The idea, as explained in the previous chapter, is essentially to provide a sense of the raw material that the series of interviews collected for this study has made available. As a representative sample, only the first side of the tape covering some of the first interviews has been transcribed. But in addition, relevant sections of the tape of the second Peroni interview, especially relating to topics discussed in the previous interview, have also been transcribed. It has been possible, in this way, to note some historical incongruities between the two tapes, such as the different names remembered for the boarding house kept by the Firmani family, called "Firmani House" in the first interview and "Ortona House" in the second (referring, however, to the common nickname by which the boarding house was known among its mostly Italian clients). But these are technical issues of memory, accuracy and consistency. In fact the minor discrepancies reveal both the broad commonality as well as the uniqueness of individual oral life history. As a substantive historical record, the basic information flowing out of the two Peroni interviews, two years apart from each other, is essentially the same. Not least because of this consistency over the period, we can reasonably infer that the oral testimony is reliable. It agrees quite well with the limited documentary evidence of the same period, as already noted. The reader will be able to judge by going through the new historical material conveyed by the following transcripts.

PERONI INTERVIEW

First Interview : 26 October 1982

(Tape 1 - Side 1)

We begin with a recollection of the informant's uncle, Tommaso Firmani, and his migration to South Africa in 1881 from Ortona Mare in the Abruzzi, Italy.

Mrs PERONI

He started as a boy of fifteen. He went out to fish.....on the sailing boats. He went out of Italy, went around, arrived in Africa, here he stayed .1881.....they found gold in Johannesburg and he went to work here in the mines of Johannesburg. After some ten, eleven years, (they) heard nothing of him. (His) mother would write to the other son, Antonio, who was in America.....in Miami, and said: "Go, go to Africa to look for your brother, because they have told me that there is a Tommaso Firmani there, in Africa". Then there was also the other brother, Pietro, who was my father, much younger. And he (Antonio) said: "I will go first. I find him in Africa, I will call for you". He arrived here, asked around, no one knew anything." Never seen him".....Then he started a boarding house in Cape Town.....Riebeek Street. He said: "In case the odd Italian comes around, he will come to this house, because it is the only one; there is no other place".....Boarding House Firmani". Yes, then.....a man came, goes back, reports, says: "If you want to go to Cape Town, there is an Italian boarding house, belonging to Firmani". Then also my uncle Tommaso heard about it, after a couple of years or so, that there was a Firmani. "Firmani? My name is

Firmani". Then he took to the road and came to Cape Town. In Cape Town he found his brother.. Then this brother sent for my father, Pietro. He made him come here. All three of them are here. My uncle Antonio married a girl, with an Italian ... father, from Camuggi. He was an officer on board of an Italian steamer, her father. She was called Antonetta, the girl, but the father's name was Giovanni Olivari. He was camuggino, from Camuggi (Camogli?.) He was an officer on board an Italian steamer..... I don't remember the name. But he saw a German girl, he fell in love with this German girl, stayed here, the steamer left. At that time you didn't need papers. He stayed here, he married here, had a daughter..... he had ten children! Seven (were) left, the others.....dead. And this girl here, who was seventeen years old, my uncle married her; and he stayed at the boarding house with this girl.

Firmani apparently maintained the boarding house, for some five, six years. And then he was a fisherman. Bought a boat..... went to fish. People then didn't know about crayfish. At that time, one fished any kind of fish, but people here did not understand about fish. They ate only stockfish....they didn't know about sole...." Throw everything into the sea - he said- they won't eat it ." The Italians, they ate it, but the others didn't know anything. And calamari..... oh...people saw them, but no one would eat them. Other fish, no. No, only snoek..... this we sold, but everything else was horrid. Then my father was here, Tommaso never married. He died here in..... before.....no, after the First War.

Like many fellow immigrants, the surviving brother is remembered as a fisherman. All were fishermen here. All fishermen. There was nothing else to do. Who had a trade maybe did some building, but here there

were no houses.....There was nothing. At that time there, there were only a few houses.... So he fished. There was a French company, a Frenchman, who sent for a couple of Italians to fish here, when crayfish was found. But this was after 1900.

As Italian fishermen these were almost the first, yes. Then, from one came another. From Castellamare -this is Sicily- came the Scalabrino family.....the Bosco family, the Cannone family, and many others. But before they came, other Italians settled here, by jumping ship.....and they stayed here. To hide, they went down towards Velddrift. Today it is called Velddrift, but at that time it was called Hoetjies Bay, Saldanha Bay. Now Saldanha Bay, but at that time it was called Hoetjies Bay, Steenbras Cove. The Italians called them by these names. And there was a certain Stephan, a certain man Stephan, and he set up a factory and to ... make these Italians stay and work for him, he found them "african" (probably meaning Coloured,) wives.Each one married an "african" woman and now they are all there. They jumped ship. Nobody had called them. They came.... on their own. They got married. One is called Sein.....one should say Sienil Sieni, Antonio Sieni. The other was called, Giuseppe Serra. Others .. I don't remember their names. They are so many. These, and their families,we find them all down there. They all remained fishermen. Their children became fishermen. And....some became " africans " There are still some, yes...There is (the)Langebaan(people). At Langebaan there is Marra. Marra became rich. He owns almost the whole Langebaan..... (it) belongs to him. Then his children, one studied to become a lawyer, the other a doctor, the other a school teacher, and the daughter stayed at home to keep house. He had a big house.

Marra arrived in South Africa in 1900, about that time made a lot of money! One of his children the lawyer, he, because he was a little dark - his mother was dark - could not find work as a lawyer. They wouldn't accept him. There was this business of White and Black, and they don't accept it so he had to do a trade, whatever came his way He started a tea room; he is alive, but I don't think he knows what he says anymore.... The other brother went to Scotland.

Marra had accumulated wealth through trade. He opened a shop, he bought fish shops, sold fish. Always fish. Through selling fish, he then opened a grocery shop. There (in Langebaan) people had nothing, there were no shops. And then, with his wife, who was an Afrikaner, who could speak the language, because he knew nothing... , they got along like this. They bought almost the whole of Langebaan. bit by bit Then he died, and left everything to his children. Marra died after the Second World War. He went through all the war. If you go to Langebaan, you'll find something. If you go to Velddrift, maybe you'll find something too. But this is the story of the fishermen. Then the 1914 war came and, sure, Italy went on the side of the Allies. Everything was going fine for us. But during the Second World War Mussolini went against the Allies. And all the Italians were caught and put away. You know, this business of Mussolini. All the children sang about Mussolini...

Mrs Peroni was asked what other Italian families were in Cape Town between 1900 and the First World War. Then there was a certain Villa. He acted as a spokesman for all. He was from Rome. He had a bar in Waterkant Street, that was called "Roma Bar". And there he had his business. But this was before the war, before the First World War.

(The "Roma Bar", was one of the first Italian bars in Cape Town). *Now it's changed. Now, just now, last year. They (have) renovated it. It has always been the "Roma Bar".*

Villa kept the bar for a long time. Just before the war. Then there was Nannucci. He acted as a father to everybody. They all went to him with their troubles. He tried to help, together with Villa. Villa would speak to the Afrikaans magistrate, because he was better educated, He would go and sort all their problems out. They all went to him. And then there was Nannucci..... and there was also Rubbi. Rubbi started at Robben Island. When he arrived, he went to work there.

One of Rubbi's first contracts was to build barracks on Robben Island. *He came here and started a small carpentry shop; then, he became big.. His wife was very good; she helped (the) Italians a lot. It was really her, who started the Italian Club... We formed an Italian Club. She called all the Italian children, and taught them to sew. And then, when Mussolini took over, he organized for the children of Italians to be sent to Italy to see the land of their fathers. And so, all free, without paying anything. I had three.....four sisters, and a brother, who went to Italy on the ship "Giulio Cesare". They all went there, but this was all free. All the Italian children. Then there was Miss Stella Tosi. She came to "learn" (teach) at the(Italian) school.*

Miss Tosi was invited to teach at the first Italian school by the Moni family to whom she was supposedly related. *She had family here, the Moni, Fatti. They sent for her, because she was a school teacher, to "learn" Italian to the children. She started to "learn" here at the Sacred Heart Church. It is a Catholic church, there in Somerset Road. There is a big Crucifix in front. There, the school was at the back.*

At this point Mrs Peroni unwraps some photographs. *This is my family: my father, my mother.. my father went to Italy. He went to marry my mother. My mother was born in Chieti. My father was born in Ortona Mare. We are four children, all still living ! Mother and father are dead, but we are all alive.....My brother Antonio is in Johannesburg. He has a printing firm with a partner, called Mercury Printing Works. My brother here now has four sons... One is a Doctor of Education, the other is manager of a printing workshop. The other goes everywhere. One works at the bank ... I married a Piemontese.. ..born in Turin, and he is dead. He died when my children were small.*

When Mr Peroni was seventeen years old. *his father didn't want him to go into the army in Italy. He took him to Argentina. In Argentina he worked in restaurants. The father bought a restaurant, but he didn't make him work in his own restaurant. He sent him to learn in another restaurant. And then - he was seventeen, eighteen years old - there was a ship that was coming here to bring some horses. He offered to work with the horses, in order to pay his passage to South Africa. And so, he left his father and mother. Peroni arrived at the Cape at the end of 1913 and found work as a chef at the Mount Nelson Hotel. They took him on as a youngster, you know, to work with the chef at the Mount Nelson Hotel. But..... he was mad for the sea. He went everyday to the sea. He would drive Mr. Scalabrino mad, the old man Scalabrino, and would say to him: "Learn me to go and fish". "Go away! You already have a nice job "- he says - "you have to get up at one in the morning, you must go out and get wet, and look for fish". He says: "No! I want to go. I want to go. I want to go!!". He did this for a long time. "Alright! Come". He left his nice job to go and*

become a fisherman. Where have you ever heard of a Piemontese (from Piedmont) becoming a fisherman? Then, he became a fisherman; and it wasn't that he was a good fisherman, but he was lucky. Where he cast his nets, there was the fish. Where they put the nets, there was no fish. And they called him "The Son Of Neptune" He had all the luck. He fished always, until he died. He bought three, four boats. First one, then he sold one, then he bought another...

At this point in the interview, Mrs Peroni fetched a box containing photographs and newspaper cuttings. *Then there was the Bosco family. They came here, there were five generations here.....so I believe. Then the first Italian submarines came, the TOTI and SCIESA; they came in these waters after the Second War. There was a man on board, called GalliGalli, Arnaldo Galli. He wrote the song, this song (shows the handwritten text of Galli's song). Galli's song is very long, but is nothing more than hackneyed phrases of high-sounding patriotic propaganda - so common in Fascist times - written, moreover, in rather poor Italian. It is omitted here. The Giulio Cesare, the steamer, the ship that came here in 1934. Before the war. Yes, that's right, because it was sunk. Count Labia is assumed to have been the first to invite Italian ships to Cape Town. In a commemorative illustration of the Giulio Cesare's 1934 visit we see Count Labia, Countess Labia, Baron Ruli, Doctor Del Ponte, the sister of Countess Labia, the Captain, and us girls, dressed as "cadorine" (traditional dress of the Cadore region in the Alps). Another participant was a Mrs Rubbi, founder of the Cadorine as she originally came from the Cadore region in Italy and who had organized with Countess Labia the parade of local Italian girls for the arrival of the Giulio Cesare.*

The usefulness of newspaper cuttings and photographs in aiding the process of recollection is clearly shown by Mrs Peroni,..... *and these are my family. We are four sisters, here. and the (other girls) Isola, Pomario, that is one of my sisters, this is the Introna girl, and these are my other sisters. Princess Labia (had) asked the children to come.....And now I want to tell you something else. Wait. This before the (First World) war in Knysna. Here you can see everything . And here it explains (reads from Cape Argus 26-10-1983 and expands from personal annotations regarding the history of these families,) Angelo Mangiagalli of Milano, bachelor, came to Gouna, Knysna, to produce silk in 1881. He was a relative of Senator Mangiagalli. Married Giuditta Fardini in Knysna in 1882.*

Giuditta Fardini was the daughter of a family of silk -makers. *A family that came together. And this Mangiagalli married Fardini. (Reads again) The son, Giuseppe Mangiagalli, married in Parow, Clara Canovi, daughter of one who had come with them. Same group of immigrants. in 26-12-'14. It is them who got married. These are the children of the families who came together. Their son, Edward Mangiagalli, married Anna Saveria Firmani, who is my sister, in Cape Town, 1941. The son, Nino Mangiagalli, married in 3-2-'68 Emilia Peron....Ceron, born in Biella, Italy. This was a new family; they came a short while ago, in '68. And this is my nephew, who married this girl and their son Aldo, fifth generation.....is now twelve years old.*

(The rest of the interview is in English only)

Alright. (Reads) Married couples arrived in 1881. Fardini Family, Grucci (spelling) G-R-U-C-C-I. Grucci Family, Grassi Family, and Rebellini and wife. These migrants were all silk-makers brought to South Africa from Milan and...they were made a fool of, because when they came they found nothing. You will read the story. They were made

*fools of, because then they had to go into the forest and work with the stinkwood trees, and became foresters. Vede qui (Look here). It tells you here. You can read all this. It tells all about it. Now.....(unwrapping and showing another photo). This, of course, is my nephew, Eddie Firmani, when he played in Russia, at the "Kremelin", (Kremlin) for, you can see by the jersey, the **Internazionale** (an Italian soccer team). (Unwraps another photo) This is..... my mother, when she was very sick.....This is four generations: me, my daughter, her daughter. That's four generations. That's my older brother, Bartolomeo; this is his son, Orlando, this is his son, (and) my mother,.....four generations.*

*Mrs Peroni's nephew, the one that is the Doctor of Education. This is his son, and that is my mother. That's the four generations, because we were eight children, you see, eight. Four generations.....These are all the youngsters, from the **sommergebile** (submarine) ..Toti and Sciesa. They are all on the **sommergebile**. This is a further reference to the Italian submarines sparked by the photographs and mentioned earlier in the interview.*

And this is my son. He is the manager at Hersback(?) Printing Works; this is, you know, family business. This is another of my grandsons. He won the cup for ice -skating.

Mrs Peroni's family is temporarily forgotten as she finds a photograph of the Labias, and comments on their role in the Italian community. He played a very good part. When the war broke out, and all the Italian men were taken to..... camp..... all those under sixty.....Over sixty ... they weren't taken,My husband was taken (and) I was left with five children..... four children. And all the other Italian families.....Then Count Labia gave each family five pounds sterling a month to each family, to help them. That was out of his own pocket.

The government gave nine pounds and he gave five pounds to each family, to help them. And if there was anything they needed, he would have helped.His wife, I forgot the name, for she was English. She gave them, the Government, a whole piece of ground in Saldanha Bay. She had a big piece of ground, from the entrance of Saldanha Bay right through to North Bay, a big place. She lent that to the Government. to do what they liked with. I suppose that if she didn't lend it, they would have taken it; so, she offered(it) to them. But they were very good to the Italians of Cape Town. He was the Minister Plenipotentiary and had two sons. One was married to Count Viotti's.....(Mrs Peroni's facts are muddled, the eldest son married a Miss Viotti who became Princess by marriage) When we had the Club, they always attended the Club and came amongst the Italians to see how we were getting on and all that. He was very good, as far as he was concerned, because there wasn't very much he could do.....

That's my husband, that's myself, that's his friend Vanzaghi, they lived in Worcester. Mrs Peroni in several instances during the interview displays an intimate social knowledge of the Italian community. These are all my daughters. Quite a handful.....(laughs). That's my niece. She is now in Sardegna. She married a Sardinian.....She is now living in Sardegna.....This is my mother and father, going to sign the book once a month, for being aliens, during the war, you see. They had to go to the Magistrate Court to sign, once a month, that they were here. When the war broke out, the Italians were not allowed to go to fish. Fishermen were all taken up to the camp. Some(mainly artisans and skilled workers) got out(after) two months, five months, some got out (after) six months. Some came out in a year's time, and some stayed six years.Those were very, very clever people, you know, the educated

ones. (These were the active members and leaders of the Fascist Party; here as in other testimony we see that organised, enthusiastic Fascism in the 1930s' appears to have attracted mainly middle and upper class rather than working class Italians in Cape Town) *So they kept them, right for six years. END SIDE 1 - TAPE 1.*

(Tape 1 - Side 2)

The rest of the first interview continues with Mrs Peroni still perusing through old photographs; the prisoners of war are temporarily dismissed as she takes out another photo, *this is taken in 1931, before the war, a bordo del Sistani, Club Sociale Italiano* (on board the Sistani, at a function of The Italian Social Club), *you see they had a sort of fancy dress, this is Doctor Del Ponte.* Dr Del Ponte was the doctor of the Italian community, *Dr Del Ponte's family came to South Africa, say 1912 or so, maybe thereabouts, and his mother and father opened a shop here and imported spaghetti and macaroni and stuff from Italy and they were the only shop here in Cape Town, ...I think they had something in Johannesburg....I think Fatti was in Johannesburg then, importing. And then his uncle took over the shop and he came here as a young doctor from Italy, I think he was quite a young boy when he came.*

She points out Del Pontes' wife and others in the photograph, *these are all the people that were here at that time, all the prominent families, Mrs Bini, Dr Del Ponte, his wife, ...* at this point she mentions again the "Società Italiana," *Mr Bini was in there and a Mr Azzaro, Luca Azzaro, he was the secretary, he was a Sicilian from Castellamare but he had*

studied for the priesthood in Sicily, but he didn't want to be a priest and he came out here, to this country and he bought a boat and started fishing like the rest. Unable to provide further detail on fishing boats, Mrs Peroni discusses other related aspects. Then they sent for seine nets in Italy, to bring out these nets to trek the fish, then of course in later years they prohibited this and they did not trek it anymore. She at this point resumes the commentary on the people in the photograph, the Italian girls of the...(Club).. the Cadorine, all dressed as Cadorines, and Natalia, she was a housekeeper for Mrs Rubbi, the chauffeur. She (Mrs Rubbi) used to run this place, she did most of the work. You have the Italian school, 1936. The Cadorine's taken at Count Labia's house.

*Now I must show you, This is the Bosco family their golden wedding, no their diamond wedding, sixty years married. They (Bosco) come from Trapani, pointing to people in the photograph, Mr Bosco, Mrs Bosco, their son. Mr Bosco was the *nostramo* (boatswain) on the Italian sailing ships, and when he came to South Africa in (18) 92 he remained here, he wanted to stay in South Africa. Sent for his wife, and she had three children, that's her daughter, that's the one son and they got another son, but he is not here, I think he was dead at the time of this.*

And these are all her family, the daughter, the daughter's husband, a grand-daughter Mrs Peroni enlarges on the Bosco family history. They had three children, two sons and a daughter. The one son was a carpenter, the other son was also a carpenter, and the daughter was at home, she was a housewife. One son worked for the tramway company, the youngest one, he grew up at the Salesian Institute, under a certain priest called Father Tozzi, I think you must have heard of him. The other boy was older and he went to work as a carpenter, don't know

if he went to work for Rubbi. Then suddenly remembers. He worked for Thesens . Then he met an Italian girl by the name of Marzo, Giovanna Marzo and he had six children. But during the war they made his life such a hell, such a misery that he shot himself. Italian you know, a prisoner, they made quite a thing of it. The youngest one is still alive he must be near eighty, he is eighty two. But he had no children, he married a Portuguese girl.

Mrs Peroni shows other photos of her family and then a photo of *Mrs Bini* (Albina Bini's mother) *Bosco's daughter, Abina Bini, the pianist and singer, another sister of hers, the Bosco boy and his wife, Albina Binis' son, her husband Bergamasco, he died.*

At this point Mrs Peroni took over the talkative, free-ranging interview, redirecting questions to me.

PERONI / DE NOBREGA INTERVIEW

Second Interview : April 2 1984

(Tape 1 - Side 1)

The second interview with Mrs Peroni took place nearly two years after the first one. Mrs Peroni had a friend with her, Mrs Ida De Nobrega, born Norfo, also from an old Italian family at the Cape. In this interview, both ladies helped and challenged each other in their memories. Mrs Peroni was however the leading respondent, expanding on certain points already discussed in the previous interview, sometimes giving a slightly different version of them.

The interview discusses the early economic activities of the fishermen, the Italian community, the local boarding houses and the mixed marriage problems among the more peripheral Italian groups. But recollection also touches on other interesting topics, like, for instance, the development of Fascist groups at the Cape during the early 1930s', or the patterns of leisure and entertainment activities of middle class families at that time.

Identification Type : Mrs *De Nobrega*

Mrs Peroni

Mrs Norfo's father came from *Sardegna..... His name was Raimondo Norfo. He left Italy.... he left Sardegna when he was a little boy... A young man, travelling alone. .you know, in those days, you know, my father used to say : Metti un paio di scarpe, bisogna andare a lavorare* (put on your shoes, you must go to find work).

In 1897... he arrived here. He found Carboni, which is her (De Nobrega's) grandmother. Her father was a ship's chandler. My "nonno " (grandfather) *was a ship's chandler....Si , and all the men... Raffaele, Raffaele Carboni ,he came here in the early 80s', and he brought his wife out.....just him, his wife and his children.* Carboni came from (together) *Fano. On the Mediterranean side, near Ri...* (means possibly Rimini) *San Remo!* (N.B. - This geographical information is incorrect, because the town of Fano is on the Adriatic side of Italy, facing the Yugoslavian coast, while San Remo is on the opposite side, near the French border). De Nobrega's grandfather was " *a ship's chandler.* " In Italy the grandfather was *a " marinaio "* (sailor), *you know, a fisherman, Not exactly a fisherman. A sailor. Well.....a sailor on the boats. He came to South Africa. And then he had a little business*

and he put up like a boarding house... in Sea Street. A little street called Sea Street. The boarding house opened in 1880 When he came out, because he brought his wife with him. She did the cooking and...Because he used to go and meet the boats and bring the captain to his house. And then, from there, they used to go and give food for the boat. They kept the boarding house right through till my "nonna" (grandmother) died. She died in 1915 or 1916. 1915, just after the First World War. The boarding house (speaking together) was a house,.....just a house. (again together) Here in Sea Street.....Waterkant Street. They never used to sleep there .They slept on the boats. And just to eat and, you know, "far la partita" (play cards), you know..... Play cards, have a drink! Italian food was served and obtained from the ships, yes. They used to bring home spaghetti and all that. Now and again, you could get it from some of the shops... where did we get maccheroni? From Del Ponte. Yes, Del Ponte was here at the same time. Later on, he opened a shop, and then he imported all the Italian food. Scalabrino, Borruso, Cannone., Firmani, Sangiorgio, These are all boat owners.They owned ..about thirty boats. One boat each. Each had his own boat, except my uncle. My uncle had two. Yes, they used to.(employ coloured workers..) If there were any Italians, they would employ Italians. If they couldn't get Italians, they would employ Coloureds by the day. You go out fishing today, you get paid. No price. The fish went, you caught a hundred fish, it got divided. You paid the boat share, you paid the captain share, the engine share, you got divided what was left equally between all. Fish, and cash when they paid. As they brought fish off the boat on to the wharf and they sold it, like that . Snoek went for one penny each. Right up to 1914. Even later than that, until after the war. Then some Italians, during the 1914 war, went to

Luderitz, to the South West, to capture German South West Africa. Which the Government here gave them a medal. My father got medal, my husband got a medal. All had a medal, for capturing South West Africa.

In response to Bini's reference to 200 dinghies and 70 boats, *I did not count the Saldanha Bay, and the Velddrift, and the Steenbrass Cove boats. They were all Italians, all Italians. Dinghies connected with the motorboats. Motorboats had two or three dinghies, and they would go out and fish That's right. Italians, whoever they had on board. They would go and catch the snoek... The snoek came off the motorboats.. So much crew, each one would catch the snoek that way, because the snoek is a fighting fish. But dinghies, you go for crayfish.* The preference was to use Italians to go crayfishing, who had the know-how, *because there was nobody else. They knew nothing about it...they refused to eat sole. They (South Africans) refused to eat crayfish And they refused to eat any big fish that was caught in those days. The natives saw a crayfish and would run for their lives. Those days they had to take Italians because they understood about the fish. They understood about crayfish, and bit by bit they brought it in. Mr Saint George started to bring in the crayfish and sell it to the hotels. The hotels had Italian chefs and Italian maitres d'hotel. So, through them, they brought it into the hotels....And then, there was the perlemoen. Do you know what the perlemoen is? My husband brought a load of perlemoen in, and asked the hotels to buy it. And none wanted to buy it. They didn't have any Italian cooks... chefs, then. So, he had to throw it back into the sea. But today, they pay all that money, now that they have learned how to.....Chokka, they wouldn't eat. (Explaining the local term "chokka") Calamari.*

They also introduced the Sicilian way of netting. *Yes, the seine net. They wrote to Italy and brought these nets out, There was some fighting between Italian and Coloured fishermen over these nets. Yes, because they only knew of line fish and they only caught hottentot fish. The Italian caught maasbankers and....sold it....The carts used to come. The carts used to go around this town. The horses and cart with the trumpet and they use to load up and sell the fish from house to house...They used to buy from the Italians. And there were a few Coloured fishermen who got in with them, seeing what they did. They started to fish too. They were more courageous. They would go out in little boats too, but they only would do line fishing. Now they (Coloureds) have taken over. There are no more Italians.*

There was a Mr Rondi, who came out to South Africa. Rondi, (spelling) B-O-N-D-I, and he also came out..... also jumped the boat. He was more like the "pastelleria" (old-fashioned Italian word for confectioner), you know. Confectioner, that type of thing. and went to my grandfather, to my "nonno ", and he said to him: "Look, there is nothing for me in Cape Town, here, but I hear, you know, that in Johannesburg there is gold. There is money. There is" So my grandfather gave him money to go to Johannesburg - with a couple of pound, in those days - and see what he could do. Anyhow, Rondi started very small and he grew, he grew. And there is still Rondi's Sweets Factory Mr Rondi's factory. From nothing he had a wonderful big factory in Johannesburg. Rondi's sweets. And never remembered the man who gave him the money.... Well, you know, when you step up, you forget about who helped you.

The Firmani's boarding house was called *La casa di Fano, La casa di Ortona* (Fano's house, Ortona's house,); *they were all nicknames.* (from the names of home towns) *They were not called by their (sur)names. It was called Maria Fano, or Raffaello Fano. They didn't use surnames. We hardly knew surnames. My uncle's place was called "Antonio Ortona's " and that is how his brother got to know he must be his brother. When somebody who went from here to Jo.burg mentioned this, and said he went to a boarding house called Antonio Ortona. He said: "Oh! That must be my brother". So, that is how it worked out that he was....*

Peroni's father and husband had *only one* (boat) *at the time. They used to sell one, buy another one, sell one, buy another one. In business there was a lot of jealousy! NO, NO, NO, Business, each one to their own. One was jealous of what the other caught.*

Italians who jumped ship *stayed in the interior and went down, worked their way down to the coast, to Saldanha Bay, really to Velddrift. And there they found a man by the name of Stephan, and this Stephan, knowing that they were Italians, took them all, gave them each a boat, and sent them fishing. The first boats belonged to Stephan and they went fishing for Stephan, of course. And there, they each married "Afrikaans" girls, and their families were formed down in Velddrift. There are still some there, now. Then, after working for Stephan, one by one they each bought themselves a boat. That was just before the Boer War started. But that lot that was in Cape Town, some went to Italy and got a wife. Some, like my father, he went to Italy. Her father (nodding towards De Nobrega) met her mother here, and so on. There were also some in Langebaan who had "African"*

women. *Yes. That's Marra, Seini, "Malomore" (Bad-Temper) that's what they called him. They went there with their boats and, fishing from there, they met these women. They had no other women and they married them. There was no white women. and then, this Marra - Giacomino Marra - he opened up a shop. ... almost all of the Langebaan beach was his. Still Marras there now. And he had a son, which he sent to be a lawyer, another son, which became a doctor, another son, who became a school teacher.*

Marra's sons encountered some difficulties later on, because of their colour, and their experience mirrored the reality of shifting identity for some immigrants. *Their colour, yes. The doctor went to Scotland and married a professor's daughter. The lawyer would not take up his work, because he couldn't, you know, he couldn't. So, he just worked for his father in the shop. The school teacher had to be a school teacher for a Coloured school. Although classified as Italians, yes, of course, but they wouldn't be accepted. The lawyer, he couldn't get anything anywhere.....in the end, he just threw himself, you know. He got married to a very nice girl, also that her parents came from Italians, but mixed up too, and he had two or three children. And the other brother married a slightly coloured girl, also mixed girl. He went to England. He is living there. **END SIDE 1 - TAPE 2***

2) ANTONIO INTRONA

Antonio Introna is a man in his sixties', a woodwork teacher at the Salesian Institute in Cape Town. Born the son of a fisherman, Introna tells his family history, beginning with his father's arrival at the Cape. The information in this interview deals mainly with his own life history, but also includes details of his father, his family, and life experience before the

Second World War. Introna had primed himself for an interview format and his oral history was given in a logical sequence, enriched with comments and anecdotes. As Introna himself states, *this is my family history*. In it he recalls the hardships of his childhood, his father's sacrifices, labour problems, and family structure, and he also provides information about the development of the fishing community. This includes valuable detail on the type of catch and its location and the mobility of fishermen. An important watershed is constituted by the death of his father. Thereafter, from living in strictly Italian environment, where Italian had to be spoken and Italian traditions upheld, the family became more South African under the greater influence of a South African mother, and the Italian ways were forgotten. Introna remembers the significant figure of Mrs. Nannucci, the Italian school, the Fascist movement and the family pleasure at being sent to Italy on holiday. Furthermore, he supplies information regarding the Salesians and their history, in which he identifies certain priests; he also provides data about other Italians involved in woodwork, and other members of the fishing community.

There are certain similarities with Mrs Peroni's interview. For example, there is the fact that none of the children of Italian fishermen followed the same occupation, and there is emphasis on the hardships endured by fishermen and on how they battled to secure a better life for their children. These exemplify archetypal immigrant experiences and social aspirations. Finally, it should be noted that Introna's father was one of the examples mentioned by Bini's book, of how some Italians arrived at the Cape, merely by "jumping ship".

INTRONA INTERVIEW

22 October 1982

(Tape 1 - Side 1)

Antonio Introna

Introna's father, Ilario, came from the town of Bari. He had five or six brothers and sisters and when he reached this country he never ever saw them again, because he never ever went back home. He married at an age of about thirty or thirty two, as far as I know, married a South African girl living in Hout Bay, the reason being that he was a fisherman by profession and he worked at Hout Bay. He did leave home at a very early age, he was about 17 or 18 when he ran away to sea and he sailed around the world. After about two years he reached South Africa, where he jumped ship. Several of them actually jumped ship, and being strangers here, they had to keep out of the way and consequently they suffered a few privations because they hiked or trekked, as we would say, inland,..... and they were only able to move at night because of the language difficulties and the fear of being apprehended by the Police. They reached the region of Worcester, or thereabout, before they eventually were caught, because they were so hungry that they were forced to go begging for food, and not being able to speak the language, English or Afrikaans, they were apprehended, and their story was listened to and they were promptly brought back to Cape Town and put back on the ship. And that was that. Well.....much the same thing happened the second time; again, after some years, the ship came to Cape Town, and this time he was more successful.....because he wasn't caught and eventually he learned

sufficiently of the language to come out and find work, and I don't know what happened to his colleagues, but eventually things worked out for him and he then got a steady job and of course eventually met my mother, or my mother-to-be, and eventually married her and settled.

At first he worked for a company, I don't know the name, for a start; and eventually, he acquired a small boat of his own. He was based at Hout Bay for many years, but in his early years of his marriage eventually they moved to Cape Town, where he fished locally. He worked very hard and unfortunately he wasn't very popular with the other Italian fishermen possibly because of his strong feelings of how labour should be treated. He had some Cape Coloured staff on his boat, he treated them very fairly, but like a good master he did expect a return from his employees and consequently his employees really were treated better than some others, and this of course did not prove very popular with the other Italians.

He fishedthe seasonal fish; there was crayfish in season, there was snoek, there was bankers (maasbankers), there was pilchards, and whatever was going in the season they worked. Unlike many of the other Italians, he didn't ever leave Cape Town, many of the other fishermen went up the coast as far as Walvis Bay and they worked up there. This meant leaving families at home for several months at a time, but those people did prosper, they did better than he did, because it was a question of following the fish down the coast all the time instead of waiting a year for the fish to arrive. So, there were many times when us children didn't have too much to eat. We were a very large family, we were thirteen children in all; eleven survived, the first two children died at a very early age shortly after birth. My mother had to work very hard too, and, I think,well, I don't think, I say, she was a

very good wife to him, and this proved itself in later years.....look, this is MY family history.

In 1924, the year I was born, my father suffered a very serious injury: his boat broke its moorings in the fishing harbour down here and was driven on to the rocks. This is where petty jealousies came into play, because he couldn't get another person, not even another compatriot of his, there were several of them here who came from the same village in Italy, to help him move this boat off the rocks. Consequently, he had to wait for the tide to rise and during that time, of course, the boat was bouncing on the rocks, it was holed, and eventually he pushed this boat off the rocks himself. And in doing so, it did his heart a very serious injury, from which he never recovered, as a matter of fact, he never ever worked after that. That was the year I was born, 1924. He eventually died in 1937 and he was an invalid for those thirteen years, and another five children were born after that too. So, things weren't very easy for us and, I say, my mother was a very good woman, and she survived all this, looked after my father, looked after us children, and she herself had to go out to work to provide for us. There was a time, when my father did desire to go home, perhaps to stay, I don't know, but certainly to see his family. Now, he was much like several other Italians, in reverse, because many of them had come out here and left their wives at home and his intention was to send my mother to Italy with the surviving, who were already there, and stay on here a year or two to acquire a bit of money and then follow her. Well, she was very much against it, and she said: "Look, if we don't go together, we don't go at all". And that was the situation. They never ever went and that, the result was what I said earlier. Now, he was a very great patriot, because all his life he never ever forgot his homeland, and we as children were obliged to attend

an Italian school, which was run in Cape Town by the old Fascisti movement. My father was a great admirer of Benito Mussolini and, through his generosity in some respect, us children, five of us, I think, were given the opportunity of going to Italy through the Fascisti movement and we spent approximately two months in Italy, travelling by ship both ways.

The Italian school was run by Miss Tosi, who used to take us for lessons. We would go twice a week after our own normal school day. There were a big group of us children attending, and the classes were divided into younger children and older children. Boys and girls attending, and then.....in the evening, there was a cultural group for the older people, a sort of Dopolavoro, I think they called it, when they would meet. Occasionally they would have film shows and dances and general getting together and trying to maintain the cultural link. Because, bear in mind that most of the..., all, I would say, of the children in the group, and there were several, there must have been 50 to 100 if you include the older or nearer adults.....must bear in mind, that these people had never been to Italy and all they knew of Italian culture was what they got from their own parents or from the Youth Movement which we attended. Those days, the Consul in Cape Town was a Count Luca Labia,eventually, I think, Mussolini made him a prince. Some of his children do survive in Cape Town....and certainly one of his sons, because I see his name in the newspapers now and again. Generally, the group survived up to the outbreak of the war and, of course, Italy being on the side of....the Enemy, or the Germans, as they were called.....unfortunately, all these things collapsed, and that was virtually the end of the Italian movement as such in this country.

Of the original Italian community, *there are very few families left in Cape Town. As a matter of fact, I think there are three of the original group left, there are many children and grandchildren. There is a family called Munna, the mother came from Sicily and she died just about two or three years ago. She was one of the very last fishing family. There was a family called Riccardi, and Dell'Università . They were also the same family. Originally fishing, but the children..... a peculiar thing about this all is, very few of the children went into the fishing industry. For some reason or other, their parents seem to feel that they would be better off going to a more stable form of employment rather than following the sea.*

The fishing community.....I would have to take a guess, because I was very young. I am talking about my personal family history. We related to ourselves only as children, we didn't.....meet their people, because they were a lot older than us, but I would say the fishing community down in Cape Town might have numbered about 50; and they all lived in the region just around this place here, Amsterdam Street, Cardiff Street, Bennet Street, Battery Street, all quite close to the vicinity of the docks, where it was quite easy to get down to their employment.

Basically, fish was very very cheap. I can remember my father catching crayfish where they were paid(the equivalent of) R1,25 per hundred, and, if these fish weren't big, you didn't get a rand twentyfive, you got perhaps ninetyfive cents.....My mother cleaned the fish, mullet or "haarders ", as they are more commonly called, on the beach at Hout Bay, where she was paid nine pence, or the equivalent of seven cents per hundred, so, nobody really got wealthy and, while they did accumulate a bit of money, in my father's case, the money he accumulated he had to use for himself because when he

became ill, there were always doctors' bills, there was hospitalization, there was X-rays, and any money we had went very, very quickly.

It was more the rule to fish from Cape Town, than from Hout Bay. For some reasons or other, Hout Bay was rather isolated, because if you take back to the turn of the century, there were no hard roads, and they would have to travel from ... Hout Bay, over to Wynberg, and from there they could come into town by train, but it was a journey with horse and cart over Constantia Nek. I didn't think the coastal road was built at all, so there was no coast road for them to come. Invariably the fish was brought to Cape Town and sold here. But there were even, in those early days, one or two small factories at Hout Bay, where they did process fish, not like they do today. There was no fishmeal being made, there were no deep-freeze storage facilities.

None of the fishing businesses were owned by Italians; they worked and they sold their fish. And that was all. Culturally, our family, somehow or other, retained quite a lot of the Italian culture, musically. While I wouldn't say that any of us were great musicians, I do have two brothers, who were very musically inclined. They both played brass instruments in a band, not an Italian band. The younger brother learned his music at the Salesian Institute, here, where we did have a very successful brass band, but somehow or other, the culture, the listening to good music, operatic music, was instilled in all of us, and we all, you know,.....with not much background, we still do, and listen to more music of that type than any other kind. I have a sister who was quite a good singer. She never sang professionally, not even as an amateur, but she had a very good voice. My father was a very dominating man and particularly on the girls, he would have preferred to see them locked up in a convent. rather than associate with other

children and live normally. I say normally, but that's perhaps not quite so; we were normal children, but my father was very afraid of his daughters being spoilt, and, consequently, when he died, my older sister was already 24 and she was still at home; and she didn't even have a boyfriend. So, when he died, of course things changed. This is an interesting point, nieces and nephews do have this feeling for music too. And more, I would quite use the word "incredible", but more surprising perhaps, I have a nephew who loves fishing and has a small boat and he lives at a place, Kommetjies, where some Italians do stay, and he spends all his spare time either fishing or, again like the village where my father came from, which was pastoral, he makes a garden and he doesn't plant flowers, "because, he says, you can't eat flowers" So, he plants vegetables, and that's it. Because, it is more practical, as far as he's concerned. The little bit of beauty flowers give is alright, but he feels vegetables are more profitable. So, the little background in my father has come out in this generation .

I had ... five brothers and myself, making six boys. My oldest brother, started out life in the wine industry. Unfortunately he had to leave because he wasn't of an age, you have to be eighteen before you can work in the liquor trade as he started working at the age of sixteen. My father was ill, as I say at the time, and eventually he had to give up this life, then he became a clerk in a lawyers office and he had to give this up for some reason or other and eventually he settled in the shoe industry. He became what they called a 'clicker' that is the man who cuts the shoes, and, he in years later, became interested in the trade union movement and eventually became a very respected official of the trade union, in the leather industry - he became the inspector of labour and of wages. in Cape Town. Then my next brother started

work as a junior clerk in the Consuls' office in Cape Town. I don't recall his name but the year would have been about 1936 -there was a, yes, I've got his name it might come back just now - and he eventually left that employment to come and he joined the church, he became a priest. He did his studies for the priesthood in Italy at the Beida College in Rome and he came back to South Africa in the year 1948, and he started work in Cape Town and eventually he was shifted up to the Apostolic Delegation in Pretoria and he worked as a secretary to the representative of the Vatican in South Africa, he happened to be a Dutchman. The Archbishop, I can't recollect his name for the moment, eventually this man went to India on transfer and he was very anxious for my brother to go with him, but, my brother felt that his work was more important in this country and he stayed. He came back to Cape Town and he was only down here for just a few months when the new man, he was an American, he was of Italian extraction - again I can't recall his name, he was impressed with the work which my brother had done up there and he sent for my brother and consequently he spent some more years up in Pretoria. Eventually this man again was transferred, I think he's dead today, he was transferred back to the States, and my brother then came back to Cape Town and he worked in Cape Town until he died about four years ago. At a very young age, 58.

Myself is next. I attended school here at this place at the Salesian Institute. I was trained in woodwork, and I left here and entered the woodwork industry and, so, incidentally there are several Italian boys in the woodwork industry from my generation and a little bit before me.

Now, the families: there were people by the name Munna - there was Isola, there was Rometti, those are three that come easily to mind..

Munna - they were Sicilians. There was another chap, Rometti, I don't know what part of Italy his father came from. Munna is still alive. He has two children As a matter of fact Munna himself is very little Italian in the sense. He is a very nice chap and is a personal friend of mine. Munna's father was quite a successful fisherman. There was a family called Pisani, also they are all dead. All these people I've mentioned are fishing, the original you know. Then there was someone by the name of Penso. That's Mrs Tonin, sister in law, I don't know what they did. Isola, his son, went into woodwork. He is very successful, he is a sort of foreman. Rometti's children. One became a doctor, another is up at University, he is a lecturer in Electrical Engineering but their background was less Italian than ours because their father was Italian he was more reserved, he wasn't part of the community as such. Pisani's, there are a few daughters left. There was one; and a few sons but both died. One was killed - a fishing accident actually - his boat capsized and he was drowned. Then there is another group: Firmani, they were also fishing, again children went into the woodwork trade. Building, and joinery, furniture. They started out working for someone else. Munna eventually had a business of his own and Isola had a business of his own, he was a partner in a business. Eventually I left school and I went into the furniture industry where I became a wood machinist. I didn't work for an Italian.

Some of the Italians who were in business had very small businesses and they were more or less one man businesses or perhaps just two working men working together, they did quality work though, they brought back the style from Italy. There were two brothers who had a small shop quite close by here, and they specialised in stinkwood

furniture and I am trying to think of their name. They made a great name for themselves in Cape Town for the work they did. I've seen some of their work because furniture that was made about sixty or seventy years ago occasionally needs repairs and people who have this furniture have brought it to me for these minor repairs, adhesive glues weren't as good as they are today. Consequently over the years the glue breaks down and these things need re-gluing and fixing together again.

After seven years I was offered a post at the Silesian Institute to come back and teach boys here at the school. Rometti, he came out here to the Salesians, from Italy at the turn of the century. The Salesians came to Cape Town in the year, I think it was 1896, and then established a small place in Roeland Street, quite close to the corner of Buitenkant Street, and I think the original is still standing there. In 1910 they moved to the present site in Somerset Road but in this early period Mr Rometti, did come out and he was definitely a woodworker. I don't know....very likely he made furniture because he did work in Cape Town in one or two factories as a cabinet maker, which was a furniture maker you see. But other than him, there was no other Italian orientated person here. We had a couple of Irishmen and Englishmen working here but there were other Italian Brothers. There was an old brother called Marcovaldi, he was a great surgical shoemaker. This meant specialising in shoes for people with deformed feet. He worked here in this building. It would be in the early 1920s' and he eventually went back to Italy and he died in Italy. I would say Brother Marcovaldi was one of the early specialists in Cape Town. Yes, and then there was one or two older men, I can't recall their names one was a great musician, he taught the band here for many years and I think he playedthe trumpet. Then again there was another brother here who

had an Italian name and I think, basically if you went back far enough he would have been from the old stock perhaps..... it's difficult to say where he had come from. His name was VianelloEND SIDE 1-TAPE 1

(Tape 1 Side 2)

a printer by trade, he learned in England and then he went to the Belgian Congo for a short while, and I think he spent some time in Italy, also in Turin where the Salesians have a big training house and a printing press up there. So, I have been working for 36 years and really I was born in the shadow of this building, just two streets away, and as a very young boy at the age of seven or eight. I can recall bringing our shoes to this place to have them repaired, in the cobbler shop here. My next brother he also learned tailoring, etc., he was successful, he became, a sort of a manager in a ladies clothing factory, a small exclusive factory actually, and in later years he acquired a diploma with a distinction in tailoring. There were other Italian tailors and there are a few.....younger people now, having learned the basics of a trade through the influence of an Italian orientated movement - the Salesians.

He also, he was the musician of the family actually, and his instrument was the trombone, and for several years, he worked at the Salesians here also teaching boys the trade of tailoring and he ran our school band which was very successful, he won several awards at the local musical festivals and, who knows that interest may have come from our own background. However, then I have two younger brothers still, the one went into engineering industry and he has left the industry

since, and is taking a more professional job, again as a wage inspector and in the footwear industry same as my older brother. Unfortunately he has no culture at all, when I say that, his music is pop and hasn't much time for the arts I'm afraid. He is married and has, five children, six children, five daughters and one son. Unfortunately none of them is musically inclined, and then the last brother, actually the last two boys were twins, and then the last brother learned his trade here at the school. Eventually he went into the industry but he felt that he would prefer to do something else and eventually he joined the South African Defence Force - in the Air Force division and he now specialises in instrumentation, that is the fixing up of, flying instruments. The girls, I can't say much for them, they were kept under close rein as girls, consequently they only met their husbands rather late in life. As a matter of fact, of my brothers and sisters who are married, only one of them, my eldest brother, married an Italian girl. She was from Naples. Her family, the name is Spisto, they were three daughters and one son, the father is dead and the mother is still alive. The father came out here before the last world war, in the year....probably about 1934 or '35, and the family followed later, I think in 1937.

The father was like another type of Italian, It's not meant to be a derogatory term. He was a commercial traveller, and he specialised in selling materials from door to door.... You bought a piece of material and you had a suit made at the tailor yourself. And in later years they then turned to selling other things too, carpets and other forms of drapery and clothing. Yes, he was in that profession. I would say there must have been about at least, twenty of them working at the same profession. And here is an interesting point : during the war several of them were detained in an internment camp.....until their backgrounds

were checked, and I think that just about all of them were released. But.....a sort of an embargo was put on their work and they were restricted to an area of five miles, say about seven-eight kilometers, within a radius of eight kilometers from where they stayed. And in spite of this restriction they all made a very comfortable living. Of course in a few instances some of these men did cross the line, you know, they went a little bit further than they should have done, but, really speaking, things were quite.....not lax, but the authorities didn't view....these restrictions placed on these men in a very serious light. It was more just a form ofthey had to do something and that's what they did. Butit was never enforced to any degreeThese people were mainly *Napoletani*. (Neapolitans) They fought like mad among themselves. Basically.....most of them lived in the Greenpoint area and also in later years they moved up to Tamboerskloof, Oranjezicht area. Funnily enough all these people seemed to be drawn to living in the town. They didn't mind going away to work out in the suburbs but they all stayed in the city. Or very near to the city.

In Cape Town there was a very prominent.....Italian builder, Joseph Rubbi..... Now Joseph Rubbi and his wife, particularly, she played a very,very dominant role in the Italian movement in Cape Town before the last World War, and there are one or two other people also. There was an old Mr Bonachi, don't know what he ever did but he lived on the premises where we used to, used to have our lessons and so forth. And there was another very good lady there was a Mrs Nannucci, I think their background was dry-cleaning. She was also, very active and she was a very nice woman, a thorough lady, not that the others weren't ladies, but some were more ladies than others. You know she was a nice, gentle, kind, person. I've a great recollection of her. And

when the various national days came along, she was always kind to children, there were always gifts and we were always given a little treat. And Mrs Nannucci was always there walking around "have you got enough", "do you want anything more?". Oh, very nice and gentle. And I am speaking now of a time going back forty-five years and I'm only fifty eight, so you can see how young I was, and that recollection is still in my mind.

The early part of the Salesians in Cape Town. There were a few Italians who came out but you see by that time the Salesian influence had moved over to England and it was established there. Now Cape Town was a part of the English, what they call province, in other words we here weren't directly attached to Italy, we were attached to England. So, consequently staff who came out here were English or Irish. There were a few Maltese but there were also some Italians because there were some Italians sent from Italy to England to start the movement off and in some instances, these people remained in England, never ever went back to Italy. So, in the early days of the Salesians there were a few. There was a father Cerruti who eventually went to Australia from South Africa, and then a man who was very much loved in Cape Town by the Italian community, was a father Aeneas. Aeneas Tozzi, he spent many years here forming the early Salesians in Cape Town. He was rector of this house for many years.

His contacts had to be with England, because being attached to England. As a matter of fact, he spent quite a lot of time, spiritually advising the Italians. He couldn't get involved in any political movements or anything like that, but I, as children, the Italian community, as a youth group we came to the Salesians here and we used this playground here.

It was an educational centre, but it wasn't only for Italian boys, while there were many Italian boys in my time. When I was at school I can recall probably at least 20. As I am talking to you, names are coming back. Sandro Giunti. Again, children of fishermen. I would say really. The Italian children who came to the Salesian were from the fishermen's family, the poorer families, actually. Families were inclined to be large and parents wishing to get their children educated, and prepared for some form of trade in industry, you know, which was offered here. We offered seven or eight trades, we offered surgical shoemaking, tailoring, printing, bookbinding, woodwork, composite English which is part of printing; apart from that there was the cultural, there was the music and this was all, this was all combined with our academic subjects which children have to do, you see. So we had the advantage of having an academic education.

Father Tozzi is remembered as an influential figure in the Salesians. *The movement came in 1896 it was another 30 years or 28 years before the next house was opened in a place called Lansdowne, which was somewhat different to this school because we taught arts and crafts and Lansdowne was opened as an agricultural school and he was responsible for that foundation too. And then, eventually, Father Tozzi was recalled back to England where he became what is known as a "Provincial" and he was then responsible for the foundation and formation of the different Salesian schools in the English part, an area which covered England, Ireland, Malta and South Africa. In England, they have something like 12 or 14 schools. You see, Father Tozzi initially got those off and here there is an interesting point: that the man who trained the young Salesians and young men who wished to become Salesian, they do a special year of training called the*

"novitiate", he was an Italian too and he occupied the post in England training these young men for 50 years. So the influence of the Italians was even marked.....

Our involvement with the Italian community was during my fathers lifetime, and my older brother, after my father died, my father died in 1937 you see, which took us right up to the fringe of the second world war. Now up to that time we as a family were really Italian orientated. As a matter of fact, all our births are registered in Italy. I don't know if we were subject to military service if we went back to Italy, you know. But as far as I know our births were registered in Italy although we are South Africans, you know. As far as I know our births were registered in Italy. Again in his lifetime as, affecting our family, when he addressed us he only spoke Italian and we had to speak Italian back to him. He spoke English not too well. He was only fifty eight when he died and he spoke a little bit of Afrikaans which in his early days wasn't quite a language and hadn't developed. But at home we had to speak Italian.

The Introna household in some ways resembled that of the Scalabrino's. *They also fished, the Scalabrino family and again some of them.... the younger....second third, fourth generation one or two of them are in the fishing business today. There (is)certainly one boy, Marino, his name is Marino, his father was a hairdresser by profession. Marino... his father was the oldest of the Scalabrino's and the bloke who had the hairdressing salon at the Waldorf was the youngest. There is quite a big gap between them. So Marino is actually in the fishing business. He had a cousin whose name was Salvatore Bugarella. He by profession is , I suppose you would call him a businessman. He had a small shop. As*

a matter of fact he is in partnership, he was till he died a year ago, he had a partnership, a chain of ladies hatshops with Scalabrino.

Garsolini was an old family in the building industry. I don't know what his speciality was whether it was plastering or brick laying or something. Another old family was Cannone, yes, they came out at the same time as my father you know. They stayed in Woodstock right at the top of the hill. Those boys, there were four boys, they've done very well. They went into.....two of them were builders, one of them was a cabinet maker and the fourth one worked in the shoe industry. And then they pooled their resources and they bought a farm out in the Malmesbury district. It was a mixed farm. They had grapes, and there was sheep and the vegetables, and eventually they went into poultry, and the four brothers all lived on the farm with their wives. Eventually they sold it. But during those years they retained the building business, because in the area on the farms there was plenty of work building barns and stables and things like that so they did a lot of work in that area. Today they're all retired and one of them lives in Durbanville, his name is Jackie, Giacomo, and Jackie is still a very successful builder and developer in the area down there.

The Garsolini's they were....two sisters married two brothers. Two of the Cannone married Garsolini's and then the elder brother, Jerome, Geromo, he married into the Firmani family. But these are all men sixty-five to seventy now like my brother, my oldest brother he is seventy and he ...went to school with .. Rometti and all those chaps. Let me first tell you, but you know at the turn of the century there was some Italian men who landed on the coast down at Langebaan. And at Saldanha Bay you will find many Italian family names there. It's much like in the country districts in Malmesbury and Paarl. The

children are perhaps first or second generation but absolutely no Italian at all. In Langebaan a family called Fiorentino, Marra, Canestra, there were about seven or eight groups and down at Saldanha Bay also there was another group there, Carosini. So these men all were fishermen you know, the men who came at that time were all connected, were peasant type.

Introna finally recalls the son of the late Angelo Giuseppe Rossi. Angelo was an expert in salt processing plants and the the founder and developer of Salnova Ltd, in Port Elizabeth. *Father Rossi, don't know what his Christian name is, but he is a Jesuit, and he is the son of a man who developed a new technique at the time for processing salt from seawater and the family have since gone back to Italy. Fr. Rossi is in Cape Town. Among other things which he does he is the chaplain to the hospital in Cape Town, Groote Schuur, Woodstock.*

END OF INTERVIEW

3) AMEDEO TRAVERSO

Amedeo Traverso, a man in his seventies, is a retired businessman and builder. He was also interviewed twice, the second session being far more informative. The interviews were conducted partly in Italian and partly in English. The first interview did not flow very easily as informant and interviewer rather struggled to establish a rapport. Traverso in this first interview was filled with suspicion of the interviewer and was rather cagey and unresponsive; whereas in the second interview, he more willingly volunteered details concerning people and events. Traverso may be seen as a typical example of local Italian entrepreneurship, business acumen and adaptability. Because of the depth of the information that could be provided by Traverso, as he was involved in so many business

ventures, it is sometimes difficult to follow this history as thoughts often stop in mid sentence and he assumes knowledge of his businesses and the business sector and related issues. In his life history he not only provides details and information about his businesses but also about the community and his involvement and participation in community activities. In the second interview, he explains in detail some of his innovations in the irrigation systems and in the building trade. Traverso also discusses other Italians and their involvement in business. He describes, with humour and detail, (as did Introna), the Neapolitan cloth sellers in the Cape; particularly how, they managed to arrive in Cape Town, and their subterfuges when they landed. He mentions Barabbino, who was reputedly the first to introduce a hollow brick technique to construction at the Cape and who had set up his factory at the Strand. In all his oral recollections he provides much incidental historical information regarding his own businesses, his innovations and on the community and its social structure.

TRAVERSO INTERVIEW

First Interview: 18 October 1982

(Tape 1 - Side 1)

Amedeo Traverso

I came to (South) Africa, (in 1925) because my boss knew someone here, Costa. (2) I planted those olives there. And for a year I was with him to learn English, to write it, etc., In Paarl..... he was in Paarl already twenty years. And I stayed with him for a year, because my boss wrote to him. He says: "look this boy wants to go anywhere."

In fact, they had promised me a good post in Mogadishu with Ing Rossi, Commendatore Rossi, but I wouldn't sign. I didn't want to stay there because I wanted to go abroad. And for a year I went there to learn. Then, I could write but I couldn't speak yet, because there was no one there. And so I went to work as a waiter at the Mount Nelson Hotel, to learn to speak. After three years I left and I started to work with an Italian who was working in monumental works, with marble and those things. Pacini. He's still here. Pacini was mixed up with the Monis', maybe because they had imported him to make wine. Later, Pacini worked for the Deciduous Fruit Board..... he was a very hard worker that man, only he couldn't stick to what he was doing. When. ... he finished one thing, he had to do another .

Well, I stayed there at the Mount Nelson, I learned English. Then I went to Italy, thinking maybe of staying there because it was a bit heavy for me to go between Italy and here. In 1930, I went to Italy. And my boss wanted me to stay because he said that he was retiring and he would give me some shares there. But, with my friend here, ... I didn't like Italy anymore everything is closed in there , you don't see. I was now used to "braaivleises", to picnics, to the sea and I felt stifled ; I couldn't. I came back and I started in Paarl with the monuments. I had a couple of hundred pounds, which I lost because I bought a car. And the car ate up everything. And I arrived here and what did I do? Oh yes with Pacini; We worked in order to import monuments. Then since the Monis wanted to close I started on my own. And I started to import. I imported from 1930. From 1931 to 1939 I was importing. I had a preferential (tariff) on the Italian line, I was importing almost..... about at that time six, seven hundred pounds of marble a month. From Carrara. Always from Carrara, the monuments and the plain marble,

always from Carrara; and I would make about fifteen percent. I was making enough money. First of all I formed a company that sold monuments. In Paarl. Then I opened up in Cape Town as a wholesaler. The Paarl firm was called Jacobs and Muller, not with my name. Because it was already made. There were two brothers who were going bankrupt and they said to me that..... . I would go and fetch my marble. I say: "no, you are not going bankrupt." They said to me whether I would go with them, I didn't want to but I say "I'll go." And for about ten years I worked to keep the firm going etc., In the meantime I started in the building trade. I was a little scared, then from buildings I went into construction. Because if you see this thing here (shows book) you will see that we did a job for at that time one hundred and seventy five thousand pounds. It was in 1935. Yes, but first I came up with the monuments and that sort of stuff. I sold, I sold a lot then I was approached by a guy from Worcester..... Agliotti (Bini. refers to him as G. Audignotti) I went. The first breakthrough was not the first but one of the first, a job of a hundred and seventy five thousand pounds at that time which today would be three hundred and fifty thousand rand which would be about thirty million, because it's gone up ten times. And we lost, we lost a lot. In Worcester....we had a good name we did. Because my name has always been good with the Irrigation Department. Sometimes we got jobs even though we were not the lowest. Traverso specialised in canal construction. Canals on farms. They approached me in 1942. In 1942 exactly we did the canal.....This was during the war to take water to the airport of the Royal Air Force at Oudtshoorn. And we did that canal, from Melville Dam to Oudtshoorn. This was the first construction job. I preferred construction to building.

Traverso also commenced building *small houses*. *I started with Puccini ,with Puccini before the war. Because when they put him in the camp, I bought his shares for a pound. When he came out I sold them back to him. So it was before the war, it must have been in 1935, 36, but in construction as such in 1942.* He escaped wartime internment because in 1937 I met my wife, and was naturalised. Then I saved several Italians, because otherwise they would confiscate, any property, they confiscated. And then I would buy the shares from the Italians, and when they returned I gave back their shares. When the war broke out they took all the Italians. They thought that they would not be sent to the camp, because they did not take all the Germans, they only took those that were marked. But the Italians did not have any records and so they took them all. But we managed to get Fromage out, who was my partner in the cement works and all that.....

Furthermore Traverso also had a large joinery firm. In 1934 I started *Traverso and Company Pty Limited* .(I was) always in control. Then war broke out. And the last steamer was the *Piave*. It wanted to escape, because they wanted to declare war, and then Cape Town harbour ordered for the steamer to be confined to the docks. And on that steamer I had there four altars for churches, because I then specialised in churches. The first big job was in 1936. The church at *Wittebome*. Not the church only the altar.

I quoted, I will always remember, eight hundred pounds, which was the price they had quoted to make it as imitation Venetian style, I instead, made it in marble .Because the altars , I did not sell them as altars. No one could do them. I, instead sold them as worked marble. I would go there at night, and we would erect them. I did many of them, many. And on the last steamer I had four altars: one for Cape Town,

one for Port Elizabeth, one for Belville and the other one for Claremont. Then I wrote to the government that I owed (money) because they gave me credit from Italy, I wrote to the (South African) government that I was South African, that my company is South African, because the shares are mine, and that I could not pay storage for my property because I had no money. And I didn't have, because from Italy I had ninety days credit. Then if I could not pay they would write to me immediately.. and so the government said:" don't worry, pay what you can" And I paid everything. It took me two years to pay it, because they were satisfied with fifty pounds a month, or something like that Then with what I was saving, because I worked myself to cut the marble and those things, I paid my two partners who were in the camp, and I paid fifteen, twenty rand per month to their wives here. And I paid for about five years, but also with the granite from Paarl and with the Paarl company. Then, in 1942 I say "I cannot stop here" and so I went into the construction business, in the country, and in 1942 we did the first job here. One of the first jobs was at Oudtshoorn yes, construction, then from there we submitted quotes every time. I remember a contract with Vanzaghi, he was the bidder for this contract, we were third, and he was second, but the Irrigation Department gave us the contract. And from there I dont know how many we did, we did a lot of construction for farms. Traverso stresses that he specialised in water canals, irrigation for farms. I had ten years of great hardship because I worked even ten twelve hours a day. He sometimes employed Italian workers, I took some, the government never refused me. I had.....in fact two or three from Venice they came out from Italy, they were not prisoners. And when I made an application the government never refused it. Forty, fifty, from fortysix, fortyfive they never refused me. I must truthfully say

that they always treated me well, the government never...not once did they say: " we don't give the Italian company a contract," even during the War. Never.

Sometimes Italians complained, but as far as I was concerned, in fact more than once ,they told me they were happy that I had the job etc. It was for this reason that I could not stay in Italy anymore. Another life (style), more free, as long as one worked. Also it was the times, at that time if one had a white faceit wasn't like now. Then in the sixties ,no, in the fifties Pagano arrived, and he wanted me to take him as a partner, I say " but you are mad".

Pagano arrived from Egypt. He had a few shillings. And then Bergamasco and Pagano started these big works and they approached me. And from the fifties onwards I had a few things (going) I paid, about two, three thousand pounds a week in wages. I had about one hundred and fifty blacks in construction, and here in Cape Town because even when I worked for Pagano, I did not work (only) for them, I was in a syndicate. Pagano was the engineer, Bergamasco the agent , Chiddy the lawyer and I the builder. All together. I gave the estimate of the job, they would do the calculations and then they left me alone.... and from the fifties to the sixties we did , I think at least a million a year of work. I did not stop at small buildings, always large constructions. The Arthur Seat Hotel, Arthur Seat Mansions All the buildings you see around there. (Blocks of Sea Point Flats) And this lawyer we had, Chiddy, was a very clever man. He invented that which is now called "block share", the government did not want to allow it, because they lost the transfer tax, but they could not stop us. Then in 1964 these large banks did not want to lend us more money, they wanted to be included in the deals.

In fact what you see now belonging to Sanlam; those things, we did them. **END SIDE 1-TAPE 1**

The second interview with Amedeo Traverso took place two years later, on 25 April 1984. During this interview he was more relaxed, providing further contextual information. He generally expanded on topics already aired in the first interview. Traverso on this occasion described how he started making *terrazzo* (a mixture of marble chips of different sizes with coloured cement) floors. He made the first terrazzo in the 1930s', importing the machines from Italy and starting with two labourers. At first he also imported the marble chips from Italy, but during the War period the chips were obtained from local quarries in Namaqualand and in the Transvaal. Terrazzo, until the 1950s' was considered a luxury; the cost then was 37s 6d per square yard. Traverso continued making terrazzo until 1974 when he sold all the equipment to Lovric & Sons, in Cape Town, who still continue to make terrazzo tiles.

Traverso also explained in detail his involvement in irrigation schemes in the Cape which were subsidised by the South African Government during the period from the 1930s' to the 1950s'. The Government usually built the main canals through public works, but the secondary canals that carried water to the farmers had to be built privately. Italian builders during this period were very competitive: their tenders were often the lowest and they had gained a reputation for good workmanship, so they were usually in demand. The last and the largest irrigation project awarded to Traverso and Co, was in the Worcester area in 1957. The contract was for the sum of £160,000, and consisted of 5 km of pipelines of different sizes to feed water to farms in the area from a main reservoir. In this project, Traverso claims to have introduced a new technique of

shuttering, by substituting steel, manufactured by Consani Engineering following his own specifications, instead of the conventional wood. Traverso maintained that by using steel shuttering, one could reduce the height of the canal by 2 or 3 inches, thus cutting costs, and at the same time saving labour and time because one could increase the lengths of the sections to be cast at any one time. This had the further advantage that the steel, even though more expensive than wood, could be re-utilised and could be more easily erected.

Traverso also supplied what might best be categorised as folklore about the experiences of Neapolitan cloth-sellers who managed to land at the Cape and outsmart the port authorities; he claims that Neapolitan cloth-sellers were already operating in the Cape when he arrived in 1925. He relates the story of how all immigrants had to prove upon disembarkation that they had at least £50, to cover the cost of a return fare; these Neapolitans would arrive four or five at a time; the first would disembark and show his £50, would then go to the back of the queue and give the money to the next arrival, and so on. This subterfuge must have been quite common practice, because the immigration authorities after a while stamped the money to prevent it being used over again.

Traverso recalls how some of these men who hawked cloth all over the countryside, cheated many customers; often they would tell the story that they were sailors who had missed their boat and were trying to make some money by selling cloth. The prospective buyers would then be shown the first metre or so of cloth which was of good quality, but the rest of the cloth was quite different. Others sold "marble" statues; these statues were usually made from a mould, imported from Italy, but contained only marble dust and alum, and did not last long when wet. Many of these

shady Neapolitans became wealthy, and some started new legitimate businesses; all of them seemed to live quite comfortably. Italians from other regions of Italy claim that these sharp Neapolitans did much to harm the image of Italians in South Africa, revealing in their attitudes the transference of Italian class and regional rivalries to a new immigrant host country.

The sample transcripts and comments in this chapter have attempted to reveal the type of information which can be extracted from interviews. They also encourage us not to waste time and to hasten to record the testimonies of old people who lived in a period which we already call history. With their help, we can shed new light on existing written evidence and fill gaps left by conventional historians. For example, Mrs Ida Peroni died recently. Her death was a great loss not only to the community but also to potential researchers; I for one would certainly have liked to have asked Mrs Peroni many more questions. And by doing so, to have been able to feel that her narrative would thereby have helped to restore her sense of her own history. For by recording memories, we can help old people who by *reminiscing maykeep their sense of self in a changing world.* (3)

Notes to Chapter Five

- 1) Thompson, *Voice*, (new edn.) p.18
- 2) Raffaele Costa arrived at the Cape in 1896 and started a nursery in Newlands. In 1902, he was joined by his brothers Fernando and Carlo. In 1925 Fernando decided to cultivate olive trees on a commercial scale and bought 40 hectares at Paarl where he started with 6000 cuttings from his nursery in Newlands and became the pioneer of the olive industry in South Africa. See Bini, *Italiani*, p.53.
- 3) Thompson, *Voice*, p.18

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have attempted to explore two connected themes. These have been a consideration of the methodological study of oral history, focusing upon its strengths and failings and its various social uses and applications, and a suggestive attempt at a reconstruction of aspects of the social and economic history of the Italian community at the Cape, essentially through oral history.

By way of conclusion we turn first to a final consideration of oral history practice. In the methodological approach to my research I have endeavoured to show the different applications of oral testimony in different countries, as well as how institutions and societies have evolved to encourage the acceptance of this relatively new field of research. I have tried to point out the varied applications of oral history, its usefulness in recording the voice of the working class, the life of minority groups and of immigrants. More specifically, I have also considered how oral testimony may illuminate the study of economic history, in its probing approach to the construction of histories not only of workers and labour unions, but also of entrepreneurial achievements.

I have tried to illustrate how oral testimony and oral history have been used, and are increasingly being used, both to fill historical lacunae left by conventional historians and to elucidate areas of historical knowledge where little or no written documentation is available. Thus, oral history has been employed particularly to record the history of the underprivileged and the the dispossessed. It has been used to trace the history of mostly inarticulate immigrant groups and other marginal collectivities, to throw light on the role of women both in society and in the economy, and recently to record not only the voice of "the people" but also that of the business elite, as well as that of politicians and other dominant members of society. Africa-based oral history has shown, particularly since the publication of Vansina's work in the 1960s', that a newer and more creative approach towards many conventional historical enquiries enables the uncovering of information previously thought inaccessible or undeserving of historical study. This is particularly pertinent to many parts of the African continent where documentary evidence is scarce or non-existent, especially for precolonial periods. There, the historical voice of the African worker has also been silent for many years. Records kept by missionaries and government officials are often limited in their perception of real situations and narrow in focus; it has often taken the influence of oral testimony in Africanist scholarship to insert the agency of African actors into the historical picture.

In the present locally-based study, I have attempted to point out how oral history can be usefully applied to the critical study of economic history, as emphasised by Thompson in the latest edition of his seminal *Voice of the Past*, in which he suggests *It is often only oral evidence which allows adequate study of a transient economic activity..... thus there are virtually no written records of itinerant trades-hawking, credit-drapery, market-trading and so on and even for the highly*

organized brewing industry, there was only the barest documentation. (1)

An obvious example is the work of pioneer mining historians like Christopher Storm-Clark, who has used interviews to collect information about fluctuating workers' wages and the impact of technology, which revealed major errors and misconceptions in the official documentary sources for mining history in Britain. Allan Nevins' work on the history of the automobile industry, and Studs Terkel's *Working* have also helped to make investigative inroads in economic history, a field traditionally based exclusively on written documentation. We have seen through interviews, the links between economic history and small incremental technological innovation and discovery, as well as the ways in which industrial managers and small entrepreneurs have constructed their life histories in society and in the economy. In this study the life histories of men such as Rubbi or Traverso may be seen as one way of responding to Thompson's observations that *economic historians have conspicuously failed to follow the example of sociologists in collecting life histories from industrial managers and from petty entrepreneurs.* (2)

Labour history, particularly in South Africa, has also come to rely heavily on oral testimony, for in official white records, relatively little is revealed of the plight, problems and aspirations of African workers and those of other dominated classes. Overall, it is encouraging to see that interest in oral history continues to increase with a growth of new studies on interpretation and memory, and localised research on occupational histories or the formation of political consciousness, not only in Great Britain, continental Europe and the USA, but also in countries as far afield as Australia and, as this study shows, here in South Africa. (3) Oral history groups of various kinds have been formed and are now researching community histories hitherto ignored by conventional historians and

eroding resistance to new methods of historical enquiry.

Furthermore, the preceding historiographical chapters have attempted to illustrate the fundamental validity of oral testimony in general and its potential in advancing the work of the historian and the researcher in economic history. Oral testimony has allowed us to view facets of that history through a different, micro-perspective. As a new methodology, it has raised legitimate questions as to the reliability and consistency of evidence; yet the stimulus it provides for new methods of research has enriched the quest for fresh historical sources. Overall, it represents a creative means with which to explore especially the socio-economic history of immigrant groups, recording their struggles, opportunities and attainments; oral research can open up their family history as well as the more public history of communal social and class struggles. Moreover, oral testimony ushers in a more intimate and composite sphere of enquiry in history in which both the voice of the worker and that of the entrepreneur or employer might be heard, where one can listen not only to the history of business "giants" but also to that of the small shopkeeper and shop assistant. For long term changes to the social system need to be seen not only in terms of influences such as trade cycles, but in terms of the adaptations of individual lives at different class levels. Oral history is also particularly instrumental in raising awareness of bias and misinterpretation in historical sources in general and in helping to highlight the subjectivity of various kinds of evidence. For the raw evidence upon which both analysis and description of social process and social change must ultimately rest, is the life experience of ordinary men and women.

Secondly, we turn to the preliminary reconstruction of the life of the Western Cape Italian community. Here, a sample of the richness and

originality of oral testimony gathered in interviews has been provided, and there is undoubtedly great potential for further detailed studies of the social life of this community. I have attempted to show the importance of oral testimony in supplementing and illuminating the exceptionally sparse documentary evidence available, and to demonstrate how this has imparted a newer understanding of the expansions and contractions of the Italian community in a developing South Africa.

The original concept of this thesis was to trace the history of the Italian community in South Africa with particular reference to the Cape, and to assess its contribution to the development of the South African economy. After preliminary research, the original project had to be revised and the field of enquiry narrowed because of the almost total absence of documentary evidence. A valid substitute had to be found, and the thesis matter basically switched to a reflection upon oral historical enquiry and a sample recovery of the oral testimony of the Italian community. I have tried to indicate at least an implicit connection between these two interests. However, because of the great geographical area to be covered, a further regional restriction was imposed and the field of enquiry was narrowed to the Cape Town area, and to certain areas of the Western Cape hinterland. Documentary and written evidence on the local life of Italians until the Second World War left considerable historical gaps and oral testimony became a prime source of information for this particular study. The choice of period was determined mainly by the fact there were still living witnesses available who could relay first hand information. It was therefore possible to open a lesser known chapter in local socio-economic history as well as to preserve a unique form of historical documentation that would otherwise be lost forever. Accordingly, the reconstruction of aspects of the social and economic history of the Italian community was

achieved largely through personal interviews, supported by documentary evidence wherever possible.

The sample transcripts in Chapter Five provide a glimpse of the inner life of the Italian immigrant community over a period of more than half a century, as well as a new source of personalised historical narrative. As a close-knit community in Cape Town, Italians constituted an identifiably cohesive grouping until approximately the Second World War period, when children of earlier immigrants grew up, married, left home, found new occupations and strove to improve their standard of living. Furthermore, as their numbers were increased by small ripples of new immigrants, localised group entities developed as people from the same region and province arrived and consolidated a way of life. This resulted in smaller, discrete and more graduated Italian communities emerging in different suburbs, such as the small clusters of Italians in predominantly Afrikaner suburbs such as Parow, where many of the more recent arrivals settled and built large extended family homes, and Sea Point and Green Point and the City Bowl, where the older residents tended to settle. This division interestingly represented a social differentiation between the established "old money" of earlier settlers and more recent entrepreneurship. It is reflected in the contrast between earlier, struggling Sicilian fishermen of the early twentieth century and some post-World War II immigrants who were more readily established as boat-owners, having access to capital. These processes took place within the broad overall context of an ethnically hierarchical local society. While Italian entrepreneurs of the 1930s' and 1940s' were unambiguously white and part of the dominant class, at least some of the earlier fishermen had no such advantageous position; when not competing against Coloured fishermen, they were certainly liable to form

liaisons with women "other than white" and to acquire a commensurate status.

Over a period of fifty years, Italian immigrants arrived for different reasons and in different ways. Census reports tabulated the number of migrants who arrived in South Africa and the Cape during this period; movement fluctuated according to economic conditions and political attitudes and administrative measures. For example, immediately after the Anglo-Boer War, there was an influx of immigrants which was soon to be stemmed by depression and unemployment in the Cape Colony. But a migrant need persisted. Rural Italian families, as in the rest of Southern Europe, tended to be large, with the male breadwinner often unable to earn enough to support a whole family; sons were therefore commonly encouraged or, at times of subsistence crisis, forced, to emigrate to relieve pressure on family resources. This is substantiated in several of the preceding interviews. Some immigrants arrived directly from Italy, while yet others arrived via Argentina and even Australia.

During the Anglo-Boer War, prospective Italian immigrants arrived in Southern Africa from Argentina as grooms, paying their passage by accompanying horses destined for British troops. For example, Ida Peroni's husband arrived in this way. (4) These immigrants, however, soon faced employment uncertainty, as was clearly shown in Consular reports. Others took the risk of illegality. Antonio Introna explains that his father twice tried to enter South Africa by "*jumping ship*" The first time he was caught and sent back. Oral testimony provides further details of how these men survived when they jumped ship; we learn from Ida Peroni that many found their way to Velddrift where they found employment with Stephan

who in 1880 had an estimated 80 fishing boats and employed 600 men. Unfortunately, the number of Italians who worked for Stephan Bros. is unknown, and it is unlikely that records would ever have been kept of these illegal immigrants. Other settlers included Ida Peroni's uncle, *Giovanni Olivari, an officer on board an Italian steamer, I don't remember the name, (arrived in Cape Town) saw a German girl, fell in love and stayed here. At that time you did not need papers. He stayed here, married this seventeen year old girl and opened a boarding house.* (5)

Through the interviews we discover details of the early Sicilian fishing community in Cape Town, which at the turn of the century was dominant in the crayfish industry. In local fishing reports for 1914, Italian fishermen are mentioned and even consulted.(6) However, personal details concerning these men and their employment are only to be found in oral testimony. Thus, Ida Peroni for example explains that, *there was a French company, a Frenchman who sent for a couple of Italians to fish here when crayfish was found, but this was after 1900, but before these, other Italians settled here, they went to hide towards Velddrift, where there was Stephan, to make these Italians stay he found them african wives* (7)

The dominant informal pattern of migrant attraction and increasingly stabilised settlement is revealed in the Rosario Scalabrino interview where he also mentions a Frenchman who went to Italy to recruit fishermen for the crayfish industry. The fishermen came mainly from Castellamare, Trapani, Catania and Messina. As one fishing family arrived and wrote back about the work opportunities in Cape Town, others from the same village or town followed. As Ida Peroni states, *from Castellamare, this is Sicily, came the Scalabrino family, the Bosco family, the Cannone family and*

many others. (8)

But experience was certainly not uniform. Some Italians arrived through organized immigration, as was the case with several families from Milan, imported by the South African Government to establish the silk industry in Knysna. The scheme proved to be a dismal failure. (9)

Sifting through the accumulated oral testimony, it has been possible to see a sustained pattern of social development in the Italian community; thus, one can follow how immigrants learned or adapted their skills. Sometimes, progressively moving outside their initial field of work, they took advantage of new opportunities, starting fresh ventures and sometimes improving and changing old ones. Entrepreneurial success was mainly at an individual level, although life histories provide details not only about businesses but also about their families and other collective aspects of social life. Typically, members of the Italian community met socially at various times of the year when they would gather to celebrate particular feasts or Italian national holidays. Mrs Ida Peroni remembers that in Cape Town the Italian community had a great celebration of cultural affirmation on *venti settembre... (20 September)... that is when Garibaldi united Italy, they all used to go to Moule Point, all bring a paraffin stove, pots and paraffin tin and would go out to the rocks and get the mussels and periwinkles and sea cat, (10) everybody would bring bread, onions, and then everybody would boil little pots, there were pots all round and we would all eat together, then they would bring out their guitars and mandolins and the women would be singing.*

Mrs Ida de Nobrega in the same interview adds that the Italian community in Johannesburg also gathered to celebrate the *twenty settembre*.

These inter-war events were not free of unsettling political influences and

tensions from outside. Gatherings took place at Zoo Lake, on *the nearest Sunday to the 20th of September*. (They) *had bought a piece of ground built a club. In those days there were no buses there were trains, no motor cars just the odd one. We used to have this big , "festa " (feast) Mr Fatti was very kind, he would lend us some of his lorries to bring the food and the " birra "(beer) and the " vino" (wine) they used to drink (it) like water. And you know how much they paid? 7s6d a double, and you eat and you drink till you could no more , go in the train, the lot; and that went on for years, until the trouble started when Mussolinis first started to come ; then there was a Brocco family, they were builders and they had some young sons and they went over for a holiday , and they came back, and of course they came back the big fascisti.* Mrs Ida de Nobrega contends that most Italians in Johannesburg during the Fascist rule in Italy were not really interested in Fascism, *we are not fascisti (they would say) we are Italians, we came out here as Italians, we don't live there and know what all this business is about, you just leave us alone; anyway one thing led to another, and we had Doctor Saporiti , he was the one in charge of the Italian community; and it used to be beautiful. From Pretoria , from all over, all the Italians you could think of used to gather that day. And one day there was a big argument , about politica, (politics) and one of the Brocco boys took out a revolver, Saporiti saw that, and in those days we had a band who played on a cart for the horses, Saporiti got on this cart and he said: "Italiani come here, I want to talk to you, we dont' come here for politica, we come here to enjoy ourselves, to get together , and now you come for the politica, é finita la festa (the party is over) finito," Oh no, oh no " (from the people) And he **finitoed** the festa and there was no more twenty settembre.* As an external influence, Fascism would appear to have been quite a dramatic force, forcing the immigrant community to cease customs

which had now become potentially disruptive. In a less troubled context, Amedeo Traverso in his interview describes the various attempts of the Italian community to form an Italian club in Cape Town, including his own contribution in establishing and constructing the present Italian club at Rugby, near Milnerton.

Italians were active in many key secondary sectors of the economy: from agriculture, irrigation, building and construction to architecture and music. Giuseppe Manca will evidently never be forgotten for his pioneering work in the popularising of classical music and has a significant place in the cultural history of District Six, with his teaching and marketing of opera in a mostly working class Coloured community in Cape Town.

The Moni family, for example, introduced several technical innovations in the wine industry. They were the first to make sparkling wine with the Champenoise method and the first to introduce screw tops on bottles. Giuseppe Lombardi in the Elgin area, established Appletizer fruit juice in order to utilize surplus apples. Raffaele Costa started the olive industry in South Africa. Angelo Rossi invented a new salt-extracting process which was later exported to other parts of the world. The Consani brothers and Marcello Bedin were well known for precision engineering. Mauro Pagliari, now a naturalised South African, is one of the most successful ex-POWs. A skilled engraver, he started a mint, die-making and engraving business in Cape Town after the war. A tribute to his excellent workmanship is the mace for the South African parliament which he worked in solid gold. He not only continues to design and mint gold medals for all occasions, but also designs and makes the insignia on all South African cigarette packets. And his renown is not limited exclusively to his artistic skills, as Pagliari also excels as a "cultural interlocutor".

The Pagliari's house is a social meeting place for many elite South Africans who enjoy his "Italian" hospitality, and through which Italian and South African "high" cultures blend to mutual advantage.

Sometimes people who did not necessarily wish to reproduce a public Italian identity in business life, traded with a name not associated with Italian, such as Petrel Engineering owned by Giuseppe Ceccarelli; or Jacobs and Muller owned by Amedeo Traverso. Informants like Iginio Tonin and Giovanni Colussi did not own their own businesses but worked for others, their testimony providing additional information about the structure of personal work relationships with employers, with whom they sometimes shared a common national identity but from whom they were differentiated by class location.

A classic example is provided by the life history of Giovanni Colussi. The son of a peasant farmer in the province of Pordenone, Colussi came from a large family, and was the seventh of twelve brothers and sisters. At sixteen he went to work at the Bottega's metal workshop in Casarza. (Colussi later married in the Bottega family; his brothers in law eventually settling in Cape Town where they set up their own small wrought iron business). At twenty-one, he completed his army training, but found it impossible to find work as a non-Fascist party member, so in 1930 he decided to join his older brother in Argentina. The brother had already been working as a lift mechanic for Otis for three or four years, so through him he found work immediately; *arrivai alle sei alla mattina a Rosario, alle otto ero già sul lavoro* (I arrived in Rosario at six in the morning, by eight o'clock I was already at work). However, after a few months came the Depression, when work became scarce, *il novanta per cento di quelli che sono andati là, o sono ritornati in Italia o non hanno trovato lavoro.* (ninety per cent of those who

went there either returned to Italy or could not find work) Because of his skills in metal work and lifts he found work with a German firm which was to erect the first grain elevators in Rosario. He worked for them for some time and finally was sent to Uruguay, to instal the fermentation plant for a Brewery. After a few months the "peso" was devalued, so in conditions of economic insecurity, he decided to leave to join yet another brother who had emigrated to South Africa.

This brother, together with another ten or so of his friends, had emigrated to South Africa in 1931; when they landed they were arrested and sent to jail, since they were not in possession of work permits. However, through the Italian consular authorities and with the help of other Italian nationals in Cape Town, they managed to find jobs and were subsequently released. Colussi's brother and two of his friends found work with Nannucci, others were employed by Moni and a number went to work for Rubbi. In 1934, Giovanni Colussi arrived in Cape Town, and found work with Globe Engineering. Since he could not speak English he was only paid a labourer's wage of £1.10s per week. Colussi, like many other Italians, used to frequent the Waldorf restaurant which served as a customary meeting place, and here he was told that Consani was looking for him, as he wanted to offer him a job. Colussi found this strange, for when he had first arrived in Cape Town and had gone to Consani to look for work he had been turned away. Consani gave the excuse that he had employed other Italians who had later proved to be unsatisfactory. The Consani brothers had apparently subsequently heard good reports of Colussi's working abilities, so they offered him £ 7 per week, (which was £1 more than the prescribed skilled weekly wage), to go and work for them. Colussi accepted the offer and after the first month he was given a further increase of £1 per week. When Consani asked him whether he could build truck bodies, Colussi built four

bodies in four weeks, whereas previously a German employee had only been able to produce two in three weeks. In 1936, the whaling station at Langebaan was reopened and Consani won a tender to build seven steam boilers. Colussi was sent to do the work which he completed in six months, as he often worked exhaustive hours. In 1937 he married Bottega's daughter by proxy and decided to leave Consani's because he could no longer bear the pain to his eyes caused by the welding machines. He then went to work for Nannucci, where he had to maintain machinery and vehicles. At the same time he was given the freedom to work independently. Moni also employed him to repair and instal machinery and plant both at the winery and the milling business. Colussi now over eighty, still works at his own leisure in the Nannucci workshop. His working life displays one of the major distinguishing features of local Italian experience: the forging of links with fellow nationals, whether kin, friends or entrepreneurs.

Another twisting and shaping occupational life story is that of Iginio Tonin. Tonin arrived in South Africa as a chauffeur and mechanic for Rubbi in 1924. He had met Rubbi in Italy in the previous year, when Rubbi acquired an Alfa Romeo and Tonin was employed as his chauffeur for several months in that country. When the car was shipped to South Africa in 1924, Tonin accompanied it. This was the first Alfa Romeo to arrive in South Africa. Tonin remained Rubbi's personal chauffeur until 1927. During this period he had to maintain two other motorcars as well, and also repair cement mixers and other machinery used in Rubbis' construction business. He had a good relationship with his paternalist employer. *Rubbi è stato sempre generoso con me. Perché ogni sabato, dopo cena,.... a quei tempi si portava il panciotto, tirava fuori una sterlina d'oro, e mi diceva " Si prenda la Chrysler e vada fuori. " Pochi padroni facevano così.* (Rubbi was

always generous with me. Because every Saturday, after dinner, in those days one wore a waistcoat, he would take out a gold sovereign and would say: " Take the Chrysler and go out ". Very few employers did that.) Tonin worked for Rubbi until 1927 when Rubbi decided to go on holiday to Italy, and took Tonin with him. He recalls that the Rubbis' would normally visit Italy every year, but that during the period between 1924-27 because of work pressure Rubbi could not leave Cape Town. When Tonin arrived in Italy he decided to stay there, and had no wish to return to South Africa as Rubbi's mechanic and chauffeur. He was still willing to work as a chauffeur on a part time basis for Rubbis' in-laws in Italy, (which he did for about a year), but at the same time had started his own business in Italy, breeding chickens commercially.

This business venture did not last long, for in 1929 he was approached by Count Labia,(who had first met Tonin in South Africa when he worked for Rubbi) to go and work for him in South Africa. He met Labia in Venice and was persuaded to return to Cape Town. Tonin recalls in great detail how he helped to affix all the panels on the ceiling, which had been imported from Italy for the "Fort" in Muizenberg. (The residence was built by Count Labia in the 1930s'). He remembers anecdotes about Princess Labia, and details of the household staff. While Tonin was still working for the Labia family, Rubbi offered to help Tonin establish a garage business, as Tonin, whilst working for Rubbi, had often expressed the desire to set up *un garage all'Italiana*, (a garage, Italian style). Therefore, when Rubbi bought a corner block on Strand Street he suggested that Tonin should open "his" garage on the premises and that he would assist him financially. The first year would be rent free. Tonin, however, did not accept this offer. *Io non sono nato per lavorare con il denaro degli altri, sfortunatamente..* (The responsibility) *diventa una cosa troppo pesante per me.*(I was not born to work with other people's money, unfortunately.... it becomes something too heavy for me)

During the war period, in 1941, he was interned at Koffiefontein, but was allowed out after four months when he was asked by Consani to go and work for him. *I started in 1941 and I left in 1968, 29 years for the same firm, I became the maintenance engineer...* In his interview Tonin also provides details about his involvement with Traverso while working for Consani, and further clarifies and expands on Traverso's business activities including his partnership with Isola, who was Tonin's brother in law.

Accumulated oral information covers many aspects of a typical Mediterranean immigrant community, such as the reasons for emigrating, the struggles and successes of their social destinies, the challenges of daily life and the role of women both in the family and in business. Here, many women clearly played a significant social role; for example Mrs Nannucci, Mrs Rubbi and Princess Labia occupied a major patronage role in the social welfare of the community, organising charities and social events as women of status. Class privilege enabled them to assert a public identity, breaking from conventions by which Italian women's roles were usually those of housewives and matriarchs. In addition, Giuseppe Villa and Oreste Nannucci are remembered not only as middle class businessmen but also as generally accepted representatives of the Italian community; often acting as spokesmen, they interceded for members who could not speak local languages or were faced with social and other difficulties. Through this service they sought to embody the "interests" of a settled Italian community. Relations were symbolised by the convention of social superiors offering unpaid assistance to those less fortunate.

A potentially interesting derivative study which takes my preliminary research further, could be constructed around the topic of Second World War Italian Prisoners of War in South Africa, addressing the question of

how their presence and work skills influenced local sectors of the economy; and perhaps even a further social study of the lives of war brides both from here and from Italy. The actual attitudes of ordinary white South Africans towards the wartime value of the skilled labour offered by captive men was vastly different from official discriminatory policy on immigration. The lives of these servicemen as bound labourers on farms, contrasted sharply with those of Italians residing at liberty in South Africa; and furtive contact between these two groups was not uncommon in some rural areas, where most POWs were concentrated. Here, moral and material support was readily given by the few local "free" Italians, mainly women. Mrs Maria Vanzaghi who lived at Worcester, where a large contingent of prisoners was stationed, tells of the risks she took when she would stealthily throw cigarettes into irrigation ditches where she knew Italian POWs were digging, saying "sotto voce", "*Sono Italiana*" (I am Italian). Her regular visits to POW-labour farms in the Worcester district at Christmas time provided food and encouragement for small batches of men away from home. Her house at Worcester also served as a meeting point for these POWs, where she would feed them and look after them when they were sick. She even acted as intermediary for messages and letters to their families, oblivious and uncaring of her husband's fears that one day they might be arrested as a result of her politically risky philanthropic concern, for as she herself said, *ero giovane*. (I was young)

For example, Mrs Vanzaghi remembers one Christmas when she and her husband went to visit farms in the Worcester district where she knew there were Italian prisoners, to distribute pasta, wine, and cakes. When they arrived at a farm and saw that prisoners were still working late on Christmas Eve, Mrs Vanzaghi could not contain herself. Disregarding her husband's orders to be quiet, she spoke : *Domani é Natale e voi altri*

siete ancora qui a lavorare. Mettete giù quella zappa li (Tomorrow is Christmas and you are still here working. Put down that hoe) *Ci ho fatto metter giù la zappa e questi qui sono rimasti. Ho detto: "Adesso venite con me "* (I made them put down their hoes and they were quite stunned. I told them: "Now come with me"). *Ma c'era questo foreman che é venuto dritto; ci ho detto :* (But this foreman came straight to me (and) I told him " *Don't you know what is tomorrow? Tomorrow is Christmas day! And these boys are all dirty. They must get washed, they must prepare!*" *For they had nothing. Non avevano niente, perché come ho visto, avevano là una pignatta di quelle di ferro, là fuori, sa, sul fuoco..... come i neri li trattavano* (For they had nothing , because, as I saw, they only had an iron pot, outside, you know, on the fire..... they were treated like Blacks.....) *Non tutte le farm, devo dire, perché tanti li hanno trattati molto bene, come il Marais. "* (not every farm, I must say, because many treated them very well, like Marais.) ... *Dopo ci siamo salutati, ci ho lasciato quello che dovevo lasciarci, ci ho detto: "Domani li devi portare giù alla Messa, perché domani é Natale, perché noi, ho detto, siamo Cattolici, dobbiamo...devono andare alla Messa". Credo li hanno portati.* (After that, we exchanged greetings, I left what I brought for them, and I said: Tomorrow you must bring them to Mass, because tomorrow is Christmas, and because we are Catholics, we must.... they must go to Mass. I believe they were taken).

After the end of the Second World War, Maria Vanzaghi dutifully looked after a small section of the Catholic Cemetery in Worcester, where the POWs who had died in the area during wartime were buried. At her own expense, she undertook the building of gravestones, and attended to all repairs of the tombs; on the day of All Souls, in November, she made sure that there were always flowers on each grave. Now, frail and in her eighties, she has handed over the task of looking after that special corner of the cemetery to her brother and sister-in-law, Luigi and Speranza Caretoni. Each year, in

early November, on the Sunday nearest to All Souls day, a Holy Mass is celebrated at various cemeteries in South Africa in remembrance of deceased Italian POWs. Worcester is no exception; a large number of Italians attend from the surrounding districts as well as from Cape Town, including official representatives of the Italian Government, to worship at the cemetery at Worcester for the occasion. After the ceremony, some are invited for refreshments at the Carettonis' house; later they all proceed to a predetermined location, usually a camping site in the surrounding areas, where the women have prepared a Pantagruelian picnic, enlivened by singing and dancing, a cultural survival of pre-World War II gatherings mentioned by Ida Peroni and Ida de Nobrega.

Some of the interview work undertaken for this study was as revealing of the attitudes and consciousness of South Africans as that of Italians. South Africans commonly held preconceived ideas and stereotyped concepts about Italians and their occupations. For some, Italians were only road builders, while for others they were only engineers, or only restaurateurs and barbers. When explaining that I was trying to discover the Italian contribution to the economic development of the Western Cape, the usual comment that followed was, "was there any?" Then, there were the more technical problems related to interviewing methods. I soon discovered that a more relaxed and unstructured approach resulted in a better interview. Sometimes information of a confidential nature was supplied but asked not to be recorded. Preliminary interviews were often not very helpful. My personal experience substantiates Margaret Brooks' point that they *removed some of the spontaneity from the actual recording* (11) Indeed, they often proved a disadvantage when the full interview eventually took place, as the information supplied was partial and missing significant detail.

Often, listening to interviews, I was reminded of my own experiences as a child of a later generation immigrant and felt that the life experiences I had faced reflected some fundamental continuities with those of earlier-twentieth century Italian immigrants. Equally, in terms of factors such as educational opportunity, they reflected some crucial contrasts. I first came to Africa aged twelve in 1957, when I accompanied my mother and brother to join my father in Southern Rhodesia (*Zimbabwe*). My father had been working for the past six months as a camp supervisor for IMPRESIT, an Italian construction company formed for the Kariba Dam project. He, like many Italians who had been to Africa before, suffered from the tendency commonly called "*mal d'Africa*" ("Africa sickness") an Italian saying that once you have been to Africa you always have a craving to return. During the Second World War, as a soldier with the Italian forces, my father had visited Eritrea, Tripolitania and Abyssinia, so in 1956 when IMPRESIT was seeking personnel for the Kariba project, he jumped at the opportunity of returning to Africa.

The residential village at Kariba Heights, built on a hill in the middle of the African bush, consisted of a community of about two thousand people. It resembled an isolated Italian village where everyone spoke Italian, ate Italian food, which was imported especially, and in which there was even an Italian priest. The village was not without the usual social scandals and jealousies typical of any small, enclosed community. While IMPRESIT had organised a Company Italian school for children up to primary school-leaving level, there were, however, no facilities for the few of us of high school-going age. Parents were thus faced with a dilemma; either they had to send their children to an English boarding school or leave them at home. By chance, there were two English children of my own age who were at a boarding school in Salisbury (*Harare*) and whose parents also worked at Kariba. My parents, against the vocal advice of fellow Italians, decided that

my education was important and, not without trepidation, I was entrusted to these two boys of my own age, put on an aeroplane and sent to the same school. I could not speak a word of English, had never been in a boarding school before or worn a uniform, and the food and cultural arrangements were strange to me.

As I was the only Italian boy in the school I was treated both as a novelty and as an oddity. Like many earlier immigrants, my experience of integration was an uneven one. The majority of pupils and teachers wanted to meet me, and were mostly very helpful; needless to say I was subjected to the usual boyish pranks of all school children when I did not not always master the correct English expressions and words; more seriously, I have a vivid recollection of the social prejudice I endured when fellow schoolboys, mostly children of newly arrived English immigrants, openly attacked me as an Italian and drew a guilt association with Fascism and Mussolini. Yet Fascism had never been discussed at home, and as far as I was concerned it belonged to Italy's past. I could not easily defend myself, but it did serve to increase my determination to learn the language and deepen the assimilationist desire to overcome social and cultural discrimination and be accepted into a host community. As school progressed I increasingly learned to master essential vocabulary, and my progress with the language was sufficiently good to earn me Form promotion with my classmates. My Italian-speaking parents were delighted: but, paradoxically, my absorption of English speaking culture had now made them socially dependent on me. I remember always having to go with them as an interpreter on the few occasions on which they came to the city, and later, when my father decided to settle in Rhodesia after the completion of the dam, to accompany him on job interviews. I always detested what for me were awkward "Italian" excursions.

On the few occasions that my parents came to town we would go and eat at "Guido's", a boarding house essentially similar to the many Cape Town boarding houses recalled in interviews. The house was initially rented and run by an Italian called Guido, and a partner, Maria, who did all the cooking. Her husband, of Tuscan origin, was a mechanic who worked in the interior and only came home at weekends. The house, later purchased by the couple, was conveniently situated in the centre of Salisbury. An ordinary single storey colonial house in appearance, it had a long running verandah which had been enclosed and which served as a dining area where there were about twenty tables. On one side of the dwelling there were three double bedrooms where the beds were let on a monthly or daily rate to single Italian men who required temporary accommodation. The bathroom was shared by the occupants of the bedrooms as well as by the diners. On the other side of the house was the kitchen and another three rooms which were used as living quarters by the owners. The boarding house served lunch and dinner mainly to single Italians who were for the most part artisans; these constituted the regulars who ate there every day and paid a monthly rate. When passing Italians who arrived from Italy, or who worked elsewhere, came to the capital, either alone or with their families, they would invariably come to Guido's. Since the Italian community in the 1950s' and 1960s' was relatively small, Guido's became a social meeting place for all.

This social experience must have caught echoes of the first encounters of Italian migrants in Cape Town in the earlier twentieth century. Nor was the food vastly different from that served by Mrs Ida Peroni when she ran her boarding house in Napier street, from the mid 1930s to 1950. She had taken over the boarding house from another Italian who had started it a

few years previously. Her boarders were generally single fishermen. And Mrs. Peroni's menu in 1938 did not differ greatly from Guido's. For 2s6d, Peroni supplied, salami, boiled meats, salad, fish, depending on the fish caught on the day by her husband, coffee and brandy.

Guido's meal consisted of a first course, pasta or rice, the meat dish of the day or a steak, fruit and coffee, was served with wine or beer and the whole meal cost 10s6d. It was a case of first come first served, and often one had to wait; if all the seats at a table were not taken you would be asked to share your table, which was also a good way of meeting people, and to make useful work contacts and other exchanges. In later years, Guido's was discovered by non-Italian locals who enjoyed simple Italian food, and to accomodate these new customers as well, it changed in character, and thus lost its basic Italian boarding house flavour.

As I grew older and increased my education, I became more involved in the local Anglophone community and only mixed with Italians when I was with my parents during school holidays or on university vacations. My brother and I spoke English to one another and spoke English when we mixed with other Italians of our own age; sometimes it was the only way we could communicate with them, as often at home they spoke only their regional dialects and not "standard" Italian. Most people knew each other, and regional differences were often forgotten; even though there were some rivalries and petty jealousies. Although the community was certainly not a classless one, people generally helped one another through networks of mutual aid and neighbourliness; and a shared Catholic religion was a binding force. When I left university and returned to Italy I lost touch with the members of the Italian community. Later, when my father retired in 1976 and my parents returned to live in Italy, I was told that immediately

prior to, and after, Zimbabwe's independence, many other Italians had left the country and had emigrated to Italy or South Africa.

By sifting through information collected in the course of this oral research project, together with additional historical help in the form of both oral and written cross references, one can begin to reconstruct a representative pattern of Italian life in the Western Cape which previous writings have not fully captured. This reconstruction has been based very largely on the contribution and experiences of ordinary immigrant individuals. My own history forms a tiny part of that pattern. Obviously, much remains to be documented. The growing historiography of urban Cape Town has not yet properly dealt with questions of white immigrant experience (12); in many ways much of the Italian historical experience reflected in this study has also been a Capetonian experience. For, in one sense, it has been as partially or fully assimilated "Capetonians" that the Italian community has expanded or contracted, and has struggled or prospered; it has been as Italian Capetonians that individuals have changed their trades or occupations, moved along the scale of social class, and have gained or lost friends and partners. Such migrant experience has always embodied both continuity and contrast; while settlers of the 1950s' and 1960s' were not impoverished Sicilian fishermen and have included large commercial farmers such as Saporetti, Ferrucci or Ciman, or factory owners like Riva, their numbers have continued to include "traditional" immigrant workers, such as tailors, like Tagliaro and Porcelli, and barbers such as Papa. For these men, craft work was to remain a life-time occupation. It is their stories and those of yet others which will illustrate the web of active culture, skills, and pride within local Italian society. And therefore, in concluding I hope that this work might be instructive and stimulating to

fellow students in oral history and encourage further research in the pursuit of **ORAL TESTIMONY**, especially of those vibrant immigrant experiences that await further exploration.

Notes to Conclusion

- 1) P. Thompson, *Voice*, (new edn.), p. 75
- 2) *Ibid*, p.76
- 3) See for example, M.E. Aube, " Oral History and the Remembered World," *International Journal of Oral History*, 10,1,(1989) pp.31-49; T.Lummis, *Listening to History*, (Hutchinson, London, 1987) ;R.Samuel and P.Thompson (eds) *The Myths we Live By*, (Routledge, London, *in press*).
- 4) *My husband was about seventeen (when) his father took him to Argentina. There was a ship that sailed with horses. he offered to work with horses in order to come to South Africa*. Ida Peroni interview, 26.10.1982
- 5) I. Peroni interview, 26 October 1982
- 6) Marine Biological Report, No 2, (Cape Times ; Government Printers 1914) pp. 36-40
- 7) In a subsequent interview in English, 2 April 1984, the wives are " *afrikaans*" It is also interesting to note that the census figures represented some Coloureds as Italians.
- 8) Bini, in *Italiani*, confirms that there were about 70 Italian fishermen by 1910: pp.17-23
- 9) Ida Peroni interview 26.October 1982 ; *in 1881 Angelo Mangiagalli arrived, with him were the families Sciacotti ,the Pontissa , no Pontiggia, Canovi, Toma , Caccia , they asked them to produce silk.....but they were made fools of, because they came and found nothing. You will read the story"* in the Cape Argus, 26 October 1963
- 10) Ida Peroni interview , 2 April 1984, 'sea-cat', 'chokka', i.e. calamari.
- 11) Seldon and Pappworth, *Word of Mouth*, p. 68
- 12) See for example, C.Saunders et al(eds), *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, Vols 1-6 (University of Cape Town, 1979-1986)

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ROSSI G.	CAPE TOWN 1984
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SAPORETTI C.	CAPE TOWN 1982
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TONIN I.	CAPE TOWN 1982-1984
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TRAVERSO A.	CAPE TOWN 1982-1984
VANZAGHI M. nee Caretoni	WORCESTER 1982-1984
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Avondo L.	Banker (Cape Town 1983)
Bertoncello P.	Building Firm (Paarl 1984)
Busi F.	Building Firm (Cape Town 1984)
Calabresi F.	Italian Consul (Cape Town 1982)
Ciman L.	Pig Farmer (Malmsbury 1984)
Celotti A.	Building Firm (Cape Town 1984)
Colpi A. (Fr.)	Consolata Missionary (Cape Town 1982)
Delle Donne I. (Mrs)	Cheese maker (Klipheuveld 1984)
Di Santo L.	Farmer (Riviersonderend 1983)
Della Cia G.	Wine Maker (Stellenbosch 1982)
Ferrucci D. (Mrs)	Chicken Farmer (Paarl 1985)
Ferrucci F.	Chicken Farmer (Paarl 1985)
Grandi G.	Precision Engineering Firm (Cape Town 1986)
Girolo A.	Restaurateur (Cape Town 1983)
Gabbani L.	Restaurateur (Cape Town 1984)
Lincerì T.	Chef (Cape Town 1984)
Lorenzi G.	Panel Beating Firm (Cape Town 1984)
Merola F.	Italian Embassy Official (Cape Town 1983)
Marsiglia M.	Sanitary ware Firm (Cape Town 1984)
Marchesini A.	Tile Firm (Cape Town 1982)
Pugliese I.	C.M.T. Firm (Cape Town 1984)
Pondiani F.	Restaurateur (Cape Town 1985)
Porcelli C.	Tailor (Cape Town 1985)
Riva L.	Plastics Firm (Cape Town 1984)
Ramazzotti S.	M.D. Textile Firm (Cape Town 1983)
Rallo G.	Fisherman / Shopkeeper (Cape Town 1986)
Toscanini G.	Stove Firm (Cape Town)

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