

Italians in South Africa: Challenges in the Representation of an *Italian* Identity

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Abstract

Through a selection of material written by Italians in South Africa, this study aims to discuss the difficulties and challenges faced by Italian emigrant writers in representing their identity. The study places itself in the context of other studies in the field of i/emigrant, minority and ethnic studies in as much as the body of work, similarly to i/emigrant texts written in other parts of the world, has been to date considered of marginal significance or has not been examined at all. This study instead considers the opportunities of analysis that texts such as these represent and offers motivations for the need to engage with them. To analyse these texts offers the possibility to observe the relative status of the reader/critic and also to be open to the process of identity creation which does not exist in a vacuum but rather through the exchange and relations held between people of different linguistic, socio-political, historical and cultural backgrounds. With specific regard to material written by Italians in South Africa, an area in which research has up to now been fairly limited, it is argued that the tendency is for writers to emphasise a nationalistic and patriotic definition of *Italian* identity. This is in part as a result of the pressure emigrants face when confronted by their new cultural, linguistic and geographic setting. The tendency towards patriotic and nationalistic sentiment has also been encouraged during specific moments of Italy's history, and that is, the years leading up to Italy's unification and declaration of its nationhood status (the Risorgimento) and during fascism. The texts analysed are a letter (dated 1833) of a settler to the Cape, one Rocco Catoggio; the war time diary (published in a literary and political Italian newspaper in 1901) by a certain Camillo Ricchiardi, a volunteer and Boer sympathiser during the South African War (1889 - 1902); newspaper articles published by Italian Prisoners of War in the Zonderwater Camp during the Second World War and the biography and chronology by Adolfo G. Bini on the history of Italians in South Africa.

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Per Papà

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation examines a limited selection of material produced by Italians in South Africa from the nineteenth to the twentieth century with a view to considering its relevance to the creation of an Italian identity within the South African context. The central question of this dissertation concerns the disputed and contested notion of Italian identity and how this is represented within a literary and textual format by writers who travelled, settled and/or were held captive in South Africa as Italian Prisoners of War.

My decision to examine the question of Italian identity from the perspective of Italians writing outside of Italy (mostly emigrants) is informed by the notion that identity is continually created and negotiated through the encounter with social, cultural, linguistic, political and geographical difference. This of course is not only true to Italians but also of other nationalities, ethnicities and groupings of people. However, as Donna R. Gabaccia points out, Italians have typically been a highly mobile people both within their own country and outside of Italy's borders (Gabaccia 2000, p. 1). Gabaccia further argues that it is specifically travellers, migrant workers, immigrants and other displaced Italians who contribute to the development of an Italian identity and who have in the past caused changes and disruptions to this identity (Gabaccia 2000, p. 5). This notion is reinforced also by other critics who argue that Italian identity can best be understood from a position of marginality or otherness. From this perspective, the construction (or deconstruction) of identity is possible because of the interaction of multiple voices and in particular through the representation of identity by marginal, *other* and generally different voices of i/emigrants (Verdicchio 1997, preface), (Boelhower 1987). In discussing the American context, Anthony Tamburri in *A Semiotic of Ethnicity* (Tamburri 1998) sees the need to "offer a specific taxonomy of how ... to otherwise consider the Italian/American writer in this age of semiotics, poststructuralism, and the like."

(Tamburri 1998, p. vii) He also sees the role of ethnic or minority literature as "the dislodging and debunking of negative stereotypes." He continues, "In turn, through the natural dynamics of intertextual recall and inference, the reader engages in a process of analytical inquiry and comparison of the ethnic group(s) in question with other ethnic groups as well as with the dominant culture." (Tamburri 1998, p. 4).

Although I am partly critical with regards to the extent to which semiotic approaches when applied to emigrant texts succeed in questioning dominant culture (for reasons to be discussed later), I see in the approaches of critics such as Tamburri and Boelhower as useful tools for the discussion of the texts which I have selected. Also as will be discussed, the limited amount of material written by Italians in South Africa in itself affects the extent to which it is possible to discuss the effects of semiotics and poststructuralism in Italian emigrant works in the country. My study has nonetheless been motivated by the desire to extend and expand research in an area to date almost entirely ignored.

Guided by theoretical concerns regarding the emigrant fiction developed in other parts of the world, my aim is to offer an initial description of how Italian identity is represented in the following texts: a letter (dated 1833) by one Rocco Catoggio, a settler to the Cape; the war time diary of a certain Camillo Ricchiardi, a volunteer and Boer sympathiser during the South African war; a selection of material from newspapers printed by Italian prisoners of war at the Zonderwater Camp near Cullinan during the Second World War and a work by an established member of the Italian community in the Cape, Adolfo G. Bini, who in 1957 published a memoir and biography of Italians in South Africa.

The study of textual representations by Italian emigrants raises a number of questions which I briefly introduce here. Emigrants are typified by their experience of being between cultures, of no longer being Italian and of not identifying with the culture of their new host country. This tension is typically discussed in terms of the generational progression of emigrants whereby new generations born in the country of adoption are considered better acculturated than their parents or grandparents. In this study I do not specifically turn to questions of generational distance from Italy but I intend to focus more directly on how the writers selected represent their identity: have they embraced their Italian identity, promoted their new South African identity or attempted to create a hybrid identity for themselves? In this regard, a number of other topics will be introduced in the discussion including the complexities of representing a national identity, questions around the status of the works (which also regards the choice of language by the writers) and the notion of the representation of *ethnicity* as an alternative to national definitions of identity.

My approach in the analysis of these texts will be that of discussing the question of Italian identity in a composite and inter-relational way and of exposing the existence of a multiplicity of points of view or of “voices”, what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as the heteroglossia or plural possibilities of language (Bakhtin 1990 (first published 1981)). The fact of being in South Africa, irrespective of what language these writers addressed themselves in, will be seen to in some way have influenced the creation of their Italian identity. Thus it is that I discuss as the subtext of Rocco Catoggio’s letter his relations with different social and ethnic groups in the Cape at the time: the Dutch, British settlers, his immediate family, his slaves and Africans. Or in the case of Camillo Ricchiardi’s *Diario* I consider notions of class and rank through an analysis of his relations with the Boers, with the Italian volunteers as well as the British soldiers officers and civilians. This “situational” or “contextual” approach is also valid for the articles written by the Italian POWs and Adolfo Bini’s chronology.

Still with regards to the approach used in this study, none of the texts selected here aim towards the creation of artifice through a narrative, fictional plot and in this way raise the question of what should be defined as “fictional”. In effect the study spans various disciplines including letter-writing, political writing (Ricchiardi’s *Diario*), journalism (of a kind) and biographical and chronological (historical) writing. I justify my use of these different texts on the basis that it has been widely recognised in academic discourse that it can be very difficult, if at all possible, to differentiate between fictional and non-fictional writing in as much as all writing on some level entails the creation of artifice and fiction.

In the dissertation I propose a brief historical overview of the situation of Italian immigration to South Africa as well as issues such as the rapport of Italian immigrants with Italy and official Italian institutions in South Africa (Chapter 2). I then present a brief description of the material available on the presence of Italians in South Africa, from an Italian as well as from a South African perspective (Chapter 3). This section is followed by some general theoretical considerations on the questions and problems facing the analysis of Italian identity when represented outside of Italy, the topics include discussions on ethnicity, postmodern approaches to ethnic texts, nationalism, regionalism and the subaltern status of works such as the ones discussed here (Chapter 4). The main body of the dissertation (Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8) presents a detailed analysis of the four selected texts (working in a chronological order) on the basis of the theoretical questions raised earlier which is followed by my concluding remarks (Chapter 9).

Chapter 2

Historical Background

A brief history of the Italian immigration to South Africa follows as well as a discussion on the type of emigration which developed here and a comment on the official relations between Italy and South Africa. This hopefully will provide a backdrop and context to the question of the representation of an Italian identity within South Africa.

Generally speaking, the emigration to South Africa can be characterised as numerically small in contrast to emigrations in other parts of the world. Gabriele Sani's view of the Italian emigration to South Africa is that it has always been characterised as small but unique emigration. Speaking of the first settlers of Italian origin, the Piedmontese Huguenots, he writes: "It is possible to notice that here for the first time appears the uniqueness that even since this first phase will remain a constant in the history of the Italian community in South Africa: an emigration characterised from its origins by its peculiar nature, different to every other Italian emigration experience." (Sani 1989, p. 15).

Sani makes a case for the possibility of ancient Roman discoveries and travels to the Southern African region (Sani 1989, p. 3) and discusses possible early travels by Italians during the Middle Ages (Sani 1989, pp. 4-8). However, according to Sani (1989) the history of Italian migration to South Africa begins with the arrival of the Piedmontese Valdesi Huguenots to the Cape from the Netherlands. As a result of religious persecution from the Savoy monarchy in Piedmont around 1685, the Valdesi fled from Italy first to France and then to Holland where they were allowed to settle. Shortly after, the Valdesi settlers were offered the possibility to travel to the Cape V.O.C. colony established in 1652. In 1688 and 1689 the first Piedmontese Valdesi arrived in the Cape together with other Dutch settlers. It is not known how many Valdesi settled in the Cape, Sani estimates that the Valdesi could have

accounted for two to three hundred people in the colony at the time (which numbered a total of around seven hundred people). Sani, however, does point out that given the circumstances of the Valdesi's migrations, it is unlikely that they would have maintained their own distinctive "national" or cultural identity for long, and that their assimilation within the community of the Cape colony probably occurred fairly easily and rapidly (Sani 1989, p. 15).

During the eighteenth century Italians travelled intermittently to South Africa, mostly destined to the Cape, they generally were missionaries and traders. Some of their experiences were recorded in travel journals, through correspondences or official records of the Dutch colony (Sani 1989, pp. 15-6). There also exists some archival material identified by Sani with regards to specific commercial interest by the Duchy of Tuscany in the spice route to the East through the Cape (Sani 1989, pp. 16-7).

The end of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century brought about significant changes in the Cape which had consequences to the immigration and settlement of Italians. There was continued economic interest in the area from Europe while at the same time the residents in the Cape continued to consolidate numerically and financially. The political situation in Europe following the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars effectively resulted in British occupation of the Cape colony which was to have an effect also on the settlement of Italians in South Africa. As Sani points out, British occupation and control of the Cape favoured renewed European as well as Italian interest in the area, in part due to the greater religious tolerance expressed by Britain in comparison to the Calvinist outlook of the Dutch. Sani describes the lives of some of the immigrants and settlers to the area who became well established¹. Among the settlers mentioned by Sani is one Rocco Catoggio whose letter to his family is the subject of analysis in Chapter 5 and whose arrival to the Cape was directly linked to the political situation in Europe and the Napoleonic wars.

The nineteenth century was marked by the establishment and expansion of British colonial rule in Southern and South Africa; territorial conflicts of settlers with neighbouring African chiefdoms and the settlement of Afrikaners (following the Great Trek) towards Natal, the Eastern Highveld (now Mpumalanga) and the Transvaal. It is possible to find references to Italians of very varied backgrounds who worked,

¹Sani cites for example a certain Antonio Chiappini, a successful merchant originally from Florence; Willem Bartholomé Eduard Paravacini di Capelli, a Dutch officer of Italian origin; an artisan by the name of Nigrini; Vincenzo Pallotti, a priest and one Tito Omboni a doctor and traveller (Sani 1989, pp. 21- 24).

traded, and settled in South Africa in a number of ways during this period, some linked to the British colony, some trading throughout South Africa (including with Boers and Africa chiefdoms), some employed as transient manual workers in large construction enterprises, others providing skilled or specialised labour and expertise (Sani 1989, pp. 25-42).

The mineral discoveries first in the diamond fields of Kimberley in the 1870's and then on the Witwatersrand significantly altered the nature of the immigration to South Africa and coincided with the beginnings of mass migrations from Italy. Initially leaving Italy as migrant labourers with the intent to return to Italy, many Italians later chose to settle in countries which provided them with work such as Brazil, Argentina, the United States, Canada, other European countries and also South Africa. Some were known to travel from country to country in search of work, so that for example, some traders and workers arriving in South Africa had already worked in other countries such as Argentina, California, Alaska and Australia. A number of reports and publications in particular have provided an idea of the type of life and the numerical consistency of the Italian communities at the time in South Africa. Among these is the research conducted by missionary Giacomo Wietzecker sent to the Kimberley diamond fields by the Italian Royal Geographic Society. The Italian Geographical Society gave the number of Italians living in South Africa as 160 (Weitzecker 1987, p. 755). In 1888 the Italian Geographic Society followed up Wietzecker's initial report by sending questionnaires to the Italian institutions in South Africa as part of their broader research on Italian emigration outside of Europe. In the final publication (Unknown 1890), the only information present was on Italians in the Kimberley area. It is unknown, as Sani points out whether this was because no other parts of South Africa were considered or whether only Kimberley responded to the request (Sani 1989, pp. 44-5). The report put the number of Italians at about 230 people. Official Italian statistics of the same period are available but are considered unreliable, a census for the year 1881 calculated a total of 79 Italians for the whole of South Africa, and in 1891 figures quote 280 people, both are highly improbable. Another set of highly interesting reports were written by a number of ship officers on board of the ship *Cristoforo Colombo* which had been sent specifically, at the beginning of 1899, to the coasts of the Cape and Natal in order to collect information of an economic and commercial nature on the English colonies in those areas².

The above mentioned reports, research by Sani and others describe the settlers as

²Two reports of particular are of interest that of Tenant Micchiardi (Micchiardi 1899) and another signed by ship officers Dentice and E. Bruzagli (Dentice & Bruzagli 1899?).

being involved in a variety of commercial activities, including mine work (both as labourers and in more specialised capacities) and in secondary activities owning private enterprises (restauranters or hotel owners). Many were also involved in farming especially around the Johannesburg region and some achieved some success (Sani 1989, pp. 47-49). There were also a number of building contractors and specialised workers and artisans. Unfortunately, given the scarcity of writings by these settlers it is difficult to generalise on the creation of their identity and self-perceptions at the time.

The South African War (Anglo-Boer War) (1899-1902) resulted in a wide-spread pro-Boer sentiment among many members of the Italian community resident in South Africa and specifically on the Rand at the time; it also resulted in arrivals of Italians from Italy and other parts of the world who joined the volunteer corps and took up arms on the side of the Boers, as will be seen in Chapter 6. In the years directly following the end of the Anglo-Boer war, the British restricted to eight people a month the number of Italians who could be granted a pass into the Transvaal. This meant that despite the fact that many Italians applied to travel to South Africa, attracted by the prospect of the on-going work of the mines and the continuing development of the Rand, only very few new settlers were allowed in the Transvaal. (The British restriction did not preclude settling in other parts of the country.) The demand for travel permits to South Africa was such that the newly formed Commissariat for Emigration in Italy (Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione - CGE) issued a formal notification advising people applying to emigrate to South Africa to consider alternative destinations (Sani 1989, p. 148). The Italian Government, in response to the continued interest expressed by prospective emigrants to travel to South Africa, and curious to know the work possibilities available in South Africa, sent a number of delegations to South Africa to verify the working conditions and work availability in the post-war years. Italy also remained engaged with its Consulate sections on the same issue. However, the consensus by these official bodies was that the working conditions, particularly on the mines, were not adequate and that emigration to South Africa should be discouraged. This in part contributed to the decline in emigration to South Africa following the South African War and the First World War. Although sporadic emigration continued to occur, the trend, Sani notices was towards a consolidation of the relatively small community between the two World Wars (Sani 1989, p. 178).

The outbreak of World War II and the internment in South Africa of large numbers of Italian prisoners of war (POWs), captured mostly by the British in North Africa, had the effect of increasing emigration to South Africa and of contributing substantially

to the Italian emigrant community as it exists today. As a result of having lived in South Africa for an extended period (some up to six years), many POWS chose to return after the war to establish themselves. A number were given permission to remain in South Africa without returning first to Italy as required by the Geneva Convention. For others repatriation was merely a formality before returning to South Africa, attracted by the prospects they had seen during their time of imprisonment and some daunted by the prospect of the mass destruction of Italy and Europe.

The years immediately after World War II (in South Africa) were marked by the debate on immigration in Parliament, won by Smuts' United Party, in 1947. Under this policy approximately sixty thousand immigrants were allowed into South Africa between 1947-8 (Davenport 1987, p. 354). Sani also confirms, this mentioning that out of the 28.839 immigrants who entered South Africa in 1947, 945 were Italian (Sani 1989, p. 288). The victory of the Nationalist Party (N.P.) in 1948 however marked an immediate halt in Smuts' immigrant policy as the N.P. had won the election in part on a "poor white" ticket, that is through the promise of securing work for its less privileged, white, Afrikaans voters. The question of the "poor whites" came to represent an ongoing debate within South African politics as the N.P. tried to balance what it believed was an ongoing important voting draw card with the demands presented by the mining and manufacturing sector. These industries generally required a continual and large supply of cheap, unskilled workers. Changes within industry's needs, such as during the 1950's where there was a shortage of skilled labour, provoked tensions between the Nationalists and the private sector which did eventually lead to the falling away, at least officially, of a colour bar. From the above it can be seen that the immigration policies in South Africa have been historically susceptible to the political climate and developments in the country.

From an Italian perspective, the immediate post war years and the socialist victory in 1948 in Italy brought about concerns in some sectors regarding financial security and stability of investment. As Sani discusses, there is evidence that a number of Italian investors arrived in South Africa in the 1950's and 60's (Sani 1989, pp. 288-90). In those years, and despite South Africa's mixed feelings towards foreign immigration, a number of large Italian corporations opened branches in South Africa (such as Fiat, Olivetti, Iveco among others), Italian-South African business partnerships fostered well-known local companies and a number of individuals achieved economic success (Sani 1989, pp. 294-308).

By the mid-eighties, under the political pressure of economic, cultural and sporting sanctions imposed on South Africa by countries around the world, a significant

amount of Italian investment withdrew from the country. Political relations with South Africa cooled substantially, much to the indignation of the local Italian community, as recorded by Sani and Giuliani-Ballestrino. This sense of abandonment was strongly felt and undoubtedly worked towards the creation of distrust of official Italian representations in South Africa as well as widening the affective gap towards Italy. This distance is typical of emigrant communities which in many ways maintain idealised and outdated images of their home country. In the case of South Africa, however, the distance was particularly felt because of the political rift which developed between the Italian community in South Africa and Italy. Additionally, the cultural isolation of South Africa increased the emigrant experience of being at odds with the country of origin. For many Italians in South Africa, Italy was in many ways a country with which they were no longer familiar from an ideological and political point of view³.

Since 1994, official Italian institutions have resumed more convivial relations with South Africa which has led to the signing of agreements on a commercial, scientific and cultural level. In 1993 the Italian community comprising of registered citizens living in South Africa numbered around forty thousand, although, this figure could be an underestimation as it is guessed that a number of Italians are not registered with the consulate offices around the country. The estimated number of people of Italian descent who have become naturalised South African citizens is an additional sixty thousand people (Giuliani-Ballestrino 1995, pp. 85-6). Although there appear to be few official, detailed publications released by Italian representative bodies in South Africa with regards to the economic and social make-up of the community, it is generally recognised that the Italians in South Africa constitute a well-established and relatively affluent sector of the country (Giuliani-Ballestrino 1995, p. 86). This leads Giuliani-Ballestrino to comment in her book *Gli Italiani in Sud Africa* that "in contrast with other communities of our emigrants, the community established in South Africa has had more economic advantages and fewer hardships" (Giuliani-Ballestrino 1995, p. 87).

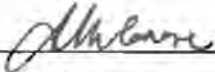
The history of colonialism, white dominance and segregation in South Africa have deeply marked the nature of the emigration and settlement of Italians in South Africa which differs noticeably from immigrations to other parts of the world. Although sometimes viewed with distrust, considered different, stereotyped, and in some cases even imprisoned⁴, Italians were never discriminated against on racial lines. This is a defining feature of Italian emigration to South Africa, but an aspect which has hardly

³See also Sani (1989, pp. 303-4)

⁴Here I refer to the camps created for Italians living in South Africa who were perceived to be political agitators, for example the camp of Koffiefontein in the Free State.

Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited or referenced.



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(MLNALE003)

Signed this 5 day of Sept. 2002.

been considered and on which very little material exists. Significantly, for Pasquale Verdicchio, the sense of identity of an immigrant community is developed among other things through the relationships with "other established national communities" and the position taken up in the already-established hierarchy and order (Verdicchio 1997, p. 98). In the case of South Africa then, it is clear that a discussion on Italian immigration would not be complete without a consideration of how Italians relate and have related to and fitted into the hierarchical and racial stratifications of South Africa.

Chapter 3

Review of Literature on Italians in South Africa

In this section I aim to present a comment on the secondary material available on the issue of the representation of identity by Italians living in South Africa. The material I have used can be divided into three main areas: Italian, Italian South African and South African. Generally speaking, the areas are defined by the language the texts are written in and where they have been published, so that typically, the Italian secondary works to which I refer have been written in Italian and published in Italy; Italian South African works have been written and published locally (either in Italian or English) and South African commentaries and references have been published in South Africa. There are of course exceptions to this, and precisely because the texts to which I have referred form part of a larger context or literature, I believe it would be more helpful to refer to the secondary sources as having been written from an “Italian” perspective, from an “Italian South African” perspective and from a “South African” perspective, irrespective of what language they have been written in, the place of publication or the nationality of the author. Significantly however, these three perspectives also suggest that the construction of an Italian identity is dependent on the perspective from which it is being observed, so that an “Italian” work may reveal certain preconceived ideas or biases regarding emigrant communities, or that typically, the same works create a distance between Italians and emigrants. This can be contrasted to an Italian South African perspective in which the experiences are recounted first hand and in which writers are both the subject and object of the emigrant experience.

As already mentioned, a preliminary search for material on Italians in South Africa revealed that the material is scarce and that it is varied both in terms of genre and in terms of quality. Unfortunately, with the exception of a few works, most of the texts

do not attempt interpretation and analysis of the question of identity representation and creation by Italians in South Africa in literary, political, sociological terms but tend towards being descriptive. This has necessarily had an impact on my study; in some places my analysis is tentative as there simply are very few pre-existing models of interpretation on which to base my comments.

But the fact that from both an "Italian" and an "Italian South African" perspective the existence of an Italian community in South Africa has been of scant interest in academic circles is in itself revealing. There are reasons as to why the study of emigrant/immigrant fiction in other parts of the world has been side-lined and considered of minor importance but in the case of South Africa, studies on the Italian community have been particularly marginalised both from an "Italian" and "Italian South African" perspective. From the perspective of Italy, and as already mentioned, official relations between Italy and South Africa cooled substantially during the height of apartheid and in particular, very few initiatives were taken up within the South African region in an official capacity and in support of the Italian emigrant community. As mentioned, it is typical for a cultural-sociological distance to develop between emigrant communities and their home country but in the case of the Italian community in South Africa, the situation has been aggravated by the fact that the community has not been politically aligned to Italy. I refer to Sani's observation that after the Second World War a number of Italians left Italy in a search for investment opportunities as a result of the threat they perceived from the pro-socialist government elected in Italy. Sani argues that over time, many Italians came to associate themselves more closely with South Africa than with Italy. Italians from Italy on the other hand, came to see the Italian community in South Africa as supporting and promoting the policies of apartheid (Sani 1989, pp. 303-4).

Within this political climate, it is inevitable for the community here to have developed a sense of inadequacy in the face of criticism from the homeland. Whilst in many cases emigrants are able to refer to their achievements in the new land of settlement with pride, I believe that fundamentally, the Italian community in South Africa has never been able to do this and has always experienced a sense of inadequacy in the eyes of Italians in Italy.

It is not surprising then that within this situation very little writing, assessment and analysis has taken place within the Italian community regarding itself. If one considers that a people must create their own history in order to lay claim to an identity, then it can be said that Italians in South Africa have been unable to create their own identity, because they themselves have not generally worked towards creating a common sense of history and identity. The inability of Italians to unify under

a common identity is often, among the South African Italian community, blamed on the individualistic, “anarchic” character of Italians. This character trait, many Italians believe, has had serious drawbacks when transported within the setting of emigration and is the source of division and disruption within the local emigrant community. However, I do not believe that the “freakish” character of Italians has created a divisive emigrant community within South Africa but rather that it has in recent years suffered from a sense of inadequacy as a result of the local political situation, further aggravated by critical attitudes from Italy.

As a corollary and as a further observation on the processes of history-creation and creation of a historic identity, is the fact that a people can only write and speak of their history when the conditions are propitious, when they have acquired a certain amount of distance from a situation, or when a community projects an ideal future to strive towards. It is my belief that at present, the Italian community in South Africa is poised to confront its sense of inadequacy vis-à-vis Italy and that it needs to actively work against its negative self-image.

The above are intended only as introductory observations which should contextualise and underline the significance of some of the secondary sources used as reference material which I now turn to.

An “Italian” Perspective: Material Written on Italians Living in South Africa

Italians in South Africa have been the object of study by Italians residing in Italy (academics, writers, others) and by official Italian bodies since the time of the Italian Renaissance, as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, it was only with the beginnings of the large, mass migrations in the late 1800’s that the issue became more topical and a politically sensitive issue in Italy leading to an increase in written debate and discussion on the subject both in general and with specific mention to the question of migration/emigration to South Africa. Although a detailed analysis of the shifts and changes of attitudes by Italians towards the Italian community living in South Africa is beyond the scope of this research, I limit myself to discussing some of the works I have made frequent use of¹.

¹I have however already made reference to some particularly interesting works such as Giacomo Wietzecker’s study mentioned and the Italian Royal Geographic Society’s other publications and the reports by ship tenants aboard the *Cristoforo Colombo*. Later works to which I have found reference and which are part of a literature regarding Italian interest in South Africa and Italians in South Africa include: *Gli Italiani all’Estero - gli Italiani nell’Africa meridionale* (A. Prister

One of the works I quote extensively is Gabriele Sani's *Storia degli Italiani in Sud Africa* (Sani 1989), also available in English (Sani 1991). I believe Sani's study to be an example of a text that identifies with both an "Italian" and an "Italian South African" perspective. Part of its defining characteristic is that it was published privately through the Zonderwater Block Association of South Africa by means of private sponsorships and so in this way cannot be considered an academic work which was reviewed by academic peers and circulated conventionally within academic channels. Furthermore the text is riddled with various typographical errors, has been typeset unattractively and suffers from other editorial problems (it lacks an index and easily consultable bibliography) adding to its "unprofessional" feel.

Sani apparently began the study out of a research grant offered by the previous Department of Education of South Africa, as he mentions in his foreword. Sani does not however mention what the topic of his research was and whether it was ever published (Sani 1989, ringraziamenti). (It is also an area in which he had previously conducted research as seen by his paper "Volontari ed emigrati italiani nella guerra Anglo-Boera", on the topic of Italians in South Africa during the South African War (Anglo-Boer War), published in the Italian politics journal *Affari Sociali Internazionali* (Sani 1983).) Interestingly, the South African Committee of the Zonderwater Block Association had been thinking of commissioning a work on Zonderwater to publish locally and to that end had already begun to raise funds for a publication when they came to hear of Sani's research. After an initial contact, Sani decided to publish his material through them once it was agreed that the book would include an expanded section on the POWS and include short biographies on members of the Zonderwater Block Association in South Africa (Sani 1989, preface). Still with regards to the genesis of Sani's book, in one of his own footnotes to the last chapter of *Storia degli Italiani*, and while discussing Italy's relation to South Africa during the Apartheid years, Sani divulges that the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had initially agreed to sponsor the publication of his research but turned it down in 1987 because of concerns about the "sensitivity" of the South African situation at the time (Sani 1989, p. 312). Having been unsuccessful at attaining official Italian recognition of his study, Sani found an alternative method of publishing his work.

1906), *L'immigrazione al Transvaal* (Danco 1908), *Sud Africa* (Maino & Maino 1932) and *Che cos'è l'Africa* (D'Agostino Orsini & Pigli 1935). Some material, it is apparent, was motivated less out of a "disinterested" academic interest than out of a political need to assess the strategic implications of the migration of Italians to South Africa and the Southern African region, such as for example *La questione del lavoro italiano nell'Africa del Sud* (Rossi 1903). More recent Italian government publications available through the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs include: *Il Lavoro Italiano in Africa* (Briani 1980) (Italian Work in Africa) and the series *Comunità Italiane nel Mondo* (Unknown 1988) (Italian Communities in the World). These works generally provide overviews of a commercial and/or sociological nature.

But the biggest problem with this reference is not so much that it has not been published within an academic framework but with its author's inconsistent and unpredictable theoretical stance with regard to the subject matter. Sani gives little indication of considering the theoretical implications of a project of historical reconstruction in general and specifically the question of the construction of an emigrant history. His work is not in fact guided by a specific research question, or rather, the question, to present an initial history of the Italians in South Africa, is too broad so that ultimately he does not succeed in presenting a comprehensive introduction on the matter. Typically, Sani follows more than one argumentative strand and indiscriminately includes a lot of unnecessary information. He often goes into great detail and uses up a lot of "energy" by giving specific biographical references on single individuals, sometimes without linking the information to actual events or a broader argument. Understandably, the move from the particular to the general is a challenge specifically to the genre of historiography, and for the commentators on Italians in South Africa it often seems a useful starting point. Unfortunately Sani's links between the individual people and the general history are sometimes tenuous and unconvincing.

Sani does however in his introduction present a number of objectives for his study and they include:

1. Recuperating a memory of a past which Italian public opinion has tended to side-line;
2. Reconstructing a community-based history of a people and a community;
3. Linking up the history of Italians in South Africa to a national identity of Italians in general, specifically by focusing on an "illustrious" past of these people;
4. Trying to create greater uniformity and cohesion to a body of material that is both fragmentary and incomplete.

As can be seen above, Sani operates from a notion of history that is based on romantic, nationalist and humanist ideals. Within this framework, past events are generally glorified and conferred a special status by dint of being in the past. Also, within Sani's interpretation of history, the agency of individuals is given precedence to factors of socio-economic significance. While it is true that a lot of historical writing has traditionally operated from within this framework, it is interesting that Sani seems almost completely unaware of the consequences of the choice of these biases from which he operates.

In contrast to *Storia degli Italiani in Sud Africa*, Teobaldo Filesi's *Italia e Italiani nella Guerra Anglo-Boera (1899 - 1902)* (Filesi 1987) is a rigorous, historical academic work published through the "Istituto Italo-Africano" in Rome. It is in fact to date the only Italian academic work I have been able to locate and it proved to be infinitely helpful as it includes transcripts of original material archived in Italy, including a copy of Camillo Ricchiardi's *Diario*, correspondence of the then Consul of Pretoria (Count Emilio De Morpurgo) and extracts of other useful works. Also, in contrast to *Storia degli Italiani*, the approach to the topic is systematic and always thoroughly motivated. Filesi in fact in his introduction addresses the question of the supposed "rightness" and "wrongness" of history and the tendency towards political correctness or the attempts to smooth over unpleasant aspects of past events. In particular he discusses his decision to publish a study on the South African War at the height of apartheid. Filesi comments on the fact that less than a century before his publication and before the establishment of apartheid in South Africa, international public interest aligned itself on the side of the Boers and against British colonial interests in the area. In this way, Filesi confronts the question directly of the supposed moral authority or "virtuosity" of historical studies, showing how discussions of the past cannot be interpreted on the basis of "right" or "wrong", "good" or "bad" but that they are in fact motivated out of less evident reasons, such as an individual's particular interest in a topic or desire for additional knowledge. On the question of the supposed virtuosity of history he writes:

Qualche anima virtuosa potrebbe tuttavia estrarne qualche perplessità di fronte a questa scelta [di scrivere sulla guerra anglo-boera]. Perché - sarebbe tentata di chiedersi (di chiedermi) - in un momento in cui l'apartheid è sempre più duramente sotto processo si è voluta riesumare proprio la guerra anglo-boera che rappresentò forse l'unico momento in cui tutta l'opinione pubblica internazionale si schierò moralmente da una sola parte e - guarda caso - proprio dalla parte dei boeri? Evidentemente le anime virtuose confondono la virtù con la storia. Ma quando mai la storia è stata virtuosa?² (Filesi 1987, p. vi)

This is unfortunately something which Sani and other Italian commentators on the question of Italian emigration to South Africa seem to have forgotten in their attempt

²"Some virtuous soul could be perplexed at my choice [to write on the Anglo-Boer war]. They might even be tempted to ask why, at a moment in history in which apartheid is always more strongly condemned should anyone wish to exhume the Anglo-Boer war, a conflict which represents perhaps the only moment in which public opinion aligned itself so strongly on one side - and in this case, precisely on the side of the Boers. Evidently these virtuous souls confuse virtue with history. For whenever has history been virtuous?"

right what they believe to be the skewed perception Italian public opinion formed of the Italian community in South Africa. Sani and more recently, Maria Clotilde Giuliani-Ballestrino in her book *Gli Italiani nel Sud Africa* (Giuliani-Ballestrino 1995), are both concerned to somehow “redeem” Italians in South Africa in the eye of Italian public opinion (in Italy). But attempts of this kind do not really succeed as they tend to view the emigrant as an “other” and to create a further distance between emigrants and Italians when they are not directly condescending towards them. Giuliani-Ballestrino in particular, in her investigative journalistic study strikes a tone of “helpful” elucidation that often borders on condescension, particularly when discussing the successes of the Italian community in South Africa. The whole question of the successes and “achievements” of emigrant communities, when discussed by Italians from Italy can easily tend become subverted for political means in Italy.

Above are some of the pitfalls I see of commentaries deriving from Italy or from an “Italian” perspective. At the same time it must be acknowledged that the material available from Italy is at times been more helpful and informative than material written by Italian South Africans. With this in mind, it must be acknowledged that parts of Sani’s *Storia degli Italiani in Sud Africa* are particularly useful and provide information which is not available elsewhere. In particular his examination of the 1920’s and 30’s and the influence of fascism in the local community is interesting and provides an initial commentary of the period. Also, his assessment of the situation of the situation Italians after post-1945 and post-1948 is useful in aspects, particularly where he discusses the processes of identification of the Italian community with South Africa and South African culture (Sani 1989, pp. 303-04). It was disappointing however that periods of contemporary South Africa history and particularly the 1970’s and 1980’s were given so little scope (a short chapter on each) and that the question of South African official attitudes towards immigration should be dealt with so summarily. Interestingly, Sani makes does not develop the interconnectedness between South African immigration politics and the creation of the “colour bar” or the politics of racial division of labour in South Africa³. In general, Sani skirts the issue of the history of racial segregation and division in South Africa from the time of Dutch colonial rule to the Nationalist Party rule and the implications of this for the settlement of Italians in South Africa.

³There is a large literature available on the question of South African development of racial division in the labour force, of particular interest are Peter Alexander’s *Workers, War & the Origins of Apartheid: Labour & Politics in South Africa 1939-48* (Alexander 2000) and William H. Hutt’s *The economics of the colour bar: a study of the economic origins and consequences of racial segregation in South Africa* (Hutt 1964).

In the same way, Filesi's study, although limited in scope (it deals with the years 1899 - 1902) is one of the most reliable references available.

An "Italian South African" Perspective

On the side of material published by Italians in South Africa and by South Africans on the question of Italian settlement here, the material is particularly fragmented and of uneven quality.

One of the most well-known historical overviews and chronologies on the subject of Italians in South Africa, and for a long time the most complete reference available on the topic, is Adolfo Giuseppe Bini's *Italiani in Sud Africa* (Bini 1957). *Italiani in Sud Africa* was published in 1957 in Italy at the author's expense (Bini 1957, p. 8). Bini was a prominent member of the Italian community in the Cape and presented his manuscript to an Italian publication on Italian emigrants in Italy, *Cronache d'Italia* for endorsement. His work is essentially a collection of memoirs and chronicles of well-known Italians in the Cape and other parts of South Africa. Although some sections are more general and provide an overview of certain topics or particular historical periods (for example: the Italian Prisoners of War and Italian contributions to local industry), a large part of the book is dedicated to the biographical details of single people and their particular successes and achievements, particularly in terms of their work. While there are many sections which are anecdotal, Bini's work provides an invaluable record of information which could have otherwise very easily been "lost". It is precisely Bini's "project" of recording information on Italians in South Africa that will be analysed in later parts of this dissertation in terms of a creation of a particular typeset of Italian identity.

On the side of official Italian institutions in South Africa, there is a shortage of informational material available. However, one particular publication stands out: a catalogue of a photographic exhibition held in 1995 in Durban which traces a history of Italians in South Africa. The catalogue, *Viva l'Italia (Viva l'Italia - A Catalogue of Photographs with Text n.d.)* is accompanied by brief commentary in both English and Italian and is introduced by the then Italian Ambassador.

An independent work on Camillo Ricchiardi is Mario Lupini's biography, *Camillo Ricchiardi: Italian Boer War Hero* (Lupini 1988). Lupini's book is of interest, though in contrast to the scrupulously scholarly work of Filesi, it is a sprawling work and rather biased work in its pro-boer sentiment and also unreliable in its selective use of information and omission of certain aspects of Ricchiardi's life.

An interesting booklet also available through the Zonderwater Block Association, is the reprint of a booklet originally published in 1944 by the "Senior Italian Committee" of the Camp (also known as the CAPI) entitled *Italian P.O.W. in the Union of South Africa / P.di G. Italiani nell'Unione Sud Africana* (Unknown Reprinted 1998 by Tiger Press (Pty) Ltd, Johannesburg). The book was intended as an informative booklet to the general public about the experience of Zonderwater. It is a collection of photographs accompanied by brief text in both English and Italian on the main aspects of life in the camp, including the organisational running of the camp, POWS free time, health care and welfare services available to the POWS.

Much unedited material is available in the Zonderwater cemetery museum including letters, journals and copies of the official newspaper of the camp, "Tra i Reticolati" extracts of which are discussed in greater detail in later sections of this dissertation.

A research project currently being carried out by the vice-president of the Zonderwater Block Association, Mr Emilio Coccia, involves collating a record containing the details of the POWS who were interned at Zonderwater. The study is based on informational cards created for every POW and available in part at the South African National Archives. The details of every POW were recorded on a large index card which referred the prisoner's name, age, provenance, health status and medical interventions during his imprisonment in the camp. Emilio Coccia's project shows commitment and interest in representing the recent past of Italians in South Africa and is something of an exception to the general oblivion in which the community has cloaked its past.

With regards to fictional and autobiographical material produced in South Africa by Italians, the list is fairly short and includes Stella Castellaneta Magni's autobiographical short story (Castellaneta Magni 1991), Giuseppe Bottero's autobiography of his development as an artist (Bottero 2000), Gian Carlo Mattana's anthology of poems (Mattana 1963) and material written in Zonderwater listed by Gazzini (Gazzini 1987, pp. 262-9). When compared to the body of works produced in other parts of the world where there have been settlements of Italians, this list may seem extremely limited but the main objective of this study is not to discuss the development or the creation of an Italian South African literature (if such a thing can be said to exist) but rather to focus on how Italians have gone about interpreting their identity within the South African context. It must nonetheless be significant that the writers whom I have discussed wrote within an isolated context where there were very few if any other Italian writers expressing themselves. The recent initiative launched by Prof. Anna Meda of UNISA in the form of a creative writing competition in Italian is an example of an event designed to change this scenario

and in some way formalise and bring together possible writers in Italian⁴.

A “South African” Perspective

Italians in South Africa have been the object of some attention within local academic, journalistic and other environments. This is an area in which my own research has been limited but one which could be significant in terms of developing a broader discourse on the creation of identity by Italians in South Africa. In some way, whether consciously or not, Italian immigrants would have been influenced and affected by the discussion of themselves as an ethnic group in South Africa. For this reason I see these three areas of secondary material as contributing to the question of Italian identity in South Africa and believe that it is not possible to ignore any of these “voices”.

⁴The competition is in its fourth year and is promoted by other local organisations such as the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, other Italian Studies Departments in the country, the Association of Professional Italianists (API) and others.

Chapter 4

Theoretical Considerations

In this chapter I briefly outline some of the most significant theoretical issues underlying the analysis of Italian identity as represented in a textual and literary format by Italians living outside of Italy and with specific reference to Italian emigrants in South Africa.

To analyse the representation of an Italian identity is not a simple task, as observes Emilio Franzina (Franzina 1996, p. 1). At the simplest level of meaning, the term "Italian" refers to nationality, or of pertaining to the country of Italy, but it is clear that the sense can be expanded to include notions of cultural, socio-political, historical and linguistic identity. All of these aspects, and in particular the notion of an Italian national identity are open to ongoing assessment, interpretation and criticism, especially by Italian emigrant communities. This is because, as Franzina points out, if it is commonly accepted that there is such a thing as a "social imaginary", that people and societies weave meanings and develop rites, customs and also create literary texts to bolster social meanings and identities, there probably is no better example of a created identity than that of emigrant Italian communities: "...com'è ormai noto, la costruzione di ogni immaginario sociale, ma anche patriottico, che ne dipenda, è tutt'altro che priva di effetti, materializzandosi in riti e miti, in monumenti e soprattutto, appunto, in discorsi e in parole ad alto contenuto simbolico destinati a pesare e a contare nel tempo." (Franzina 1996, p. 1)¹.

This in fact will be a recurring theme of my discussion which will assume that by analysing the constructed and imagined nature of immigrant identity, it will be possible to understand the relativity of such messages, messages which repeatedly

¹"As it is already understood, the construction of any social imaginary, and even patriotic imaginary, is not at all without effects, and materialises itself in rites and myths, in monuments and above all of course, in debates and words of high symbolic meaning destined to be influential and to count through the passing of time."

deal with immigrants' belief in a cohesive notion of Italian identity and patriotism. And, as Franzina notes, these notions are often presented in very forceful terms, with the aim of being preserved and maintained through time.

Emigration and Italian Nationalism

It is commonly accepted that the phenomenon of mass migrations from Italy of the late 1800's is closely related to the move within Italy towards political unification which led to the formal proclamation of the state of Italy in 1861 and the attainment of independence from Austrian and Spanish rule. Although Italy wrestled off Spanish control in the South, through Giuseppe Garibaldi and his alliance with Cavour, the years leading up to and following unification were typified by political unrest and wide-spread poverty which led many Italians to seek work around the world out of total desperation. Destinations included other countries within Europe (France, Germany and Switzerland), the Americas and to a lesser extent Africa and Australia. Italians who left their homes were typically from the south of Italy (the site of the peasant rebellions against northern Italian rule) as well as peasants from other impoverished areas of Italy (including Veneto, Piedmont, Campania, Lombardy²). Significantly, as Donna R. Gabaccia discusses, the initial emigrations took the form of extended labour sojourns mostly by men who returned to Italy fairly regularly, sometimes in order to re-settle in Italy other times only to visit their homes before returning to their work (Gabaccia 2000, pp. 81-94)³. The trend did however develop towards the emigration of entire families and their resettlement in countries outside of Italy.

But as critics also agree, Italian emigration (either in its immediate stages or in later periods in Italian history) is related to the question of nationalism not only as a direct result of Italy's troubled move towards unification but also in the way that emigrants carried with them and re-interpreted their highly contested national identity once abroad. For Franzina the relation between actual events and the invention of an idea of an Italian identity is highly interesting and has not been given enough attention within Italian literary criticism. This forms the basis of his study in *Dall'Arcadia in America: Attività letteraria ed emigrazione transoceanica in Italia (1850 - 1940)* (Franzina 1996) in which he examines a series of works by Italian emigrants to America. Franzina argues that in the move towards national unity and identity,

²These are among the regions which contributed the largest numbers of expatriations in the period 1876 -1900 (Rosoli 1978, pp. 9-25).

³There are many stories of this kind of migration of which Gay Talese's reconstruction of his family's arrival in the United States is one (Talese 1992).

writers, poets and critics went out of their way to describe and give expression to this new phenomenon and sentiment. The nationalist rhetoric is evident in many writers of the Risorgimento period of Italy. He also writes that while this national sense of identity was commonly experienced and developed within Italy as a literary current which soon faded and softened its overtly nationalistic emphasis, these overt nationalist tendencies continued to exist and flourish abroad:

il discorso letterario [in Italia e sull'emigrazione] si sintonizza ben presto sulla lunghezza d'onda di un nazionalismo che forse alla lunga mancherà altri scopi in Italia, ma che non fallirà certo in quello di dotare *pro tempore* di un senso comune e abbastanza condiviso le collettività o comunità degli emigrati all'estero.

... all'estero erano state messe o rimesse in funzione le prerogative di un'italianità letteraria che circoscriveva e definiva l'identità nazionale non meno di altri fattori più terragni ... da ben prima che il processo risorgimentale fosse avviato. Assieme ai suoi effetti, comunque, agiva con forza la piena accettazione di una vulgata italica fatta di vaghe reminiscenze classiciste, di rimasticature romantiche e ottocentesche e insomma un bagaglio di nozioni che non solo le scuole, poche e male organizzate, ma l'intero associazionismo etnico culturale ... incoraggiò ad accogliere all'estero come segno distintivo comune.⁴ (Franzina 1996, pp. 2-3)

As can be seen, Franzina argues that Italian national sentiment became identified with peculiarly literary understanding of Italian identity laced with overtones of Romantic and Classical traits. Franzina's suggestion is that while the Risorgimento spirit and its nationalist sentiment underwent a gradual change within Italy, many writers who were out of the country continued to express themselves in this particular fashion. This is something to which I will return in the later sections of this study and with specific texts to be analysed.

⁴“Literary debate [in Italy and on the question of emigration] very soon becomes synthesised on the wave of a nationalism that maybe in the long run will exhaust its purpose in Italy but which will not fail in giving a communal and relatively shared notion to the communities or groupings of emigrants abroad ... abroad the prerogatives of a literary *italianità* had been established or re-established which circumscribed and defined a national identity as well as more earthy aspects ... well before the Risorgimento process had begun. Together with its effects, however, it acted with force towards the acceptance of a vulgate Italianness made up of vague classical overtones, of romantic smatterings and in fact with a baggage of notions which not only schools, few and badly organised, but also the entire ethnic cultural tendency to form associations ... encouraged to welcome abroad as a distinctive communal marker.”

National Versus Regional Identity

As explained above, the processes of national unification and emigration are closely linked, and it was particularly those Italians who felt that there was no space for them in Italy, either materially or in terms of the ideology on which new nation was created that left Italy from about 1850 onwards. In his book *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora* (Verdicchio 1997) Pasquale Verdicchio writes that Southern Italians were particularly alienated at the time of Italy's founding. Verdicchio calls the southerner a "dissonant national subject" and writes that Southerners were often vilified and seen as an obstacle towards the attainment of national unity. Verdicchio argues that as a result Southerners have experienced their culture and identity as being alienated from that of the north and that of Italy in general. When Southerners did leave Italy and continued to give expression to their regional culture, Verdicchio shows how this was also criticised from within Italy and considered un-Italian. In his study, Verdicchio has chosen to examine one group who were particularly marginalised in the attempt to question the homogenising cultural policies and practices of Italy and Western nations⁵. However it is also true that the question of regional identification is something that concerns all Italians and not only Southerners as Italy has a strong tradition and history of regional and local difference and diversity. The question nonetheless remains as to how Italians represent themselves once outside of Italy: do they more readily represent a national or a regional identity? And is this Italian identity generally presented in homogenised or diversified terms?

Given the pressures to incorporate and be a part of a new society with a very different cultural identity to their own, Italian emigrants to Anglo-Saxon countries have often attempted to make their own identity seem more appealing and accessible to their new countrymen. Many argue that emigrants abroad tend to represent their regional identity first and then their national identity, and that being away from Italy gives Italians an opportunity to explore and give expression to their regional identity. This can be substantiated by the fact that wherever there have been settlements of Italians it is possible to find a large number of different regional associations. However, one of the difficulties with the regional cultural expression that Italian emigrants encounter is that their regional difference is often not appreciated or acknowledged by their host country. In many cases, Italian emigrants' new neighbours are not aware of the cultural diversity that is embodied by Italians and

⁵In his Preface, Verdicchio writes that he aligns himself with critics and writers who "challenge the kind of thinking that reproduces the "West" as a stable and homogenous political and discursive unity." (Verdicchio 1997, Preface)

tend to stereotype emigrants negatively, ironically often according to characteristics of a Southern regional identity. "Pizza", "pasta" and "mafia" continue to be the cultural identifiers most closely associated with Italians around the world and by South Africans. At any rate, they are among the first things that are mentioned and only with some prodding and questioning are other descriptions offered.

Franzina also tackles the question of the local or regional identity of Italian emigrants and claims that emigrants are able to identify and promote a national identity (even one they did not previously experience) side by side with their regional, local identity.

In her book, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Gabaccia 2000) Donna R. Gabaccia stresses the fact that the identity the immigrant takes on is in some ways one which becomes invented, created especially for the benefit of the immigrant's new neighbours and countrymen. Often it is a specific representation of Italy, one that the immigrant did not even necessarily associate with before leaving Italy but has learnt to take on and stand for *italianità*. Gabaccia draws attention to the fact that an understanding of *italianità* is intersected by notions of cultural-ethnic identity as well as by notions of national identity. Given that Italy's national history is relatively recent by comparison to most of its European neighbours (with the exception of Germany) and that in many ways the country experienced a highly contested unification process, Gabaccia highlights the question of Italian identity prior to the emergence of a formal Italian nation state. She believes that a distinct and easily definable Italian (ethnic) identity existed well before the formal unification of Italy and that this was recognisable to people outside of Italy. Furthermore, she argues, it is specifically those migrants who left Italy even before the 1800's that contributed to the definition of Italian identity:

When residents of Italy left home for long periods, or travelled long distances - as did the merchant mariners of Genoa - they often lived with former neighbours and called themselves a *natio* for the first time. When artists and architects left Italy to build and decorate the courts and churches of Europe, they instead gave new meaning to the term 'Italian' ('of Italy'). (Gabaccia 2000, pp. 15-6)

For Gabaccia, the issues of cultural and national identity are related though not mutually dependent. She declares:

Long distance migrations produced the first of Italy's diasporas - of missionaries and merchants, artists and musicians, and of the nations of

Genoese, Lombards, and Florentines - without producing a united Italian nation or a politically united Italy." (Gabaccia 2000, p. 16)

Gabaccia argues that it is precisely this notion of Italian identity, one not necessarily connected to a *national* identity, that has always been easily "transportable" and "used" by migrants throughout different times. It is this common identity, based on cultural and very often regional characteristics, that has been transported by generations of Italian immigrants throughout the world.

Given Pasquale Verdicchio and other's discussion of ethnicity, Gabaccia's analysis could be questioned because of her use of ethnic identity in a way that reinforces a specific, culturally homogenous notion of Italian identity. The merchants, traders and scholars she writes of tend to be characterised by cultural and ethnic overtones typical to northern Italians. In this way, Gabaccia uses an argument of ethnic specificity to in part bolster the notion of a culturally homogenous national identity in the making.

Global Versus Local Identity

The question of Italian national identity is further complicated by relations of Italians to their region (*regione*) and hometown (*paese*). As Gabaccia comments, Italians have always maintained strong attachments to their hometown and region, often choosing this region-based identity over their Italian (national) identity. It is not coincidental she writes that the Italian word for village, "paese", is also the word for country. As Gabaccia herself points out, identification of Italians with their regional identity can be seen as a deterrent towards the imposition of a national Italian culture, emigrants are no different in this regard, she writes, "Migration ... helped to keep alive the localism Italian nationalists sought to overcome" (Gabaccia 2000, p. 73).

Robert Buranello and Michael Lettieri also point out that the existence of regional associations and identification in the countries of emigration can have a beneficial effect on life of emigrants abroad. On the basis of research on Italian community organisations in Toronto, they comment on the process of regional identification by Italian emigrants as adding an extra dimension to their reality as i/emigrants (Buranello & Lettieri 1993, p. 159).

With regards to the notion of local versus global identities, Gabaccia points out that the acceleration of our lifestyles as a result of improved communication and

transport systems and technologies are experienced by i/emigrants as shifts from local to global realities. Gabaccia refers to the “shuttling” between local, national and global experiences and writes that this too can be seen as a way in which i/emigrants add dimensions to their experience (Gabaccia 2000, p. xi).

The Status of “Immigrant Fiction”: Subaltern Fiction?

A question that Boelhower raises in *Through a Glass Darkly*, is raised also by other critics and commentators of e/immigrant fiction. Boelhower points out how immigrant fiction creates an uneasy relationship to dominant, acceptable forms of literary production, and how in America it is often relegated to the position of “ethnic fiction / studies”, thus contrasted to and outside of the American literary canon. Boelhower questions this duality and divergence arguing that the “ethnic sign is everywhere”.

Part of the reason must be attributed to the tendency within Italian cultural, social and political life to present a unified, homogenous understanding of Italian identity one into which the emigrant does not comfortably fit. Pasquale Verdicchio argues that even during attempts to examine the “otherness” that emigrants present to Italian culture, the pull towards presenting a unified Italian culture is too strong. Thus, in Marchand’s book on Italian emigrant fiction, Verdicchio comments on the exclusion of writings by emigrants in languages other than Italian or texts written in dialects. For Verdicchio it is precisely writers who make use of other languages and dialects who “offer a more biting and incisive critique of history and emigration. Their denial of the Italian language as a mode of expression is the first stage of a critique of the imposition of nationhood and a threat to the fictional homogeneity of Italian culture.” (Verdicchio 1997, p. 97). Verdicchio also points to another strategy used by Italian institutions to maintain their distance from emigrant writings and that is to question their literary merit. Marchand goes to great lengths to argue for the existence of categories such as “literature”, “para-literature” and “pseudo-literature”, he writes:

Innanzitutto è stato affrontato il problema della qualità letteraria dei testi (oltre al loro valore storico, sociale, politico, psicologico, religioso ecc.) ed è stata abbozzata una riflessione sui criteri per valutarla, distinguendo tra letteratura, paraletteratura e pseudoletteratura. (Marchand 1991, p. xxii)

Questions around the validity and quality of the literature ensures the marginal and

subaltern nature of such writing and ultimately aids in preventing their circulation within dominant Italian culture and society. In Chapter 2 of his book, Verdicchio entitles one section with the question of Gayatri Spivak's frequently quoted essay: *Can the subaltern speak?*. Although Verdicchio confirms that the position of the subaltern text is determined by its capacity to become incorporated within dominant forms of discourse, he questions whether the subaltern, in order to be considered such, must be relegated to complete silence. Verdicchio points to the duality of this kind of thinking and argues for a less definitive hypothesis, one which considers the flow and exchange of information while still acknowledging the existence of power relations which determine the marginality of the subaltern. This is the very problem that faces the texts I have chosen to examine. While in many ways they are "marginal" texts, mostly unknown, published privately or for limited publication or published in academic works for the first time (Camillo Ricchiardi's diary), it is difficult to establish their status as completely marginal. Although aware of the complexity of the issue, Verdicchio argues that the problem of the intelligibility of subaltern writing as well as its circulation within dominant structures of production has to do with degrees and cannot be seen as a binary problem between speech (the realm of the dominant) and silence (the realm of the subaltern). While the texts I examine can be said to have entered cultural discourse, even if in an extremely marginalised way, questions such as the type of circulation they enjoy and a consideration of their position within the machinery of publication and distribution are just as important as their interpretation and analysis on a textual level.

The "Invention" of Ethnicity

In a book provocatively entitled *The Invention of Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors introduces a collection of essays on ethnic literary studies in the United States by claiming that the concept of ethnicity is in fact an "invention". Sollors explains that his use of the word invention and the popularity of the term should in fact be seen as the growing awareness of the *constructed* nature of discourses previously accepted without question, or believed to be highly significant. Sollors places himself within a postmodernist framework and points out that the contribution of thinkers such as Paul De Man, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Hayden White and others has been to examine the textual strategies which underlie the construction of notions often widely ascribed to and considered to be "objective", or value-neutral. Having stressed that the use of the word "invention" does not merely constitute an intellectual fad, Sollors sees the importance to deconstruct the notion of "ethnicity" and

comment on the textual strategies which obscure the political and historical significance of the concept as it is applied and continues to be applied in a variety of academic debates, such as the human sciences (sociology, anthropology, politics and historical studies) as well as literary studies.

For Sollors, key to understanding the emergence of ethnicity is the role ethnicity as a construct had to play in the political process of nation building. For Sollors, the modern use of the term ethnicity to refer to "belonging to nation or group" is in fact fairly recent and intricately connected to the project and ambitions embodied in nationalism. With reference to Benedict Anderson's study *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 1983 (reprinted 1986)), Sollors points out that just as the belief in nationalism has been "created" or has become imagined into existence, so too the notion of cohesive identity and cultural homogeneity within groups has been created.

As Anderson argues, the European aristocratic order, based on directly related families, was challenged by the American and French revolutions and increasingly replaced by various national bourgeois systems, which relied on the more *imaginary* ways of connectedness . . . In the wake of this development, the idea that nation, nationality, or ethnic belonging mattered a great deal for people became more and more widespread . . . The nation state was viewed as an ideal, and ethnic homogeneity or racial purity was advocated by thinkers like Louis Agassiz and Arthur Gobineau. (Sollors 1989, p. xii)

The use of the term "ethnicity" can be said to be on the increase in a variety of discourses which deal with social and group identity; it is commonly encountered in contemporary sociological, political, anthropological as well as literary debates. However, as will be discussed below, the term cannot be used without a certain amount of ambiguity. As some critics discuss, the term is in many ways problematic.

However, for Sollors the term also embodies another type of problem or difficulty that stems from its original use and meaning. In his book *Beyond Ethnicity: Cousin and Descent in American Culture* (Sollors 1986) Sollors describes the root and origin as well as historic uses of the word "ethnicity". The original meaning of the word, derived from the Greek, was used to mean "non-Israelite" or "gentile" which through the spread of Christianity came to signify "non-Christian", pagan or heathen. As Sollors writes, through the change "...the word retained its quality of defining another people contrastively and very often negatively" (Sollors 1986, p. 25). Sollors also points out that it is inevitable that this original meaning continues to exist as

a “memory” within modern and contemporary uses of the word. It is precisely for this reason, that it is not always easy to use the word ethnicity in an inclusive and non-contradictory sense (Sollors 1986, p.25). Sollors draws attention to the fact that despite recent attempts to use the term in a more inclusive sense, “ethnicity” retains a somewhat dormant, but still very real connotation of “other”. Although Sollors deals specifically with American literature and American use of the word, his point is more widely applicable and valid also within other, non-American contexts.

Sollors points out that although there have been attempts within academic debate to make the term more inclusive and its use more widespread, unfortunately much current discourse continues to fail to acknowledge the contradiction inherent in the term “ethnicity” and continues to use it in often rather unthinking and desensitised ways.

By calling ethnicity - that is, belonging and being perceived as belonging to an ethnic group - an ‘invention’, one signals an interpretation in a modern and postmodern context . . . Ethnicity would thus seem to make a perfect subject for a modern approach that utilises the decoding techniques familiar from the scholarship of ‘invention’. Yet by and large, studies tend less to set out to explore its construction than to take it for granted as a relatively fixed or, at least, a known and self-evident category.” (Sollors 1989, p. xiii)

At the same time, Sollors is aware that the more widespread use of the term do show an attempt to use the term in a more inclusive sense and show a desire to define a new discourse with which to refer to collective identity.

Given the two problems identified briefly above, the questions remain: How is it possible to talk about people’s collective identities? What do we talk about? How do different ethnicities assert their identity in particular ways? And with specific reference to this research project, can it not be said that the textual production and writings of Italians in South Africa reflect particular and specific concerns? And finally, how can one avoid the difficulties and limitations embodied in the term “ethnicity”?

For William Boelhower, the only way to refer to ethnicity is to examine, on a textual level, the creation of ethnicity from a semiotic perspective, that is, through an examination of the transmission, reception and circulation of “ethnic signs” within a “system” of ethnicity. Following from semiotic approaches developed by critics such

as Umberto Eco, William Boelhower, in his book *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature* (Boelhower 1987) aims to expose the “grammar of an ethnic system of signs” (Boelhower 1987, pp. 39-40). Although Boelhower’s analysis refers specifically to American literature and identity, his argument contributes some very valid points to the discussion of ethnicity that I intend to extrapolate to selected works by Italians in South Africa.

Picking up on Sollors’ comment about “fashionable” academic trends, Boelhower’s term “ethnic semiosis” may at first glance seem a facile conjunction of two terms popular in recent academic debate. But as a more detailed explanation will show, Boelhower has good reasons for using this term and is motivated precisely out of concern for the problems around the concept of ethnicity and ethnic identity. Like Sollors, Boelhower is aware of the constructed nature of the term but develops this idea further in his notion of the *semiotic* system of ethnicity, something which Sollors implied but did not pursue directly in *Beyond Ethnicity* and *The Invention of Ethnicity*. Much of the impetus behind Boelhower’s semiotic approach develops out of his critique of the terms in which debates around ethnicity seem to be inevitably couched. In other words, it is posed as the opposition between assimilationist (or monocultural) versus multicultural or “ethnic” interpretations of and approaches to identity.

As emerges from a reading of Sollors, Boelhower and other critics, discussions of monocultural and multicultural linguistic, cultural and sociological ideologies are very typical to the North American context. In many ways, as these and other critics repeatedly point out, the debate developed from the United States and can be seen to have a very pertinent application to the American context. However, the problem is not exclusive to the American setting and the debate underlies issues that are pertinent wherever cultural identity becomes contested. Arguably, the effects of globalisation have meant that in recent times the question of ethnic identity is a world-wide concern.

Briefly, the notion of assimilation was most famously popularised in the United States during the 1970’s with writings of the Chicago School which in dealing with the question of immigration and with the realities of sharing space with non-Americans and immigrants, promoted the integration of those cultures into an all-American, homogenised identity and way of life. In reaction to the “melting pot”, assimilationist politics and its failures, more recent philosophies of multiculturalism and ethnicity have emerged. Here, it is considered important to respect the cultural difference and diversities of groups or ethnicities, while recognising the necessary

interdependent relationship with the dominant cultural paradigm.⁶

Boelhower's primary objection to the question of identity when presented in this way is that the multi-cultural (and more recently the ethnic) paradigm risks repeating the very same errors attributed to the assimilationist view, so that both are based on similar preconceptions and defeat a fruitful discussion of group identity in relation to other groups. In the first place, Boelhower argues, multicultural debates tend to essentialise and simplify collective identity as well as the realities of a particular society (in his case, American). He writes:

If the supporters of the multi-ethnic paradigm tend to fictionalise [the stance of the monocultural paradigm] ... they often do so at the expense of cancelling out or separating out the dominant paradigm with equally univocal passion. In this way they run the risk of setting up a rival myth by assuming the formal paradigm attributes of their melting-pot predecessors (Boelhower 1987, p. 23)

The "formal paradigm attributes" to which Boelhower refers have to do with the tendency in both monocultural and multicultural systems to propose conclusive solutions to the dilemma of understanding the differences encountered in societies, political systems and in literary works. For Boelhower, the logic invoked by both paradigms resonates with the scripture reading (to which the title of his book refers): "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face" (Boelhower 1987, p. 17). Boelhower believes that both paradigms, in a simplistic fashion, have done away with the problems of interpretation and understanding that occurs between peoples. Both invoke the belief that a "true" or in-depth understanding between peoples may be achieved.

Furthermore, like Sollors, Boelhower questions the political project of nation building inherent in both paradigms, neither can be separated from the question of nationalism, because, as Sollors discusses, the nation states has come to depend on the notion of ethnic homogeneity or cohesiveness. Boelhower's addendum to this argument is to question the role that multicultural paradigms also unwittingly play in the processes of nationalism. Although speaking specifically of the American

⁶While again this is a predominately American view of the problems inherent in ethnic identity, it is important to note that in different parts of the world the question of integration has been dealt with differently and that it is related also to historical and cultural specificities of different countries. Thus, within the North American context, Canada is considered to have approached the dilemma of integration of immigrant communities in less assimilationist terms in support of ideologies which promote cultural and social diversity.

context, Boelhower's words could also be applicable, among others, to the South African post-apartheid context:

The issue of ethnicity in the United States inevitably surfaces at the national level whenever the ideology of the American Dream or of Americanism *tout court* malfunctions or hyperfunctions or simply comes in for such routine scrutiny as the presidential elections. In between times, almost everywhere in America it remains the great unknown fact. Given the continuing success of the founding political experiment, during which the Enlightenment words of constitutional guarantee were forever fixed and sealed, the issue itself remains somewhat of a scandal - for mere repetition of the alchemical formula *E PLURIBUS UNUM* would not really convert the base metals of a pluralistic society into a finely beaten national gold. Yet this is the impossible possibility, the asylum foundation, on which Enlightenment and even contemporary America is built. (Boelhower 1987, p. 17)

With Boelhower's words in mind, the terms "Rainbow nation" and the more recent South African governmental slogan "Unity in Diversity" can be seen to be based on a similar "founding political experiment"; the desire for turning cultural and ethnic diversity into the "finely beaten national gold" of nationhood is also thus highlighted and exposed as a politically driven ambition which may make use of either mono or multicultural terms. Ultimately however, both paradigms can be said to exist on the same continuum.

Boelhower's argument is that both assimilationist and multicultural paradigms severely underestimate the complications of exchange which occur between different peoples. Furthermore, with the two current options of "melting pot" or multicultural/ethnic politics locked into a binary opposition, Boelhower questions how it is possible to present detailed analyses of the cultural interaction of difference. For this reason he proposes a "semiotics of ethnicity" which will not promise to "see things clearly" or give easy answers but will hopefully provide a more sensitive analytic tool for the conundrum that is ethnicity. However, in order to avoid the opposition of assimilationist and multicultural politics, it is necessary to forgo a desire for certainty and accept that an investigation into ethnicity will lead to seeing things "through a glass darkly" and accepting the circularity of the problem, speaking again of the American context but with relevance also to South Africa, he writes: "Americans and ethnics in America are doomed to see through a glass darkly, doomed to the vicious circle of their own question and answer format." (Boelhower 1987, p. 20).

By constructing a grammar of "ethnic signs" and by examining the question of ethnicity as a system, Boelhower believes he will avoid the simplistic answers of the assimilationist and multicultural or ethnic paradigms.

Boelhower's semiosis of ethnicity presupposes some key concepts borrowed from the language of semiotics. For Boelhower, a semiotic approach to the analysis of ethnic signs must focus predominately on the processes of transmission and reception of those signs. For Boelhower this means accepting the circularity of the problem of ethnicity. But more importantly, for Boelhower, 'the ethnic topos is a conjunctural context' (Boelhower 1987, p. 23), an "inferencing context" (Boelhower 1987, p. 38), or "an interpretative relation" (Boelhower 1987, p. 38). It is a position of reading, an approach and a putting together of ideas in a particular way:

A sign is only ethnic if it is produced or interpreted as such by an intending subject. Beginning with it, one can catch a glimpse of an entire ethnic world . . . In other words the semiotic process involves not so much a particular group of things as it does their being grouped in a certain way. It is, in short, a position of reading. (Boelhower 1987, p. 39)

This approach facilitates the analytic process in an area in which the issues of ethnicity may not initially be evident. It also has the advantage of working directly from the texts back towards a theoretical framework. The method is more exploratory and tends towards deduction; there will be an attempt when dealing with the texts within this dissertation to observe and identify the repetition of certain notions and to extrapolate the significance of those ethnic signs to the issues of ethnic identity.

It goes almost without saying that ethnic signs deal with conflict or a difference of some sort; otherwise, as Boelhower points out, there would be no need for us to talk about ethnicity in the first place. For Boelhower, the typical locus of ethnicity or for encountering the clash of difference occurs in the moment of the "gaze": "Presumably, in the very transaction of gazing there are also two different codifications of the same reality (understood here as the product of an organising activity). Otherwise there would be no crisis of interpretation or no need to learn how to analyse the American scene from more than one perspective." (Boelhower 1987, p. 23). The "gaze" to which Boelhower refers is a topic that even within literary criticism is dealt with in a variety of theoretical contexts (for example, in psychoanalytic or sociological interpretations). On the level of textual, narratological interpretation, it has to do with the narrative perspective and the narratorial voice adopted in a particular textual moment. Significantly, it is very often a moment in which the

subjectivity of the authorial voice becomes exposed in a particular text, a moment in which the narrator may begin to hint at an awareness of his/her own subjective stance as narrator. In this way, from a postmodern perspective, the text is opened up to its multiple interpretative possibilities.

Within a discussion of "ethnic semiosis" the gaze proves to be a highly important moment as it can serve to expose the process of transference of "ethnic" signs within the ethnic system while at the same time undermining the question of monocultural or multicultural interpretations of the subject being dealt with. This at any rate is Boelhower's argument which he develops from discussing a passage by Henry James during which James narrates an experience of seeing some Italian workers digging a trench on Ellis Island in New York in around 1904. Instead of confirming the superiority of his status as American, the moment of the "gaze" shared between James and the workers serves to question the legitimacy of any attempt to classify the moment as an awareness develops of both the subjectivity inherent in James' gaze and an awareness of the Italian workers' identity which James cannot understand (Boelhower 1987, pp. 18-40). For the purpose of this research project the moment of the "gaze" will be also be used, following Boelhower's example, as an opportunity to examine the differences inherent in an "ethnic system" during which it will be possible to observe the awareness (sometimes more emphatically than others) of the subjective nature of the narratorial "gaze" in question.

From his discussion of the "gaze", Boelhower arrives at another important consideration of the question of ethnicity and the mono- and multi-cultural paradigms from which ethnic identity has often been defined. That is, Boelhower questions the attempts by some critics to list the characteristics of ethnicity thus somehow attempting to reach a definitive answer or understanding of the topic. For Boelhower, this approach is completely counterproductive and it goes against his own semiotic approach to the problem. As presented by Boelhower, the question of ethnic identity cannot be reduced or essentialised into ready-made categories, instead the challenge for the critic is to be open to the possibilities contained in the text and to be aware of the continuous exchange of "ethnic signs" in a particular textual moment (just as he does in his interpretation of the James' text he selected). Boelhower calls the tendency to list characteristics of ethnicity the "encyclopedic" approach. The biggest problem with this approach is that it attempts to be exhaustive while at the same time missing the point that ethnicity is a "relational" event and phenomenon; as Boelhower points out, anything could be considered ethnic factors: language, one's history, place of origin or birth, religion, even class, political affiliation, the list seems endless (Boelhower 1987, pp. 30-1).

In considering Boellhower's argument for an "ethnic semiotic" approach to "ethnic" texts and its relevance to texts by Italian South Africans, a number of points come to mind. The first relates to the question of a semiotic approach in general: the challenge of a semiotic approach remains whether the sum of experience can be entirely contained within a system of signs? While there is some agreement that "experience", "reality", "life" exists in some way which cannot be entirely captured within the bounds of semiotic systems and signs, it is also generally accepted that the realities presented within textual frameworks do constitute semiotic systems whose analysis can be very fruitful. But the semiotic framework must remain just that, an interpretative key which can aid discussion into a limited selection of signs (or sign system). Among the reasons for which semiotic approaches are promoted is the fact that semiotic interpretations often question the hierarchical structures of meaning that become imposed on certain texts: by accepting that meaning is created through the continual transference of signs, and the "equality" of signs within the semiotic system, the constructed nature of meaning is highlighted. There are times, however, during Boellhower's analysis in which he seems to be imbuing to the interpretative key of "ethnic semiosis" a certain mysterious power (Boellhower often refers to the energy or *kinesis* of the ethnic moment). Particularly when he deals with the notion that ethnic contact defies understanding, Boellhower seems to be exalting a mysterious element to which he attributes a certain amount of value, in a sense contradicting the egalitarian spirit of semiotic analysis. Just as at different times either monocultural or multicultural paradigms were praised and valued, so it seems that Boellhower's prediction of being "doomed" to incomprehensibility has become a new order, a new standard against which to judge and value all ethnic exchanges or debates on ethnicity.

The other objection has to do with the question of the methodology of semiotic models whose interpretation are based on the notion of unstable and aleatory meanings. The theory contains a paradox which is often taken to be central, of the utmost significance, and that is, that meaning is always somehow in process of being generated. This in a sense has been the great find and discovery of postmodernist thought. However, the problem here is that to follow this suggestion to the extreme would mean to be unable at any time to generate meanings, it would render even Boellhower's attempts towards analysis completely impossible as knowledge would always be fractured and incomplete. While the revolution of postmodern theories has been to question faith in explanatory systems which profess to complete explanation, it is also true that however imperfect, human interaction, and even interaction between ethnic communities, continues to take place. Again, there are times at which Boellhower's "ethnic semiosis" can be seen to be the creation of a new complete and

comprehensive system of understanding. The difficulty is to tread between a theory and a practice of ethnic semiosis. I would argue again that the significance of an ethnic semiotic approach within the context of the proposed dissertation is precisely that it offers a tentative and exploratory methodology for an area in which very little research has been conducted, without immediately making recourse to a prescriptive model of interpretation.

Chapter 5

Rocco Catoggio's Letter (1833)

One of the earliest written documents written by an Italian in South Africa is a letter written by a certain Rocco Catoggio in 1833 to his parents, brothers and sisters in Italy. It is currently preserved in the Huguenot Memorial Museum (Benjamin 1996, p. 1).

Rocco Catoggio, born in 1790 was a subject of the Neapolitan kingdom and lived in Armento, Lucania. Having left his home town in around 1811 for Naples, he travelled to Spain, presumably to fight in the Napoleonic wars. He was captured shortly after his arrival in Spain and forcibly recruited as a British soldier. He was sent to England where he spent three months before being posted, still as a British soldier and recruit, to the Cape. Stationed in Cape Town, he served another six years and three months, being released in approximately 1818 (Benjamin 1996, p. 1). It was however only after another fourteen years, in 1833 that he was able to arrange for a letter to be delivered to his parents in Italy. This lapse of time, Catoggio explains, is due to the fact that he was unable to find someone who would act as his correspondent in England and who could pay the extra cost of posting the letter from England to Italy. The letter then, it would appear from its context, is the first communication sent from Catoggio to his family in nearly twenty years (Benjamin 1996, pp. 2, 4). This fact alone makes of the letter an interesting document and provides valuable insight into the phenomenon of transmigration and emigration in the early nineteenth century as well as a fascinating view of life in the Cape at a time when British rule had only recently surpassed Dutch control of the region.

Within the context of the dissertation, I will argue that Catoggio's letter can be seen as an example of a "feint" or "buried" Italian identity. At a first glance, there is not much which links Catoggio's letter to other types of immigrant writings, many of the motifs normally associated with immigrant writings do not appear here.

For example, there is no overt mention to experiences of alienation as a foreigner arriving to a new land or mention of the difficulties in adapting to the new land or descriptions of the experience of difference from the dominant cultural ideology, all typical expressions of immigrants and of what Anthony Tamburri and others would refer to as the “hyphenated” existence of immigration (Tamburri 1998, pp. 3-6). At no point does Catoggio mention feelings of nostalgia towards his homeland, and there is an absence of descriptions relating to typical immigrant experiences of travel and adaptation which William Boelhower has described as the moments of: anticipation, contact and contrast (Boelhower 1982, p. 40).

I will discuss how this apparent lack of immigrant concerns arises as a result of a number of factors, among them: the chosen form of expression, namely, that of the letter which necessarily sets up particular parameters in the writing, and the condition of otherness and of difference from which Catoggio necessarily found himself writing which makes the recall of an Italian identity problematic and difficult. After so many years of physical, cultural and emotional distance from his homeland and family, it is inevitable Catoggio’s reconnection through writing to that part of his identity is a difficult and complex one, as is most obviously seen in his laboured and faulty use of Italian.

Other factors also contributed to Catoggio’s construction of Italian identity (or rather apparent lack of self-identification as Italian), among these, questions relating to issues of national, “Italian” identity in the early nineteenth century, before the creation of the Italian nation state; the type of Italian immigration to Southern Africa at the time (numerically very small) and issues around how Catoggio’s immigration and his experience of it are related to the structure of the Cape society which by the early nineteenth century had already established itself as a “plural” and one defined by colonial as well as racial politics (Davenport 1987, pp. 22-35). Although I will deal with each of these aspects, the focus of my examination of Rocco Catoggio’s letter will be on his relation to the “Old World Reality” left behind and how the recalling of this previous part of himself is complex and troubled but typical of the experience of emigration and which raises questions about the construction of Italianità and of the concept of Italian identity in general.

I begin with a consideration of the mode of communication employed by Catoggio and its relevance to his construction of self-identity. The form of the letter or missive can be said to be determined by its connection to the “real” world and in the potential of its communicative function which has the ability to directly influence actual events. In terms of Jakobson’s communication model, letters, more so than fictional or creative texts, deliver “messages” from the addresser to the addressee which are

directly related to actual and historic events, as is the case of Rocco Catoggio's letter. The advantage of applying the Jakobsonian model (Jakobson 1960, pp. 150-4) to particular communicative situations is that of raising awareness about how the processes of reading and writing are highly mediated activities, despite tendencies to consider them otherwise (this includes notions of the "inspired writer" or of inspired texts and even expectations about the completeness or "meaningfulness" of texts). In the case of letter writing and the process of an exchange of letters, the tendency is to trust in the implicit "power" of letters to accurately convey an initial intention or message supplied by the addresser and in the ability of the message to be "accurately" or successfully received by the addressee (supposedly more successfully or reliably than in fictional texts such as novels, poems etc). But any analysis of text, whether fictional or "realistic", often and inevitably reveals the complexity of the communicative process and the difficulties inherent in any attempt of expression and transmission of encoded messages. On a closer examination, the transmission of messages, which initially may seem to be quite a linear and direct process, is more frequently experienced as an uncertain and incomplete process and one subject to alteration.

Rocco Catoggio's letter is no different. It is clear that the underlying assumption of the letter is that its message(s) will reach destination and be successfully decoded by his family. But in examining the letter, with a historical distance of almost 170 years and with very little confirmed information about its author and other circumstantial evidence, it is clear that our belief in the linearity and capacity of letters to be successfully decoded by its addressees (intended and others) are often unfounded, even though quite necessary in order for normal communication to take place. Rocco Catoggio himself appears quite unconscious of the potential difficulties associated with the delivery of his letter and of its message. And yet the types of complications in the transmission of the letter (but which I am not able to verify) would be events such as the letter getting lost, or the death of his relatives, or other complications such as possible relocation of his family to another town, and even events such as the possibility that his family could have already have redistributed Catoggio's inheritance without having waited for news from him, or the loss of the family land and property as a result of political or other disruptions.

To some extent, all of these hypothetical scenarios would have made Catoggio's letter and its message redundant and even meaningless. But Catoggio does not appear to consider, even marginally, the existence of such problems in the transmission or reception of his message. Perhaps this is necessarily so as the contemplation of these difficulties could have been too much to bear or because in his need to communicate

his message, just as in any type of communication, he had to push such doubts aside to ensure some form of communication. Whatever the reason, Catoggio does not pay much attention to the process of communication inherent in his letter, thus implicitly and somewhat unthinkingly confirming his trust in the communicative power of his letter. The only indication he gives of being aware of the difficulty of the communicative process and the possibility of its being circumvented appears in the opening paragraph in which he describes the great difficulty of ensuring the passage of the letter to Italy. The very circuitousness of his explanation could be seen as a small and perhaps even unconscious indicator of Catoggio's lack of faith in the apparently linear and uncomplicated communicative process of writing and transmitting his letter. He writes:

After many years that I wished to advise you of my news and that I am alive and well, never was the opportunity offered to me as the present [one]. As Mr C. Fr. Drege, Naturalist and Specialist of Medicine of German origin and my dear friend is leaving from here and has promised to make you have this letter; this is because we cannot make pass from here straight to Italy letters without paying the right of franking to London, letters do not go but from here to London and there they remain unless there is a correspondent who pays the franking so that they may reach their destination. (Benjamin 1996)

Another indicator of Catoggio's attitude towards the efficacy of his chosen communicative mode can be seen in the tone and emotional emphasis used. Catoggio could have very easily made more explicit reference to the extent of the time lapsed since he last communicated with his family, and indeed, one could imagine Catoggio placing more emphasis on the potential pathos of the situation. Instead, Catoggio's style is quite formal, perhaps in keeping with accepted norms of behaviour towards one's parents in the early nineteenth century. I would also argue that it is ultimately linked to the central message of the letter, namely, Catoggio's formal and almost legalistic confirmation to his family that he intends to forgo his inheritance as he has no intention of returning to Italy. Although this piece of information seems almost obscured in importance by the first part of Catoggio's letter, it is nonetheless one of the most significant messages he transmits to his family in terms of its potential effect on the lives of his family. He writes: "and so I remit everything to you my dear, and to my brothers and sister and I declare myself excluded in all the manner of profit in favour of my brothers and sister." (Benjamin 1996). Even when he writes that he is unlikely to ever see his relatives again "in this world" - a potentially very moving moment in the text - the message is linked to the practical

matter of renouncing his inheritance. For example, he declares the following: "Thus, Dear Parents, this is all that I must notify you on [with regards to] the Cape and at the same time I must declare that in this world we will not see each other again (I am well established here and it would be [madness] to leave these parts where I am doing well." (Benjamin 1996).

From the above it can be seen that Catoggio considers himself well-established and comfortable in his new life and does not seem overall to regret having left Italy. Or if he did initially, this feeling has been replaced by contentment with his new context. In fact, in contrast to other texts which will be examined, Catoggio does not appear to identify himself particularly with his previous home and his Italian identity. In many ways, the tension referred to by Boelhower between the "Old World" and "New World" realities is not present in this piece of writing (Boelhower 1982, p. 40). In many ways he could be described as having assimilated in the local culture, he is married to a Dutch woman and acknowledges his local, "New World" identity by asking his family to address a reply to "Rocco Catorzia". (Catoggio refers to this as the English way of writing his name (Benjamin 1996).)

Catoggio's letter noticeably lacks obvious traces of this kind of tension or duality, and again, it could be possible to argue that the form of the letter dictates certain limitations, particularly with regards to more lengthily discursive narrative which would successfully allow the setting up of two contrasting worlds and realities. Within a novel or autobiographical piece there quite simply is more "space" in which to establish and create particular textual settings. Again, the communicative model of the letter determines the type of message to be encoded given its relation to real historic (actual) events and its capacity to influence them. Letters generally can be defined in terms of their brevity and the necessity to convey essential or "meaningful" facts. In this regard, Catoggio structures his letter according to his communicative necessities: that is, the need to inform his family that he is still alive, to tell them that he will not be returning to Italy, the expression of his best wishes to friends and family. The space for additional commentary therefore is fairly limited. Once Catoggio has provided some of the most essential information (what happened on his arrival in Spain, how he came to arrive at the Cape, how he managed to support himself, his marriage to a local woman and having a child with her) he expands the narration and includes descriptions and opinions on the living conditions and political situation in the Cape. This structure can again be seen to be related to the narrative and communicative structure dictated to by letter writing.

The most interesting aspect of this part of the letter is the way in which the construct of the "Old World" and "New World Realities" (the duality between "Old World"

and “New World”) are present, even if only by extension or indirectly. Although at no point does he actually mention his “Old World Reality”, somehow it is never far away from the message of the letter and operates as an implied contrast. Catoggio describes the climate of the Cape, writing about the temperature:

The climate of the Cape in winter [is] moderate, the thermometer never goes lower than 55F [or] 10 degrees [Celsius] and sometimes a bit more hot in the summer from 80 to 90 degrees Faren (sic.) to 100 degrees [or] 30 degrees Celsius, but not often because we have in the summer always a wind that blows strongly from the east that sometimes blows terribly, but as it is [that] we have become accustomed to it, we don't think of it much, thus it makes such that these parts are healthy and we don't have epidemics.” (Benjamin 1996)

In this description, the climatic conditions of Catoggio's home are suggested and a number of typical immigrant scenarios of adjustment are presented, such as in the example of having to adjust to new climatic conditions, in this case the Cape South Easter. Catoggio, like many other migrants, straddles two worlds and is faced with trying to convey something of his “New World Reality” to his relatives operating within the “Old World Reality” so that, in describing the wind, he presents the climatic occurrence for the benefit of his intended audience. At the same time he includes epidemics, a cultural referent significant to them, which, as he points out, do not occur in the Cape. To some extent it is as though Catoggio were imagining and anticipating for his family or any other foreigners the initial experience of the strong wind. Here a motif comes up that will be repeated in the other writings and is typical to immigrant writings in general; there is a sense of balance, of weighing up the two known worlds.

Chapter 6

Camillo Ricchiardi's *Diario*

Many studies focusing on ethnicity, especially within North American academic debates have given particular attention to immigrant communities and their process of integration within the dominant culture¹. My decision to examine Camillo Ricchiardi's Anglo-Boer war diary deviates from this trend. In discussing the question of ethnicity, I decided to not focus exclusively on Italian immigrants to South Africa but to rather examine textual examples in which the existence of "ethnic moments" can be discerned. Ricchiardi in fact only transited through South Africa, but the record of his participation in the Anglo-Boer war provides a rich and fascinating example of the creation of a particular type of Italian ethnic identity, one, I will argue, based on notions of honour, valour, romanticisation of conflict as well as preconceived ideas of rank and class.

Camillo Ricchiardi (registered at birth as Richiardi) was born on 5 July 1865 in Alba, last son of a large family. Ricchiardi had a varied career, he was fluent in a number of languages (including English) and travelled widely from Italy to Siam, the United States, Eritrea, South Africa, Argentina, France and Morocco. Between 1884 and 1887 he was part of the Genoese and then Piedmontese cavalry. He then travelled to Siam in order to help organise the army. From there he travelled to the United States where he first was part of the Siamese (Thai) royal representation to Chicago and then later worked as a journalist in New York. In 1895 he worked as a correspondent for North American newspapers during the Sino-Japanese war. In 1896 he published in Italy a work entitled the *Ricchiardi Annual* which aimed to record all the Italian diplomatic missions around the world. The same year he was reported to have worked as a correspondent as well as a soldier in the Italian Abyssinian campaign, Files however questions how he would have been able to have

¹See also the study of the Italian community in Australia and their integration within Australian culture by Stephen Castles (Castles, Alcorso, Rando & Vasta 1992).

been part of the Abyssinian war as well as complete the Ricchiardi Annual in the same year (Filesì 1987) pp. 29-30. Between 1897-98 he worked in Shanghai as an agent for the Union of Italian Industrialists in China. In 1898 he fought in the Philippines. Between November 1899 and September 1900 he was in South Africa involved in the Anglo-Boer war. In June 1901 he married Myra Franciska Guttman Joubert, niece of General Joubert, in Bruxelles. He had met Myra Joubert while fighting in South Africa. Immediately after his participation in the Anglo-Boer war, Ricchiardi spent some time in Italy organising pro-Boer groups, talks and demonstrations. He then travelled with his wife to Argentina and was named administrator by the Argentinean government of the two Boer settlements in Chubut and Neuquen. He also ran a number of commercial activities. In 1913 he returned to Italy and became a representative of a large company importing coffee to Italy. He suffered a stroke in 1923 and retired from his commercial activities. Between 1923 and 1940, the year of his death, he moved from Montecarlo to Nice and finally to Casablanca, Morocco where he died.

From this brief biography it is already easy to guess at the restless spirit of the man who has become the topic of some speculation as well as idealisation. Even the very accurate and mostly reserved historian Filesì cannot resist referring to Ricchiardi as a romantic and adventurer, a "quasi-descendant along the more or less direct hereditary lines of legendary models of a Byron or of a Garibaldi" (Filesì 1987, p. 63).

Part of Camillo Ricchiardi's enigma has arisen no doubt because of the scant information available on him as well as the fact that the most significant source of information on Ricchiardi, the *Diario* itself remained an elusive piece of information, cited by some but only discovered by Filesì in 1986 and published for the first time in its entirety in 1987. And even despite Filesì's efforts at searching additional information and cross-reference material on the figure of Ricchiardi, some details have not been confirmed².

²Filesì explains the source of confusion regarding the *Diario* emerging as a result of a citation by Corrado Masi in a publication of 1946 entitled *Giustizia per il Lavoro Italiano in Africa*. In this work, on the section relating to South Africa and Italian participation in the Anglo-Boer war Masi refers to a certain Edoardo Bizzarri, one of Ricchiardi's men and *author* of a war time diary which Masi quotes in some detail. Unfortunately Masi does not give any bibliographical reference to the source of this memoir. As transpires, the material quoted by Masi, is in fact the *Diario* itself which appears slightly altered in places. From this it is not clear how Masi came to believe that Edoardo Bizzarri was the author of the diary and also part of the volunteers when it is unlikely Filesì believes, that Bizzarri had ever been part of Ricchiardi's men. Filesì justifies this assertion by commenting on the fact that Bizzarri's name never appeared cited in the *Diario*. Adding further confusion is the fact that Santi in his *Storia degli Italiani in Sud Africa* cites and reproduces in its

Because of the delay in which a complete and unedited copy of the *Diario* was brought into print (as far as I have been able to tell, only in 1987 by Filesi). Filesi believes that it is likely that a number of writers who have written on the topic of Italians in South Africa, have read Masi's text and thus the incomplete version of the *Diario*. Among the authors, Filesi suggests: M. Dorato, M. Gazzini, V. Briani and A.G. Bini, referenced in other parts of this dissertation.

The *Diario* was written by Ricchiardi, it would seem, soon after his arrival in Europe in June 1901. It was published in a political journal entitled *Rivista Politica e Letteraria* in Turin with the full title: *La Legione Italiana nella Guerra Anglo-Boera: Diario del Colonnello C. Ricchiardi, Commandant Uitlander-Corps-Zuid-Afrikaansche-Republiek* (as published in T. Filesi (Filesi 1987)).

The *Diario*, which in the original consists of a 31 page document, deals exclusively with the role of the so-called "Italian Legion" in the Anglo-Boer war. It does not purport to be an overview of the conflict but rather, aims to record only the particular aspect of Italian participation in the Anglo-Boer war. This brings to light a little-discussed aspect of the war. The analysis that follows will consider the creation of an idealised and very partisan Italian "ethnic" identity as presented by Ricchiardi in his description of the Italian volunteers in the conflict. For all that a commentator such as Filesi considers the *Diario* to be a muted and fairly objective account of the events (Filesi 1987, p. 41). I would argue that on closer examination, Ricchiardi hardly ever passes up the opportunity of conferring onto his men and Italians in general (with only a few exceptions) qualities of adventure, courage, initiative, discipline as well as humour in combat, very "manly" attitudes which will be discussed later in greater detail.

Reading the *Diario*, one cannot help but wonder at the motivation of a person such as Ricchiardi and that of the many other volunteers (Italian and of other nationalities) who joined the Boers in a conflict which was both dangerous and bloody, for no compensation other than the moral satisfaction of opposing British colonial rule and interference in the two recently established Boer republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Filesi points out that in part this foreign interest in South Africa can be explained by the anti-British sentiment the war provoked which seemed only to re-confirm suspicions of the "greedy" imperialist agenda of Britain. He reminds us of the anti-war demonstrations held in England at the time, and also within South Africa a document found in the archives of the women's Afrikaans magazine *Die Huisgenoot* a 1936 publication of the *Diario* published in two installments and edited by none other than Bizzarri and a certain Edoardo Cope whom Sani calls "two young researchers" in South Africa (Sani 1989, p. 105).

Africa by figures such as Olive Schreiner. Filesi puts the foreign participation into perspective: while people as diverse as Austrian, French, American, Dutch, Irish and German took part in the war, they numbered in all a little over a thousand people, as Filesi writes, "a gesture more than an army" (Filesi 1987, p. vii).

All the same, Ricchiardi's support of the Boer cause, as evidenced by the role he played during the Anglo-Boer conflict and through his campaigning of the Boers at other times in his life, is not presented in any direct terms within the *Diario*. Indeed, there is very little in the *Diario* which tends towards political propagandising on behalf of the Boers (his chance meeting with a British catholic chaplain and his meeting with the British Commander Pole-Carew constitute the two rare exceptions). It is clear that the authoritative style of the *Diario* puts the emphasis on action and the accomplishment of courageous and daring deeds rather than debate and discussion. The implication is, I would argue, that this is befitting to a commander of Ricchiardi's standing. Thus, although the overall style of the *Diario* deliberately appears neutral and objectively focused on the facts, it will be seen in fact that Ricchiardi has constructed a text in which values of valour, courage and discipline are considered to be worthy attributes and typically embodied by men of a medium to high class standing; and out of all the nationalities Ricchiardi speaks of, it is particularly the *Italian* men who display these virtues! Although, as will be discussed, Ricchiardi creates a quasi-hierarchy of virtuous men, it is also true that Ricchiardi presupposes the existence of a class of worthy men whose virtues may be easily discernable and recognisable to each other, thus overcoming boundaries of language, culture and location. In a sense, Ricchiardi's *Diario* can be read the construction of a military code of conduct and ethics, as is seen in Ricchiardi's presentation of the figure of General Botha. Although Ricchiardi tends towards the disparagement of the Boers, considering them a "rough" people who speak a "dialect" and who lack something of the European worldliness, in General Botha, he finds a match for the values of honour and courage. Ricchiardi's first encounter with General Botha is revelatory of his admiration for the General's and the Boers' wily-combat tactics:

Il 15 dicembre e nei giorni precedenti la battaglia di Colenso, il plotone italiano era nella posizione del centro col Krügersdorp Comando, nella direzione del ponte della ferrovia, punto che fu il più bersagliato dall'artiglieria nemica. Gli inglesi ebbero in quella giornata 2500 morti, 2000 e più feriti, i boeri 14 morti 21 feriti; tra questi, io fui colpito alla gamba destra. Si fu allora che il generale Botha sorridendo mi disse: *La prossima volta vi nasconderete meglio*; parole che esprimono la tattica

boera di colpire e non essere colpito.

Ricchiardi's next personal encounter with General Botha takes place shortly before the disbanding of the Foreign Legion during the *krigsraad* (war council) on the 16 of September 1900. During this meeting, the leading Boer leaders acknowledged their weakened position in the fighting and announced their decision to end regular front-on combat with the British. On this occasion, as Botha left the gathering, Ricchiardi describes how Botha, accompanied by two hundred men, bade farewell to the foreign legion. An apparently saddened and teary Botha shook hands with Ricchiardi and personally bestowed on him his well-wishes. While this is not quite an example of an "ethnic gaze" which William Boelhower refers to and discussed earlier, it is nonetheless a very interesting textual moment in which Ricchiardi presents the "ethnic other" that is Botha and a moment of shared communication. The suggestion here is of a shared moment of understanding between two *almost* evenly-matched soldiers:

Doloroso fu il congedo del generale Botha dai volontari, specialmente dal corpo italiano ch'egli stimava ed apprezzava moltissimo, avendolo avuto quasi sempre sotto i suoi ordini diretti.

Il Botha, accompagnato da Lucas Meyer e da soli cento uomini del corpo di polizia di Johannesburg, passò lentamente, a cavallo, dinanzi alla legione straniera, visibilmente commosso, mi strinse fortemente la mano dicendo ad alta voce: *io (sic) long broeders: danke, danke*. (Arrivederci fratelli, grazie, grazie), e partì al galoppo verso le montagne del Zoutpansberg.

The relation between the two men, as can be seen from the extract quoted above, is not quite one of parity. It is Botha who becomes moved to tears and bids a rather emotional farewell from the Italian corps and Ricchiardi. Ricchiardi does not comment on his own position (let alone feelings) during the farewell so that the overall effect is that of Ricchiardi's superior standing in the course of their final meeting. It is Botha who is presented as thankful and indebted to Ricchiardi. In fact, an important narrative thread which is developed in the *Diario* is the Boers' gradual recognition of Ricchiardi's military capabilities which culminates in this scene where Ricchiardi and the Italian legion is publicly praised and thanked for their contribution to the conflict. One only has to contrast this with the early passages of the diary in which Ricchiardi presents himself to the Boers, and they, either ignorant or diffident of Ricchiardi's earlier military exploits, enrol him as a

“simple” volunteer. (Of course, as Filesi comments, it is understandable that the Boers were somewhat wary of the foreign volunteers who were willing to take up arms against the British, but in the concluding passages of the *Diario* it is Ricchiardi who comes through with flying colours, thus confirming Ricchiardi’s soldierly capabilities, just as the reader is led to suspect all along.)

He also mentions that he learnt Afrikaans (their “dialect”) and Boer customs very quickly and that he was on good terms with them. So much so that in a short space of time he became favoured among the foreigners (Filesi 1987, p. 139). From these few sentences it is already possible to notice Ricchiardi’s position of worldly superiority towards the Boers.

As seen above, the *Diario* can be used as a rich source of material in which a number of ethnic contacts can be analysed. The text is filled with examples in which other nationalities and ethnic groups are commented on: ordinary Boer soldiers, Italian noble volunteers, local Italians, Italians of mixed European nationalities (such as Commander Schiffl), as well as British commanders, soldiers and civilians. The point is that a text such as the *Diario* offers an interesting and original representation of these different interactions. In the same way that Rocco Catoggio’s letter is of interest in constructing an alternative image of the 1820 British settlers in the Cape, so here, Ricchiardi offers a different even if marginal perspective of the Anglo-Boer war and relations between different ethnic groupings. Arguably, it is precisely because of its marginal nature that a text such as the *Diario* can offer the perspective it does.

Therefore, this can be said to be one of the contributions but also challenges offered by so-called ethnic literature such as the *Diario*: the descriptions cannot be easily categorised within a dominant literary tradition, in this case, either South African or Italian. At the same time, however, it is precisely the distinctiveness and marginality of a text such as Ricchiardi’s *Diario* which offers the possibility for a new perspective on the topic of Anglo-Boer relations as well as of relations between the Boers and the British to different ethnic communities in South Africa at the time.

Chapter 7

Articles Published in Zonderwater Prisoner of War Camp

A discussion on Italians in South Africa would not be complete without mention of the Italian Prisoners of War held captive in South Africa between 1941 - 1947 in a number of camps scattered around the country¹. The most well-known and largest of these was Zonderwater, a few kilometres from the mining town of Cullinan. As mentioned previously, (Chapter 2) the internment of large numbers of Italian Prisoners of War in South Africa² and the unusually good relations that developed between the South African authorities and the Italian POW's meant that, at the end of the War, many chose to return to South Africa and settle permanently. Between 500 and 800 men were allowed to stay in South Africa at the closure of the camp without returning first to Italy, as was in fact required by the Geneva Convention protocols regarding repatriation at the end of wars (Gazzini 1987, p. 332), (Sani 1989, p. 286). Besides providing an influx of Italians into South Africa, the internment of Italians during the World War II created an interesting situation and position of exchange between the South African and Italian cultures.

The Zonderwater camp was an experience that was probably unique in the world given the numbers of Italian POW's involved and the excellent relations between the South African authorities, the Camp leadership and the POW's. This is testified by the admirable running of the camp in strict accordance with the Geneva Convention guidelines set out for prisoner of war camps. In sharp contrast to prisoner camps

¹Italian POWS were also held at the following camps and work camps: Worcester, Dutoitskloof, George, Cookhouse, Weza, Pietermaritzburg, Loskop, Jessievale, Warmbaths, Standerton and Kroonstad. (As listed in *POW: Italian P.O.W. in the Union of South Africa / P.diG. Italiani nell'Unione Sud Africana*(Unknown Reprinted 1998 by Tiger Press (Pty) Ltd, Johannesburg))

²It is estimated that over 90.000 Italian POW's were held captive in South Africa during the Second World War.

around the world during other historical periods, the South African POW camps respected the humane treatment of the prisoners. This meant caring for POW's primary needs (adequate food, shelter, clothing, sanitation) in addition to such other needs as access to educational facilities, varied work possibilities inside and outside the camp, and opportunities for creative mental and physical expression. This last possibility included the freedom to write, to produce and perform theatrical and musical entertainment, to organise sporting events as well as create fine art and artisan handiwork that was on occasion collected and displayed in highly successful exhibitions open to the general public. The POW's were also granted a small allowance and allowed to communicate with their families although their correspondence was monitored and limited to very short letters. In the approximately six years of Italian POW presence in South Africa, some remarkable things were achieved. Some of these have remained as tangible traces in actual buildings, artifacts and, in particular, the pieces of writing that will be examined in this section. Other effects of the South African decision to accept Italian POW's resulted in generally good and long-lasting rapports of mutual respect and cooperation developing between individual South Africans, South African authorities, Italians in South Africa and Italian authorities.

This sentiment of cooperation continued to some extent also during the National Party rule from 1949 though it was tempered in some cases by concerns about Italians's Catholic and also socialist identity (Sani 1989, p. 286). As discussed in Chapter 2, these concerns were overcome in part because of the Nationalists' desire to bring in skilled labour and thus encouraging immigration by Italians and other white Europeans (Sani 1989, p. 288).

If it seems hard to believe that a Prisoner of War camp could be run according to these criteria, it is helpful to remember that South Africa was led into the war by Jan Smuts' United Party, of liberal tendencies. Smuts, known also for participation in drawing up the Preamble to the United Nations Charter, must have seen South Africa's internment of POWS as an opportunity to promote South Africa within an international context by showing South Africa as a leading example in the humanitarian treatment of POWS. This can be sustained by the fact that on more than one occasion Col. Hendrik Frederik Prinsloo, Camp commander since 1943 (Gazzini 1987, p. 135), mentioned that he was posted and given direct orders from Smuts to ensure that the treatment of the POW's was above reproach. Col. Prinsloo's policy of course did not get by without criticism. It is therefore interesting to note that Prinsloo on a number of occasions dealt with the criticism of the POW treatment directly. During his speech at the inauguration of the "Third Arts and Crafts

Exhibition" held at Zonderwater, Prinsloo had the following to say:

Some of those who criticise our ways say that we are too good towards the Prisoners of War. But what exactly do they mean by this? I personally do not believe that goodness can be measured and that there are limits to treating human beings with kindness. But if by saying this critics are implying that the Prisoners of War have abused of our kindness, they could not be further from the truth. I don't believe that there is anyone better than myself who would be able to judge the matter and I want to confirm that there have been no such abuses. This building which you see is the tangible proof of their gratitude. The Prisoners have built this Exhibition Hall not in order to gain a small recompense but in order to leave a lasting memory worthy of their tradition. . . . There are others who compare and point to those countries in which Prisoners are treated with less dignity! To them I can say that it is our desire and ambition to place South Africa in the front line of humane treatment of POWS. . . . We do not have anything to learn from our friends or foes. Our great Leader, Gen. Smuts has given me clear instructions not to be concerned with what it is that others are doing but to ensure that South Africa is a model in the carrying out the noble gentlemen's agreement that is the Geneva Convention. The Prisoners have decided to hand over the profits of this Exhibition to the Red Cross. Our real reward however is to have assured a prominent place for our country in this humanitarian work.³

And again in the introduction to an informational and promotional booklet on the Prisoner of War camps in South Africa *Italian P.O.W. in the Union of South Africa/P.di G. Italiani nell'Unione Sud Africana* (Unknown Reprinted 1998 by Tiger Press (Pty) Ltd, Johannesburg), Prinsloo repeats a similar message:

This brochure contains pictorial documentation of the manner in which South Africa has carried out the provisions of the Geneva Convention, the finest Gentleman's Agreement ever entered upon by nations. South Africa does not possess a large population and its history is relatively recent, but as far as humanitarian treatment of P.O.W. is concerned, we can claim to have given a clear lead and set a very high standard . . .

Ours was an experiment and as the months and years rolled by we have

³Prinsloo's speech, from which this extract has been taken, was published in the Monthly Special Edition of *Tra I Reticolati* in Italian. I have subsequently translated this section back into English.

given to this Camp a soul and to our work a clear directive. Our greatest reward must be the deep conviction of having assured to South Africa a leading place in humanitarian work. We feel that for many years to come when problems of P.O.W. will be discussed the fair name of our country will gain added lustre and prestige.

From the two extracts above, it is clear that the policy towards the Italian POW's was believed to be something of a "political experiment" on the part of South Africa, and reflects the elements of liberal tendencies operating within white party politics at the time. The Zonderwater camp, which became known for its unique "Zonderwater spirit" was also very fortunate in attracting other like-minded individuals who were involved in running the camp. Among them was Captain H. Sonnabend, Director of Welfare services who was apparently completely fluent in Italian having studied and worked at Pisa University in Italy. It is this kind of sympathy and excellent rapport which undoubtedly contributed to making the Zonderwater experience unique.

Regarding the question of the humanitarian conduct by the South African authorities towards the Italian POW's, and the perceptions of the Camps was glorified "summer camps", it must be remembered that although the POW's were treated with respect and allowed certain freedoms, they were nonetheless denied their basic freedom of movement and denied their wish to return to Italy. This is a recurrent theme which in much of the writing produced within the Zonderwater camp. The POWS repeatedly wrote of the strain of being "behind barbed wire" (*tra i reticolati*) and of fighting actively against feelings of apathy and depression. Particularly difficult was the fact that although fascism was brought down in Italy 1943, and war ended in 1945, most of the POWS were only allowed to return from 1946 - 1947. Many felt that they had wasted precious years of their lives far from their native homes and families. The POWS also inevitably had to face language and cultural barriers as well as isolated cases of discrimination. Initially, Zonderwater consisted only of military tents which were later replaced by brick buildings. The camp was also at times racked by internal tensions such as after the fall of Mussolini in Italy, causing the camp to be divided along political lines (after 1943 the pro-fascist POWS were placed in a separate block). For many, imprisonment during the war provoked feelings of helplessness and frustration at being unable to help and at being so removed from the action of the war. This can be seen for example in Lieutenant Brunetti's Christmas message of 1943 discussed later.

With regards to the South African treatment of Italian POW's, it is difficult to disagree with Prinsloo's belief that, to contrast the dignified treatment of the POW's

with other countries' less favourable treatment of POW's is to miss the point.

With this in mind, this chapter will examine a number of articles published by the Zonderwater POW's in the newspaper *Tra I Reticolati*, as well as the newspaper *Panorama* and discuss in greater detail the question of how individual writers negotiated the representation of their identity. As discussed, the fact that not all the works to be studied here were produced by immigrants in the strict definition of the term is not seen as a deterrent to this study. Rather, what has guided my analysis is the consideration that (Italian) identity can only be represented when confronted by *difference* and that the construction of the identity of Italians in South Africa, was made possible because of the necessity for Italians to relate with people of identities different to their own. It is the combined dialogue with various South African ethnic and racial identities as well as different Italian identities (Italians in Italy, Italian in South Africa, immigrants of other nationalities in South Africa, various Italian regional identities) that together contributed to the expression of a particular and peculiar, even if up to now, little discussed, identity for Italians in South Africa. From this point of view, the period of settlement in South Africa is not as significant as the fact that the writers were placed in this position of difference and in contact with their own otherness.

Tra I Reticolati began as a simple publication of a few pages originally reporting on sport. (*Sport Tra i Reticolati*) Gazzini explains however that on 10 November 1941 the first number of *Tra I Reticolati* appeared with expanded content. The newspaper continued to grow so as to become a quasi-official organ of communication within the camp. It was filled with news related to the Camp and the various blocks, news on Italy and other foreign news, South African news, information from other POW camps in South Africa as well as sport, music, theatre, schooling activities within the camp and a humour section (Gazzini 1987, p. 262). Messages and speeches of various South African Camp officials and outside bodies were also written up, such as messages from Col. Prinsloo, Captain H. Sonnabend, the South African Red Cross representatives, YMCA representatives and even Committees of Italians living in South Africa. The newspaper was hand printed on a weekly basis from within the camp, but from October 1943, the Camp authorities succeeded in obtaining permission for one special edition to be printed each month at an external printing press in a traditional newspaper format, printed on newsprint and usually made up of around 16 - 20 pages. Furthermore, it was recognised by the then South African publishing authorities. It was in this way, writes Gazzini that *Tra I Reticolati Weekly Publication of the Italian Prisoners of War - Monthly Printed Edition* came into being (Gazzini 1987, p. 263). As Gazzini explains in his book, the POWS

received assistance and encouragement of the Camp authorities in this initiative, but this assistance also meant that *Tra i Reticolati* was also supervised and in part controlled by the camp authorities (Gazzini 1987, p. 262)⁴.

The first article, Lieutenant Brunetti's Christmas message (*Tra I Reticolati* 1943) can be said to be concerned with a stronger, less "diluted" Italian identity than later articles. Brunetti's article gives an insight into a view of his own Italian identity, one, I would argue, that is based on an Italy clearly remembered and closely identified with. As opposed to articles printed later (admittedly written by other authors), Brunetti's message shows an almost complete preoccupation with Italy and the situation there. This of course is understandable given the dramatic turn of events of the war in Europe, but also has to do with the fact that Brunetti and the other POWS were temporally closer to Italy. In later articles, for example, it will be seen how the concerns focus more directly on life in the camp as the realities of Italy and the war become more and more distant.

In this regard, it is not surprising that the article deals almost exclusively with Italy, referring to the prisoners' location in South Africa only in the concluding lines. Brunetti presents a Christmas message of encouragement and hope to the POWS by describing an imaginary flight of the Christ child on Christmas night over Italy: He writes: "During the night of his long voyage he has crossed skies, mountains, seas, he has passed through isolated homesteads, through city houses both poor and affluent, in hovels and in forgotten country mansions. Everywhere he has found a terrible desolation." By asking the POWS to image Christ's flight over Italy on Christmas night, Brunetti invokes the Christian belief in the "earthly" or tangible presence of the divine during the commemoration of this religious feast. Significantly however, the journey embarked on by the Christ child in 1943, described here by Brunetti, takes place apparently only within Italy. Although the Christ child travels over mountains, seas and cities, the implication is that these are all within Italy. In this way, Brunetti particularises his faith or religious doctrine by attaching cultural markers which are specifically *Italian*. He appears to do this quite unconsciously. Only at the conclusion of the article does Brunetti acknowledge the spatial and cultural difference of celebrating Christmas in South Africa. However, he does this somewhat glibly, writing that the Christmas of the POWS will be very different from the one commemorated in Italy: "Yours will be a different Christmas, filled with sunshine, a sunshine entirely yours, entirely Italian." This is a rather unsuccessful conclusion to the article in which he seems to be trying to simultaneously recognise

⁴A publication entitled *Tra i Reticolati* continued to be published at the end of the war by the Zonderwater Association which formed in Milan around an executive committee.

the reality of spending Christmas in Zonderwater, characterised by summer heat and sunshine, while at the same time trying to coopt metaphoric meanings of sunshine (friendliness and congeniality) as typically Italian. But the supposedly typical Italian "sunshine" which the POWS bring to South Africa is at odds with the descriptions of Italy which Brunetti mentions earlier: desolate landscapes, abandoned homes, the Alps and Christmas. In this way, Brunetti does not seem to provide an imaginary or textual reconciliation of the significance of being an Italian and a captive in a foreign land. In a sense, Brunetti seems to filter his experience only from the perspective of being Italian and does not appear to be particularly sensitive to the cultural and physical difference of being in South Africa. It is possible that this is inevitable because in order to be aware of cultural difference and to place one's own difference within context surely implies curiosity of the other, pastimes which Colonel-General Brunetti was probably not in a position to pursue given the immediacy of the war in his mind. This position can be contrasted to later articles in which the writers are much more introspective and observant to their position of cultural difference and display a much greater sensitivity to being in South Africa. In particular, it is likely that the generally collaborative attitude of the South Africans meant that the prisoners did not see in South Africans enemies; rather they probably saw a people different to themselves caught up in conflict which seemed to have little bearing in their everyday lives.

With regard to the type of Italian identity portrayed, it can be seen that Brunetti defines his Italian identity in terms of a strong belief in patriotism and nationalism. The Italy described by Brunetti is the country of Garibaldi, of national heroes and martyrs during the Risorgimento period in Italian history. The project of national unity and the liberation of Italy from foreign rule promoted during the Risorgimento is here invoked and is linked to the situation of the world war. Brunetti admonishes Italy for having forgotten the history lessons of the past; from the experience of foreign subjugation during the 1800's, Italians should have known better than to have "opened the sacred ways to the foreigner" and have "abandoned the earth" thereby precipitating Italy's invasion by foreign nations and her loss of independence. Interestingly, the article presents as the cause of Italy's invasion the false sense of trust which Italy developed with foreign nations and does not mention Benito Mussolini's role in leading Italy into war.

As discussed by Pasquale Verdicchio the politics of Italian nationalism repeatedly return readers to the question of cultural hegemony. Just as at the time of unification in 1861 when northern Italy fought off Spanish control of Sicily and the South and imposed its own cultural identity as a national one, so here in Brunetti's article,

the nationalist fervour is defined by the cultural supremacy of the north of Italy at the expense of regional (and Southern) Italian difference. Brunetti's invocation of Giuseppe Garibaldi and the martyrs can be seen as part of the myth which was built up in order to bolster a national image for the divided Italy of the 1850's onwards. As Verdicchio points out, the "liberation" of the South by Garibaldi and his allies in fact resulted in a re-colonisation of the South by Northern Italy (Verdicchio 1997, pp. 21-28). With this in mind, it is impossible not to see in Brunetti's article a northern cultural hegemony at work, especially in his discussion of the Alps as the site of combat and the gateway through which the "foreigner" was allowed to enter Italy. Although it is true that northern Italy did in fact suffer tremendous damages through the war and that Brunetti does mention that among the 600.000 dead were people of all the regions of Italy, the overall effect of the article is to reinforce the image of a northern based, culturally homogenous Italy at war. Critics such as Verdicchio would argue that in the history of Italy and Italian nationalism, messages and texts which promote "myths" of cultural unification have continued to be propagated at the expense of cancelling out local and regional difference and identity, specifically that of the south of Italy which continues to provide a "dissonant" and unacceptable voice in projects of Italian national unity.

Brunetti's article also highlights, as discussed in Chapter 1, is the fact that specifically when Italian culture has been "transported" abroad, writers have often felt the need to represent a unified and homogenous image of Italy, and associate with an Italy that may not have been very familiar to them. So although, Brunetti's message was addressed to the POWS from different regions of Italy and of different cultural backgrounds, the cultural references which he used are those of northern Italy. To extrapolate Verdicchio's argument on the creation of a national Italian identity, a text such as the one here analysed reveals that even if writers such as Brunetti tend to assume a unified national Italian identity as an inevitability it is in fact something which has always been continually negotiated. Furthermore, it has been the case that particularly at times when Italian national identity has been most under threat, as in the case of the Second World War, a resurgence of patriotic, nationalistic discourse can be found. (Indeed it would not be possible to imagine the decision of European nations have gone to war without this renewed nationalistic fervour.) In the case of prisoners of war, such as those interned at Zonderwater, it also makes sense that far from Italy, men in positions of authority such as Brunetti (he was a Colonel-General) would feel the necessity to couch a message of encouragement in particularly nationalist and patriotic terms.

The second article I examine dates to 1944 on the occasion of the opening of the

Third Exhibition of Art and Crafts at Zonderwater (*The Third Exhibition of Art and Craft, Tra i Reticolati*, April 1944). A few differences in circumstance are immediately apparent between the earlier article and this one. To begin with, it was clear that the POWS believed there was no immediate chance of their return to Italy. This is detected in the article's description of the hardship of captivity, of having to actively fight against the apathy and the feelings of futility. This contrasts markedly from Brunetti's restlessness and his frustration at being so removed from the conflict in Italy and at his powerlessness to do anything. Life at the POW Camps was dominated and closely linked to the unfolding situation of the war, so it is understandable that with a more stable situation in Italy, the prisoners at Zonderwater were more at ease to divert their attention to creative enterprises and to the installation of the highly successful "Exhibition of Arts and Handiwork". In terms of the arguments raised earlier about the representation of a national Italian cultural identity by writers of *Tra i Reticolati*, I will discuss how Salus Gattamelata in his article continues to develop this ideal in somewhat different terms by attributing to Italians a typically artistic temperament and thus promoting a stereotypical and undifferentiated representation of Italian identity.

For Gattamelata, in the Exhibition, "the genius" of Italians shines through the works which "confirm decisively the innate sense of the beautiful and the instinct for Art in the Italian people, an eclectic, impetuous and divinely inspired race". Here the writer indulges in stereotyping Italians as artistic, impetuous and restless. Gattamelata also curiously merges romantic ideals of the artist with the condition of captivity of the POWS. If one did not know he was referring to prisoners one could assume that he was talking of a Romantic artist: "The torment of the soul and the rebellion against destiny, a sense of drama and the aspiration towards Divinity. This is what the expressions of our young companions tell us." And later again, in describing how creative pursuits helped to relieve the frustration of captivity, the images of the Romantic artist mix with the descriptions of the POWS at work: "... each one of us, as we were busy with the work, had in his heart our Nation and Home. We expressed all our anxiousness, grief and hope through the raw material which became light and joy, in the clay that palpitated under our tormented hands and in the colour which illuminated the waiting canvass." This refers back to Emilio Franzina's notion that it is typically abroad that Italian writing invokes notions of Classicism and Romanticism (Franzina 1996, p. 3).

Despite the over emphasis of creative fervour which Gattamelata describes, the message is clear and is best summed up in the single line: "Through work we show our immense capacity for life and we reconfirm our right to that life." This

message, more simply stated than all the verbosity that precedes it highlights the feelings of freedom, of self expression and assertion which the prisoners experienced through creative enterprise. Ironically, it is precisely when Gattamelata avoids the Romantic hyperbole that his article is most insightful and that he avoids the trap of stereotyping Italians as possessing an artistic temperament.

The last article which I briefly discuss is taken from a special printed edition in 1946 of a newspaper entitled *Panorama* on the occasion of the closure of Zonderwater. The first is an article entitled "Leggere" (To Read) by Mario Zampiglione. In it Zampiglione describes a much used service in the Zonderwater camp and that is the establishment of lending libraries. The various libraries, including the circulating library, the postal library (for officials and postal workers with whom Zampiglione takes issue for having reserved a large number of books to themselves), the library for infectious ill patients (Libreria Infettivi), the Central library, the University Library, the Schooling Library in total contained around 18.000 volumes (excluding material which was printed within Zonderwater), of which approximately 40 percent were on loan at any given time (p. 10). This description, confirmed also by Gazzini (1987, pp. 260-2), describes an aspect of the camp which together with the schooling facilities was obviously invested with a lot of effort on the part of the Welfare officers Capt. Sonnabend and then by Capt. Ball as well as dedicated pows. It is interesting to note that in an interview, transcribed by Gazzini in *Zonderwater: I Prigionieri del Sudafrica (1941 - 1947)*, Col. Prinsloo mentions as the most satisfying achievement of the camp the tremendous improvement in literacy rates among the pows. Prinsloo quoted that approximately 11.000 men learnt to read and write whilst in Zonderwater (Gazzini 1987, pp. 148-9). So even though reading might have been the occupation of a fairly small number of pows and that overall the number of books available was fairly reduced by comparison to the number of pows, it is still clear that the library services formed an integral part of the encouragement of literacy employed in the camp.

Zampiglione writes:

Here is the word that so enthused the prisoners of war of all nationalities, here is that word that we all pronounced more than once with great desire and that at the beginning of our imprisonment only a few of us on a few occasions had the opportunity of using in the proud affirmation: I have a book to read. . . . How many times instead that word was used in the expression: how I would like to have something to read; how many times the humble prisoner wished for something to read but his wish could not

be satisfied as a small pain to be added to the others that first the war and then imprisonment gave us.

An interesting aspect of the above descriptions is the fact that for Zampiglione the act of reading transcends cultural, social and political boundaries between the POWs. His article reinforces the idea of the universal experience of reading. Furthermore, reading encourages a diversified understanding of experience.

Zampiglione's description of packing up of the Zonderwater library books is interesting as he writes that he was overcome by a certain nostalgia and melancholy. At the same time though, his sadness is tempered by the thought that the closure of the library signifies the certainty of his return home and by the thought of the enjoyment that the books brought:

We have returned the books to the University of Johannesburg and I confess that a certain melancholy assailed me when I saw the cases departing containing all those worthy works. But if the library of Zonderwater ceases to exist it is the sign that the day of the repatriation is drawing near and so there is no need for sadness.

And also:

And above all there is the certainty of having done something worthwhile and that perhaps people will keep a good memory of [the library].

But the pursuit of knowledge was not interpreted in a merely disinterested fashion, as the description of the role of the "schools" in Zonderwater shows. In the article "Le Scuole P.d.G. *Duca D'Aosta*", the writer(s) (the "Zonderwater Assistance" Committee) comments that the schools of Zonderwater and the libraries brought about and encouraged the pursuit of knowledge. The writer shows his belief that learning is a unifying, democratising activity which can be made available to all. But interestingly, in advocating the positive effects of learning, the article tends to stress the unifying and homogenising aspects of the process.

In the Second Exhibition of Arts and Crafts of the Prisoners of War of Zonderwater, on the wall at the back dedicated to Schooling events, the following verses were written: "Nati non foster a viver come bruti /

Ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza ...". The schools and the libraries, operating in unison made it possible for "virtue and knowledge" to be become common things, within the reach of all, and transforming, where possible, the sad camp of imprisonment into a healthy camp dedicated to work.

Referring again to Bakhtin's notion of forces at work in society, the article can be seen as a description of the centrifugal, as opposed to the centripetal, forces at work of the schools in the camp (Bakhtin 1990 (first published 1981), p. 272). Although, according to Bakhtin both are necessarily present, it is understandable that under the distorted condition of imprisonment there should be a concern with unification and order and that divergence and difference should be almost totally inconceivable.

With this in mind, I would argue that the writing produced within Zonderwater and in particular the newspaper articles of *Tra i Reticolati* provide an excellent example of dialogue between a number of different groups represented in the camp as the articles that appear are written by the Italian prisoners, South African authorities as well as by Italian community committees (of Johannesburg and Pretoria) and local Italian companies. The edition of *Panorama* in particular, written in 1946 on the occasion of the closure of the camp contains a message from official Italian representatives (minister U. Rochira), the Italian committee of Johannesburg, the South African Red Cross association, and a number of the Camp officials (Col. Prinsloo, Major Murray and Capt. Ball, Welfare Officer). It is precisely this dialogue which facilitated and indeed provided the conditions within which the POWS represented their Italian identity, and all of these, I would argue formed part of their composite identity as Italian POWS in South Africa.

Chapter 8

Adolfo G. Bini's *Italiani in Sud Africa*

Thus far the discussion on the creation of an Italian identity in South Africa has focused on the difficulty of defining what effectively constitutes an *Italian* identity and the problems inherent in the representation of this identity. The examination and analysis of Adolfo Giuseppe Bini's *Italiani in Sud Africa* will continue to discuss how Italians represent their identity.

In the following paragraphs, I discuss how Bini's text, like the texts already analysed, can be seen to create a continuous dialogue between many points of view on the question of e/immigration. For example, Bini addresses both an Italian audience in Italy as well as an Italian audience in South Africa (his direct community). Bini's voice operates outside of the traditional canon of works attributed to either an Italian or South African literature, yet it is a voice that nonetheless exists, and as is typical in other emigrant works, it negotiates its expression *between* pre-defined categories of writing. In this study, it has been repeatedly argued that identity is best understood when interpreted through an encounter with *difference*. In most immigrant works, this refers to the processes either subconscious or conscious that have to present an *Italian* identity to a previously non-existent audience. This is the dilemma that any immigrant faces whether he/she chooses to write or not. His/her identity is no longer something that is assumed but one that must be negotiated, selected and constructed for an external audience, be that an Italian audience or an audience of the new country of settlement (often with many different ethnicities) or that of fellow immigrants. In the case of Bini's text, he too chooses to present a particular view and interpretation of what constitutes Italian identity for him. I will argue that in many ways it can be seen as an expression of the concerns and anxieties of immigrants who need to assert their identity and place in their new

society.

This chapter will specifically examine Bini's text as an example of the representation of Italian identity based on the belief and praise for an Italian national and patriotic identity. It will be seen that Bini responds to the challenge of self-representation by calling up and creating an identity of Italians based on values of a strong work ethic, of honesty, enterprise as well as family and group solidarity. Significantly, he invokes these characteristic of the Italian make-up. Bini's text could perhaps be seen as example of a kind of popular and collective history of the Italian community in South Africa in as much as it amasses detailed information and operates as a testimony of the achievements of Italians in South Africa, specifically by its selected use and reference to conversations, interviews and even some newspaper articles and letters. Arguably, without Bini's intervention, these are stories, historiographies, biographies and chronologies which could have been otherwise lost. Significantly, through the work of critics such Hayden White, the objectivity of the project of historical representation has been questioned. For White, it is important to acknowledge the fictitious and inventive aspect in any historical undertaking, which is not to undermine its usefulness, but rather to expose the problems in claiming the objectivity of historical representations. This is nowhere more apparent in a text such as Bini's where by its very nature, the fictitious aspect of the representation is apparent. Bini after all, bases his comments on things that he heard, on conversations he had and on other texts, which in themselves are interpretations and representations of particular events. However, instead of acknowledging the possibilities embodied in textual expression, Bini attempts to assert the veracious, objective and "truthful" qualities of his narration. It is in this sense that Bini's text operates in a quasi-propagandistic fashion, wishing to reaffirm a univocal construction of Italian identity based on nationalist and patriotic values. It will be seen that to some extent this attempt is not entirely successful and that on closer examination his text does open up to a *polyphonic* interpretation.

One particular such "voice" is provided by the editor of the magazine *Cronache d'Italia*, Annibale del Mare, to whom Bini sent his manuscript for endorsement. Del Mare, who writes the Foreword to the book in the form of a thank-you note to Bini, can be seen to share Bini's belief in the interpreting Italian identity on the basis of nationalism and patriotism. He however does expose a particular version of Italian nationalism which reinterprets and in fact appropriates the work and expressions of emigrants. Del Mare can be seen to tend towards patronising Bini's work and Bini himself as an example of emigrant capabilities.

Del Mare's first comment on Bini's letter mentioning the collection of biographical

material and asking for Del Mare's opinion was that Bini's neat and regular handwriting was that of a "star pupil". He carries on to comment on Bini's modesty and self-deprecatory manner:

with the delicacy and modesty of one who has his entire life acted with scrupulous delicacy and modesty, he mentioned, almost meekly, that he wished to know my opinion on what he had gathered and on the idea, vaguely delineated, to have those lovingly written pages translated into print." (Bini 1957, pp. 5-6).

Del Mare also expresses surprise the first time he sees Bini's tidy and handwritten manuscript. It is on the basis of Bini's success through difficulty and strife that del Mare bases his admiration and sees in Bini a typical emigrant experience, one that honours Italy. The problem with this kind of enthusiastic acceptance of the emigrant and of his/her (though inevitably male) climb to economic independence, success and honourable social standing is that it chooses to forget the emigrant's initial decision to leave Italy and in some way renounce his/her Italian identity. But not only do they forget this but tend to exploit the successes of Italians abroad as displaying typically Italian characteristics. The ultimate irony is that a commentator such as del Mare is always able to attribute to an emigrant such as Bini a complete devotion to Italy even if Bini himself should ever appear to be forgetful or create an emotional distance from Italy:

He used to return to his Native Country on occasion for brief stays, as though conceding himself a prize after years of tenacious industriousness; but his Native Country would always be in his heart, with an exemplary dignity, with a sincere spirit of collaboration open to all, with a generous impulse towards his fellow nationals. The official recognitions awarded to him of the "Star of Merit of work" and "Italian Solidarity" are truly well deserved.

While it is unlikely that people such as Adolfo Bini left Italy with the specific intention of holding up Italy's good name but as a result of varying degrees of need, commentators such as del Mare have very successfully "reappropriated" and "reformed" as it were the vagabond and wayward inclinations of Italy's "children" such as Bini and others. Thus it is that a discussion on images that Italians abroad create for themselves is not complete without mention of the nationalist tendencies of commentators, writers, historians, politicians and civil servants in Italy who have

in turn helped to shape within the minds of Italian emigrants a nationalist ideology. While Bini's text is not as fervently nationalistic as is the Italian editor del Mare (in the Preface and the Introduction), he nonetheless repeatedly represents and praises specific characteristics of Italian emigrants to South Africa. For Bini it is very important that all the immigrants he mentions were able to succeed and achieve a certain measure of success, without forgetting their Italian roots, thereby doing Italy proud. If the Italian in Italy reappropriates the work of his fellow citizens as typically Italian, emigrant writers such as Bini make a point of "returning" to Italy by showing how the work and achievements of single, highly successful individuals and the community as a whole is able to do Italy proud. Interestingly, part of Bini's implied message is that once emigrants are able to establish themselves and have achieved a certain measure of success, it is then that they are able to devote time to "being Italian", to returning to their roots. This assumption is reflected also in del Mare's comment that Bini conceded himself a holiday every ten years, having worked very hard towards it. Bini also confirms this attitude in the descriptions of the prominent and successful Italians. He often mentions all their achievements and then rounds off the description with a comment on the person's patriotic or affective sentiments towards Italy and their contribution towards social or cultural projects and activities (Bini 1957, p. 23).

Bini's preface "To the emigrant", is however admittedly more "modest" in tone than del Mare's "Thank you to the Author" and "Introduction", in as much as Bini does not appear so virulently patriotic. In fact, Bini addresses his work directly to fellow immigrants and explains that his only reason for writing the book was in order to record the communal efforts of Italian immigrants to South Africa. He presents himself as having no literary aspirations and apologises for presenting a written text to tell his story, knowing that his "brother emigrant" has "never looked kindly on 'scribes'" (Bini 1957, p. 11): "I come here to narrate, with simple words, the story of your work and that of our brothers (in ventura) because I wish that your work should not be lost or ignored. I want your titanic effort to be an example and to be a guide to those newly arrived and to those who will arrive." (Bini 1957, p. 11). He also writes, as an afterthought, that his work and the stories of determination will provide reassurance and hope in the future as an immigrant in South Africa.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

This dissertation has aimed to present a discussion on the challenges and problems inherent in the representation of an Italian identity through an examination of a selection of texts written by Italians in South Africa. The study places itself within the general research area of national, cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity as represented by Italians living outside of Italy and with specific reference to emigrants. Italian emigration and the writing produced by emigrants has grown into a research area of its own, with literary texts and criticism having been written in the United States, in Canada, Switzerland, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, South Africa and in other countries in which Italians have settled and formed communities of emigrants. Typically these works (which include prose, verse, plays, films, newspaper articles, autobiographies and other textual expression) can be seen to refer to specific concerns of emigrants and their struggle to represent their national identity. As the question of the expression of Italian identity within works produced by Italian South Africans has been almost entirely ignored, I have attempted to define the topic in terms of an already existing body of theory and criticism on the issue of Italian emigrant, national and ethnic identity. This critical literature, discussed in Chapter 4 includes works by academics from the United States, Canada and Italy, among other places, where the topic is well-established. There are of course problems which are particular to the South African context which I began to outline in Chapter 2. Having provided a brief historical overview of the settlement of Italians in South Africa and of the general rapports between Italy and South Africa from the time of the Dutch colony to contemporary times, and having presented an initial discussion on the theoretical questions which I felt to be of greatest significance to this research topic, I proceeded to discuss four different texts taken from different historical periods in order to amplify and substantiate my claims about the nature of identity representation undertaken by Italians in South Africa.

I briefly summarise here some of the key points I raised. To begin with, by giving a historical background of the settlement of Italians in South Africa I hoped to highlight the peculiarity of the settlement of Italians in South Africa which have remained a constant in the discussion of the representation of Italian identity. Among the key factors are the fact that the settlement and emigration of Italians in South Africa has been numerically small when compared to emigrations to other destinations such as South and North America, other European countries and Australia. Also the largest emigration is fairly recent from 1947 - 1970's as opposed to other emigrations in other parts of the world. (I did however briefly consider trends in emigration from the time of the formation of the Dutch colony onwards.) I included earlier Italian settlement in order to discuss how emigration then and more recently has always been typified in South Africa by the situation of colonisation, of racial segregation and the uneven distribution of wealth and resources. Within this context, the tensions between different white ethnicities (different European ethnic groups and nationalities, Afrikaners and English South Africans) were often of secondary importance to the question of racial segregation and division. There were of course periods in South African history in which tensions between white groupings came to the fore¹ but overall they have not been as significant

In that chapter I also discussed how the development of the apartheid machinery and social engineering under the Nationalist government caused South Africa to be ostracised and isolated by foreign countries, including Italy. The withdrawal of support by Italy of South Africa and of the resident Italian community, I argued, resulted in the development of a type of "inferiority" complex within the psyche of the local emigrant community which is in the process of being reversed only now. The years of negative publicity compounded the typical emigrant problem of being at odds with the home country, so that Italians in South Africa lost the opportunity to renew their Italian identity whilst at the same time further entrenched outdated notions of national pride and even fascist tendencies no longer acceptable in Italy.

Among the historical aspects which I discussed, I pointed out how much more work should ideally be done in terms of tracing the moments of official relations between Italy and South Africa. When I mentioned that there are very few theoretical models on which to base my analysis, I referred also to the lack of material on the questions of Italian-South African economic, political and social relations. In particular, I highlighted the fact that more work could be pursued with regards to the development of South Africa's immigration policies and the concerns around the

¹For example the succession of Dutch control of the Cape to the British; the tensions between British imperial expansion and the Boer republics leading to the South African War; tensions within the Union Government and then liberal and Afrikaner opposition during apartheid.

"colour bar", a question which plagued South African national politics during the twentieth century.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the secondary material available on the question of the presence of Italians in South Africa and highlighted the fact that although material is available, the topic is generally underdeveloped and has not yet reached formal recognition in and of its own right. I discussed the existence of material written from an Italian perspective, from an Italian South African perspective and from a South African perspective, pointing out that there is a noticeable lack of input from Italian South Africans themselves. I contend that this is directly related to a sense of inadequacy that the community here has developed of itself and that the apparent disinterest in its own history is causing a crisis of identity. Precisely for these reasons, information on the question of Italians in South Africa is often incomplete and of a varied quality so that it is often difficult to develop global perspective on the topic and on the most significant problems.

I also discussed that the different material available points to different ways in which Italians in South Africa have been represented and that it is important to remain sensitive to these differences. Furthermore I discuss that in order to develop a critical literature on the subject, it is necessary to acknowledge and incorporate a discussion on the different perspectives from which Italians in this country have been represented, including South African perspectives of Italians in South Africa.

Chapter 4, raised a number of theoretical concerns central to the discussion on the representation of an Italian identity in South Africa. Among them were discussed the difficulties emigrants have of representing an original identity in the new country of adoption and the tension experienced of not being able to identify entirely with either with the old land and source of identity or with the new country. Related to this is the fact that there exist pressures within the new country to make the old identity easily accessible and appealing, or what could be called homogenising forces at work within the new culture (and what in Bakhtinian terms would be considered the centrifugal forces at work in the new society). Hence I quoted examples of Italians making their identity congenial and appealing to South Africans in ways that may not have been entirely consonant with their identity experienced in Italy. I also suggested that there is a certain amount of irony implicit in the situation and that the mask of this new identity can interfere in the relations between Italians in South Africa.

Another typical way in which Italians represent their identity abroad is through the expression of heightened patriotic and nationalist sentiment. As discussed by Emilio

Franzina, the wave of nationalism which flourished in Italy during the period of the Risorgimento gradually lost support within Italy but instead caught the imagination of Italians abroad who have continued to associate their Italian identity with a particularly patriotic style of expression, tempered also by recourse to Classical and Romantic ideals. The association of Italian identity with nationalistic ideals is particularly interesting given Verdicchio's presentation of emigration as a challenge to the notion of a unified and culturally homogenous Italy. Verdicchio discusses how the history of emigration (and particularly that of Southern Italians) is typically ignored or down-played within discussions of the foundation of Italy as a nation state, a bias which he shows, is still in many ways present today. I have discussed the local community's ostracisation by Italy during apartheid and commented on the political rift which emerged. Ironically, I would argue that it was the community's support of an over-zealous nationalist sentiment which also contributed to the distance between Italians in Italy and Italians in South Africa.

Among the other topics I discussed, were the question of a regional, local or city-based identity as opposed to a national identity. I concluded that there have not been many examples where Italians in South Africa have given expression to their local identity preoccupied as they have been to ensure that any expression include elements of an Italian, national identity. I did however discuss, as shown by Buranello and Lettieri that the expression of regional aspects of identity can be a very effective way of introducing another element of identity. When Italians abroad acknowledge also their regional origins and culture, they create of a more plural identity, one that can perhaps better reflect their condition as emigrants.

Another significant aspect related to the self-expression of Italians abroad is how such writings have been categorised and defined. Inevitably, the tendency has been to side-line such writings or to constrict them within the category of "emigrant/immigrant" fiction. It has been common to base such criticism on the question of the supposed lack of literary merit of these works or on the basis of what language they were written in. But as Verdicchio and Boelhower in particular argue this is to undermine and to lose sight of the significance of such works.

One of the last points raised in the theoretical section is whether the identity represented by Italians in South Africa can be defined as an "ethnic" identity. Here, some of the difficulties in the notion of ethnicity were considered, including the fact that traditionally ethnicity has been invoked in the process of the creation of nation states (in order to reinforce the supposed cultural homogeneity of nations) and the fact that ethnicity contains an implicit notion of otherness or of difference. At this

point I introduced William Boelhower's notion of "ethnic semiosis" as an alternative interpretation to ethnic identity and discussed how his notion provides a useful framework to discuss the notion of identity representation. The key aspect of Boelhower's theory is the process of examining "ethnic situations" in relative terms, that is, by examining identity from the context of encounters and moments of cultural and linguistic exchange. I hesitate to refer to the identity of Italians in South Africa as an ethnic identity because of the limitations inherent in the term, but as Sollors' points out, the tendency in contemporary criticism to use the notion of ethnicity is also an indicator of the attempt to define identity in terms other than identification with a nation state. I do agree, however, with both Boelhower and Sollors that the term "ethnicity" should be used with awareness of its original uses and connotations and that it is necessary to revise its use in current academic and critical discourse.

In the same section I voiced criticism for Boelhower's analysis because of its tendency to define experience in terms of a semiotic system. Although a semiotic methodology can be of particular value in the interpretation of linguistic expression, and hence in the analysis of a variety of texts such as journals, newspaper articles, letters, biographies etc, I question whether it is true that it is impossible to reach a definition of the content of ethnic experience within those texts (and of the texts I have selected). My use of a "postmodern" and semiotic analysis of the texts is limited to exposing the dialogic and multiple voices operating within single texts as an expression of an Italian identity. Thus I repeatedly stressed the importance of observing the individual writers' definition of themselves in terms of their relations with others and with other identities. I extrapolated this argument also to the larger context of the literature and field of emigrant or "ethnic" studies and showed that with regards to the phenomenon of emigration to South Africa (and the creative output of Italians in South Africa), it is important to be aware of the different perspectives from which Italian emigration is viewed: through "Italian", "Italian South African" or "South African" perspective. The interaction *between* these perspectives and these writings creates an added dimension to the debate.

From the context of the methodology outlined above, I was able to conclude that the expression of identity by Italians in South Africa has been greatly preoccupied with upholding patriotic and national sentiment and that unfortunately this has the effect of minimising the potential of a dialogic and plural expression of identity. The community of Italians in South Africa, I believe, is now in an auspicious position to reconsider its past and identity, aided by the establishment of democratic rule in South Africa and given the improved communication between Italy and South Africa in an official capacity. Among things, it would be important for Italians to overcome

the feelings of inadequacy in part created out of the negative publicity from Italy and embark upon more academic projects in which the question of identity is discussed and debated. Without feeling the need to return to a prescriptive, nationalistic interpretation of the past, it would certainly be necessary for more historical, socio-political, economic and cultural studies to be pursued with regards to the presence of Italians in this country. This kind of research would have important consequences from a "South African" perspective in as much as it would reveal aspects of South African history previously largely ignored or considered of marginal importance. The present study has not in fact dwelt much on this aspect, but it is important to note that the writings and debate on Italian immigration in South Africa can contribute an additional "voice" in the development of a South African historical narrative and identity. The thrust of many of the critics referred to in this study (including Tamburri, Boelhower and Viscusi) examine the writings of Italians in North America from the perspective of their contribution to their new society of adoption. Although the community has had a smaller impact on local events and the development of local culture, history and social relations, it could nonetheless be a fruitful area to pursue and would be of critical importance in showing the heteroglossic forces at work within South African society.

As numerous critics have discussed, it is important to not classify texts such as the ones examined here in terms of "minority" or "ethnic" or "emigrant" studies because this inevitably results in their marginalisation. Instead it is important to go beyond their marginal status and notice the contribution that this type of analysis can bring to questions of identity-creation and indeed the creation of hierarchies within academic and critical thinking. This in fact has been the source of my own personal motivation in this research study and with regards to a topic which on the surface did not seem initially particularly appealing or potentially fruitful. With reference to emigrants' capacity to *arrangiarsi*, to get by, it is important as Roberto Perin (Perin 1992, pp. 9-12) discusses, to see e, immigrants as protagonists in Italian-South African as well as global realities and to acknowledge the merit in the study of their writing.

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Appendix A

Transcription of Rocco Catoggio's Letter (1833)

Copia

Cariss.mi Padre e Madre Capo di Buona Speranza
Fratelli e Sorelle ! Giuglio gli 3. 1833

Dopo tanti anni che desiderai di farvi sapere le mie novelle che vivo, e sto bene l'opportunità mai mi fù offerta come la presente. Come parte da quie il Sig.r C. Fr. Drege, Naturalista, e Speciale di Medicina di Nazione Germanico e mio intimo amico mi hà promesso di favvi avere questa mia lettera; come che noi non possiamo fare passare dà qui dritto al Italia le lettere senza pagare il dritto di franco a Londra, le lettere non vanno che da qui fino a Londra e poi restano se no ci stà un corrispondente che paga il franco per far che vaddino al loro destino, Così mii parenti voi crederette che io fui ingrato, e per che non vi ho scritto piu sovente o più d'ora. Padre & Madre cari sapete dopo che sono partito d'Armento l'gli 25 di 7bre per Napoli sono andato in Spagna, subito dopo fui fatto prigioniero e trasportato in Ingelterra e a forza fatto Soldato nel detto Servizio; e dept 3 Mesi di soggiorno in Ingelterra il Regimento dove che io era fù mandato al Capo di Buona Speranza; e avendo servito 6 anni e 3 Mesi e la pace fù fatta hebbi il mio Congedo, ma nell tempo che io era al servizio qui al Capo hi appreso il mestiere di calzolajo che mi fece proffito, e quando hebbi il mio congedo mi sono stabillito in un Borgo distante della villa del Capo 40 Miglia e cominciai non solamente il mestiere di Calzolajo mà an che il conciatore di pelle, cosi che con tutte due mi fù di grand proffito con la gran bontà di Dio. Ho comprato un Terreno dove che sono, e uno non tanto distente da dove Io stò dove l'uno mi da vino e laltro grano. Di più adesso ho messo una Becharia e un

Molino à grano così che combinando tutti gli proffitti potete considerane¹ che mi hanno fatto una fort-unetta² che sempre devo ringraziare Il gran Dio della sua gran bonta. Con tutte queste Cariss. Parenti dovete sapere che poco dopo il mio congedo ho fatto Matrimonie con Una Signorina Di Nome Caterina Carlotta Theron della Hispa Germanica, e Dio mi diede Una brava e buona Consorte e al 1818 Dio mi diede del Frutto del mio matrimonie Una fanciulla³ "col nome che diedi della gran Madre" che si chiama Gertruda Catarina Catoggio, e faccio il possibile di dargli una buona educatione, non lascio nessun sparmo per compire tutto quello che si deve fare per ben educarela e come è estrem-amente buona in tutta⁴ le maniere sempre fa gioaja a una padre e madre quando dio ci benedisce con una tale che possede tutto che si può desiderare. Parenti carissimi voi desiderarete le novelle di queste parti del Mondo. Il Capo di Buona Speranza è una bella Città che cont-ine 18 Mille persone "di dire schiavi e Liberi" Gli habitanti bianchi sono la più parte della stirpa Olandesi, Francesi e Germanici. Il Climate del Cape è nell'inverno moderato, il Thermometer non v'è più basso che a 55 Gradi di Far.' à 10 Gradi di Reaumur qualche volta un poco più basso nel estate a 80 fino 90 di Far.' a cento gradi à 30 gradi di Reaumur mà non sovente come habbiamo nel estate sempre un vento forte che soffia dal levante che tante volte soffia terribilmente, ma come noi che siamo accostmati non ci pensiamo molto; perciò fa che queste poste sono salubre e non habbiamo malattie epidemiche. Qui habbiamo tutto ciò vino in abbondanza, grano di tutti la sorte, e frutti in quantità il vivere è a bon patto carne, e pesce in abbondanza, e a buon mercato così che una che è industrioso può vivere honestamente e sempre aver quale di più nei bisogni urgenti. Tanti Inglesi si sono stabiliti qui ma a la distanza dal Capo a 700 Miglia più di 5000 milla e fanno bene; nei primi anni hanno avuto molti ostacoli a surmontare, essendo collocati vicino alle terre di Nativi che si chiamano Cafferi e non conoscendo le stagioni "come che qui il più corto giorno da noi è il più lungo qui così è a vice versa nella stagione l'inverno qui è l'estate da voi" così fu la ragione di tanti ostacoli nel agricultura ma adesso an meglio, e fanno bene hanno commercio dritto dei loro prodotti che consiste in Lana, Pelli, Corni di Bovi Dente di Olifante e tante altre cose, che col tempo farano bene gli loro affari. Altro al presente non habbiamo di impartir⁵ che aspetiamo tutti gli giorni l'Ordine del Parlatto del'Inghilterra per fare Liberi tutti gli schiavi, che ci farano mette danno a noi tutti, perché qui tutto il Lavoro è fatto dai schiavi, e che essendo fatti liberi non vogliano più Lavorare come prima. Io che ne ho quatro schiavi, se fatti liberi "o si bene che il Governo promette di pagare per la loro libertà" con tutto ciò non

¹ *considerare*

² The hyphens indicate where in the original Catoggio continued on a new line.

³ *fanciulla*

⁴ *tutte*

⁵ *da impartire*

darà mai il prezzo che castano: come quì ce ne sono che costano 3 a 4 Mille Dollari del Capo (che è moneta d'italia un Mille Dollari del Capo fane vale 2650 L moneta d'Italia) considerate che soma enorme che pagandoli al valore il governo deve fare. Così siamo al presente in un dilenia⁶ di fastidio non sapendo come reuscirà a vedere il risulito di questo cambiamento. Dunque Carissi Parentt tutto è quale vi debbo notificare del Capo, e nel istesso tempo vi debbo dichiarare che in questo mondo insieme non si rivedremo (una che io sono colocato sarebbe stolzia di lasciare queste parte dove che fò bene) così rimetto tutto avoi cari, e a miei fratelli, e sorelle mi dichiaro escluso in tutte le maniere di proffitto in favore de miei fratelli e sorella nel istesso tempo debbo conchiadere con tutta la stima dovuta a Un padre e Madre Cariss.mi e fratelli e Sorelle Augurandovi tutti gli beni celesti, e Mondani pregandovi di esser ricordato nelle vostre priegiere che Dio vi dia longa vitae e salute vole si per lanima come per il Corpo, e senza mai finere col cuore continuando sempre nella mente mia con gli gran Rispetti a tutti voi abbracciandovi

Addio tutti carissimi
Sono Vostro affe.tt. Figlio
Rocco Catoggio

PS

Gli Individui qui sotto desidero gli più gran rispetti e Complimenti da me

La Cara Mia Sorella RosaLucia

Il mio Fratello Simeone

Il mio Compare Don Pasquale Cossino

D" Gulielmo Cossimo

D" Cola Cossimo

D" Giuspe Mazziote

D" Vincenzo Mazziote

Famiglia del Sig.ra Tortorelli e tutti gli parenti e Amici

Chiedo risposta di questa e dirigete come la direzione che stà qui dentro e scrivete il nome alla maniera Inglesa.

Addio

Al Sig.r Biaggio Catoggio

801-1

a Armento

⁶ *dilemma*

nel Departamento di Napoli provincia di Basalica
Italia
1501-4

Dirigete Così
Aan De Heer
R. Catorzia
Paarl
Cape of good Hope
Africa

Appendix B

Translation of Lieutenant-Colonel G. Brunetti's "Message"

"Message of Lieutenant-Colonel Brunetti", Christmas 1943, Special Edition,
Lieutenant-Colonel G. Brunetti

To all the military of the Italian Zone

The Christmas Child this year weeps.

During the night of its long voyage he has crossed skies, mountains, seas, he has passed through isolated homesteads, through city houses both poor and affluent, in hovels and in forgotten country mansions. Everywhere he has found a terrible desolation.

He has passed over our unlucky Italy, he has brought his remembrance and has collected all the miseries and the invocations of our poor country. The dead arisen from the open graves of Garibaldi, from the pits next to the gallows, the martyrs both famous and obscure of many generations have supplicated unto him.

On the towering Alps, 600.000 dead that once were alive from all regions of Italy have implored unto him:

Why have the sons opened to the foreigner the sacred ways that the work, study, willpower, obedience, suffering, martyrdom the wholly Italian soul of their fathers had previously closed off?

Why have they abandoned the soil, scarce but of such heritage that their fathers had build for them. Why have they forgetful chosen to leave it undefended in order

to hurry to sacrifice themselves elsewhere?

The Child cries and leaves a memory of tears: they are the tears of mothers, of brides of children, blessed by love. But with the tears come hopes, all the hopes of our family, of our Country, hopes in a healthy and strong youth capable of finding the way of redemption.

'Be obedient, disciplined, inspired by your sacred loves, loyal to your pure traditions, prepared in body and soul to for a destiny very different to that of your country, wrecked by a gale but steadfast in its roots, and prepared for that which will become its even greater rebirth.

Yours will be a different Christmas, filled with sunshine, a sunshine entirely yours, entirely Italian.

It is thus that the Christmas Child of 1943 speaks and weeps, he pauses a moment to console us and he then resumes his journey towards other camps.

Appendix C

Translation of Salus Gattamelata's Article

"The Third Exhibition of Art and Crafts", Salus Gattamelata, April 1944.

Two years ago, a simple exhibition of objects and of paintings of the Italian Prisoners of War, done almost on the sly, awoke some interest; last year, we became more daring and organised another one which was greeted with enthusiasm. This year, the books have not yet been closed but we can say that the exhibition has in every sense exceeded the previous ones. The organisation has been both difficult and laborious: the war affected not a little our search for primary materials, but all obstacles were overcome with tenacity and willpower. There is no need to mention names: everyone collaborated at the various levels with enthusiasm to work towards something that would be worthy of us Italians.

Did we succeed? I think we can confidently say, "yes".

The quality of the works exhibited, particularly in the area of Crafts, are of unquestionable value and of an extremely high quality. Our handicraft, with the necessary means and tools, has shown in full splendour its geniality and its artistic direction that is connected to an ancient and century old tradition famous throughout the world.

In the field of Art, although there is nothing transcendental, the genius of our race has shown some very bright splashes of light in certain works by some young artists which are a testimony and confirm decisively the innate sensibility to beauty and the instinct for Art in the Italian people, an eclectic, impetuous and divinely inspired race.

To the leading lights of Criticism, the crepuscular conspiracy, or the evanescent judgement of exegesis in slippers, many of these works could appear mannered and lacking that stirring breath of the divine which is Art. But to us they tell quite a different story.

- The torment of the soul and the rebellion against destiny, a sense of drama and the aspiration towards Divinity. - This is what the expressions of our young companions tell us: and this they have expressed for each and every one of us. Because a man's life, in whatever form and in whatever extrinsic condition it may manifest itself, is always summed up in the life of his mind and his soul.

For us now, after three long years of imprisonment, which have marked our spirit, it is difficult to grasp the right moment or the exact realisation of expression or of thought. Mired as we are in the monotonous and useless life behind the enclosure of barbed wire, constrained in thought and in constant contact with those as dangerous or as ill as us, inspiration, the willpower for work and creation is a great effort and inhuman exertion.

But it is precisely for this reason that every object and every event is of an invaluable worth that only we and those accustomed to suffering can understand .

Our Exhibition was not done for monetary gain, none of us even remotely thought of it. Each one of us, as we were busy with the work, had in his heart our Nation and Home. Each one of us was expressing all our anxiety, grief and the hope in the raw material which became light and joy, in the clay that palpitated under our tormenting hands and in the colour which illuminated the waiting canvasses.

Even if our dreams were dominated by the excitable sadness of the exile and of the survivor first of war and then of pain we proved what this experience could be, the sea of our floundering became a flood of creative fertility.

And here is our Exhibition, so much a part of us, so palpitating, so real and so different from others as a modest but shining lawn of green and flowers is to a hot house plant.

The South African population continues on a daily basis to crowd the halls; hundreds of our fellow countrymen return to marvel and rejoice as though breathing the air of their Homeland maybe for many years forgotten.

Through our work we demonstrate our immense abilities and we reaffirm our right to life.

South Africa is a young country but it has as a Leader a man of much and universal experience. It has luminous possibilities in tomorrow's world because it occupies a prominent place in the gathering of political men throughout the world. We have without a doubt appreciated by the best intellects.

In the future, when the arduous work of reconstruction will begin, we certainly will not be the last to collaborate.

If South Africa can be proud of its treatment of the Prisoners of War, it can consider itself fortunate to have hosted Italian Prisoners of War. We do not know whether our Crafts or our Art may have any lasting effect on this Country with an outlook so different to ours but it is undoubtedly true that we have stirred interest and marvel and we have adorned with smiles and with the graces of our genius its ultramodern cities and its wild landscapes.