THE 1950s ITALIAN WOMEN MIGRANTS TO AUSTRALIA
A JOURNEY TOWARDS A NEW SELF

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ABSTRACT

This research is a feminist, self-reflexive, ethnographic project based on oral history and participant observation aimed at contributing to the Italian feminist record. The study focuses on the Italian women who migrated to Australia in the 1950s, whose post-WWII departure from the institutionally patriarchal and poverty-stricken state disappeared from the Italian national narrative and is only partially recorded in the Australian. Beginning with the premise that these women left their country of origin when it was on the verge of the social and cultural changes that culminated in the radical movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, it examines the emancipatory and/or liberatory potential of migration: (how) did the transformation of habitus contribute to allowing these migrant women to acquire the freedom, independence, and sense of entitlement that non-migrated Italian women had meanwhile been achieving (also) thanks to the (predominantly middle class and/or intellectual) Italian feminist movement? How were the (non-white, peasant or working-class) women migrants positioned with respect to both mainstream (white) Australian society and the cultures of their birthplaces? What opportunities did migration give to the subjects of this research to acquire rights, re-arrange gender roles, and detach themselves from patriarchal (self-)framings?

As the investigation is conducted through (the analysis of) the voices of the participants, this thesis also examines the theoretical and methodological ruses entailed in the ethnographic (im)possibility of doing justice to their narrations. Given that the unfeasibility of providing stable definitions is complicated by the epistemological projections that influence interpretation, the questions to be answered are as follows: (how) can the subjects be grouped into a dominion that they inexorably permanently escape? How does the agent frame or liberate their speech? Which factors intervene in the translation of the life of the other-ed?

Exploring the ways in which the feminist, self-reflexive, ethnographic approach creates its subjects of study, this inquiry moreover enters the debate over the insider/outsider status of the anthropologist and provides an outline of the
advantages of self-reflexivity. The informants’ narrations are hence constantly juxtaposed to the queer feminist perspective of the author.

The analysis shows how the instances that favour emancipation and liberation can act on intimate and/or communal levels and along circumstantial and/or controversial paths.
DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Anita Bressan

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PREFACE

HABITUS OF LIBERATION

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita.\(^1\)

Preamble

It is January 2011. Two women, Gelsomina, aged 81, and Anita, aged 36, are sitting at the dinner table in the living room of Gelsomina’s apartment in Cervignano del Friuli Italy. The place is tidy, gleaming, and finely furnished. The whole place exudes affluence. The two have just finished afternoon coffee and biscuits using the ‘good’ tableware and are now beginning the interview. They have met before, introduced to each other by a common friend. As a matter of fact, this is their third encounter, and Gelsomina has already recounted much about her life to Anita.

Gelsomina and Anita are both Friulan, meaning Italians from the Friulan-speaking part of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region in north-eastern Italy, and both have lived in Australia. Indeed, they are from the very same municipality, since Joannis—Gelsomia’s birthplace—is a ‘frazione’ (an administrative suburb) of Aiello del Friuli—Anita’s town of origin. They could thus communicate in Friulan—their common local language—or in Italian, but Gelsomina has chosen to talk about herself in English. A tape-recorder lies between the two and registers their conversation:

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Anita: So when was it that you acquired an awareness of your freedom to choose for yourself? This is my question for you.

Gelsomina: Yeah... Very late in life, my dear. Very, very late in life. After you’re married... Probably, I was 50!²

Anita cynically emphasises her lack of surprise: “Oh really?” Then they simultaneously burst into a liberating explosion of laughter. Anita had actually suspected this to be the case. “Because we were born under... At a different way of... Of thinking, eh!”³ the older woman explains, implicitly acknowledging that such a different way of thinking was in her opinion no longer in effect. She then continues:

The women never thought for themselves, they have to become a good wife, a good mother, a good... A good grandmother... And we never owned any money, or any wallets, eh! That was... We were brought up like that: you didn’t have any awareness that you were for instance... How do you say? What is a word?⁴

Anita suggests “regimented” or “regulated”, but Gelsomina is happy with neither term:

Regulated... No, regulated is more like in institutions. The duty of a woman in those days—my time—it was to be a good mother and wife and everything. Never a second thought that you are treated as a... [silence]... Second... Ah!... I don’t know! We were equal to run a family. We were equal with the men to run a family. As a matter of fact, you were the boss of the household... But not of money. Not of choice. Not of dealing with anything. But you were the boss of the household. As a matter of fact, you even get the cash to do your weekly shopping, and it was your duty to make sure to go through with that. Not spending, you have to spend the money so wisely that you have to make sure it lasted a month.⁵

Anita remains silent; she observes Gelsomina and listens to the narration. She finds that her informant is as usual very elegantly dressed—they both are—and is again

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² Gelsomina, interview with the author, 2011, Cervignano del Friuli, Italy. Throughout the thesis, I chose to make only minor grammatical and syntactical adjustments to the transcripts of the interviews, and only where it was deemed strictly necessary to render the communication clearer. My aim is to remain faithful to the words actually pronounced by the informants.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
displaying the *appropriate* amount of jewellery. Appropriate according to what is prescribed for this kind of social situation by the local standards of *bella figura,* namely of presentability and respect. Anita does not know why her informant has chosen to communicate with her in English; she considers that it could be to demonstrate her self-ascribed Italo-Australian position, but does not want to make too many assumptions about this. In any case, she observes that Gelsomina is considerably fluent in her language of adoption, especially given her age and the little schooling that she previously reported to have received: at times she misuses certain terms, but overall she manages to make herself understood in her adopted idiom. Also, Anita thinks that her informant is an easy subject to interview: Gelsomina is keen to share her story and appears to enjoy talking about herself. She follows her own plot, and there is no need to encourage her to speak:

That’s what I remember with my mother... The money was in the till [money box]. And nobody had... an idea to leave that till to get a penny out of it. No, the children won’t do that. Mother put the money in the till and that was to go shopping and nobody dared to touch that money. But that was... She was the owner of only that! Apart from that, if lunch wasn’t ready 'What’s wrong with you, mother?’, ‘Woman, why wasn’t the lunch ready?’ And you don’t answer to that, you feel guilty, that you didn’t manage to do whatever, or maybe you spent too much time in the garden instead of making sure to cook—at that time, the tea [dinner] was ready at 6 o’clock. But that was you who felt that you didn’t do the right thing, not that he was telling you [that] you didn’t do the right thing.7

As the conversation proceeds, Anita notices that whilst talking about the very same subject, Gelsomina swaps between the pronoun ‘she’—to refer to the actions of her *mother*—and the pronoun ‘you’—to speak of herself—thus letting her mother’s image and her own overlap, as if the two figures coincided. Anita also senses that Gelsomina seems to be increasingly undecided as to how to value her late-acquired financial independence, and fears that a common understanding between her and her informant on the significance of the term ‘awareness’ may be lacking. The age gap

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7 Gelsomina, interview with the author, 2011, Cervignano del Friuli, Italy.
perhaps plays a role in confusing the scenario: the two appear to position themselves differently in respect to what Bourdieu called habitus,\(^8\) and they hence classify reality in distinct ways. In Anita’s opinion, they have not even had the same life goals, and such dissimilarities, tacitly and implicitly acknowledged by both, perhaps create a situation of incommensurability in this respect. Anita had already taken note of similar circumstances in previous stages of her fieldwork. Moreover, she senses certain contradictions in Gelsomina’s words... Was being the boss of the household equivalent to being independent for her? And how could one be the boss of the household without having any money apart from that given to her (by her husband) for grocery shopping? And how could one be independent without being “the boss of choice”? Again, the generational gap was perhaps rendering part of the information reciprocally unintelligible.

In the meantime, Gelsomina continues: “You understand? That was our mentality”...

And that mentality went on at least... You are asking me, I am not speaking for anybody... And yet I was very, very strong-minded and independent in my own way. But I didn’t choose to run... to run the place: he was running the place... My husband ran the place very well. What did I need money in my pocket for? I became independent when I was a pensioner. That I thought: ‘Oh, that money I spend the way I want!’ Because there was no children, no mortgage, no nothing. So if I felt like buying instead of making my own dress, to buy me one already made, I did that. But it makes no difference, I never suffered. I never felt that I was less... Less... Eh... How do you say? Less boss than my husband! [...] So if it was a question of who was the boss in the house, we were both bosses, really. You know?\(^9\)

Anita intervenes: “The only difference being that you had certain duties and he had others?” Gelsomina confirms, “That’s right. That’s right. My duty was to keep the house all gone [functioning], and his duty was to make sure that all the bills were paid, all the taxation papers were done”.\(^10\)

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\(^9\) Gelsomina, interview with the author, 2011, Cervignano del Friuli, Italy.

\(^10\) Ibid.
Anita does not add any more to the matter, but remains unsure about what to make of the data collected during the exchange; she considers that this is the most Gelsomina will say on the issue, and chooses to move on to a different topic. She will eventually try to return to the subject, if Gelsomina will give her the occasion to do so.

**p.a) The Collaborative Feminist Project of Researching Women (Migrants)**

Three years down the track in 2014, I am once again in Australia, 13,400 kilometres away from the living room where the above scene took place and trying to analyse my role in it as if I were a character—Anita—in my own story. My main concern in this respect is whether the question I had posed to Gelsomina made sense in the first place: were personal freedom and independence relevant issues to an elderly Italian woman, or was my interest in them simply the product of the epistemological projections of a feminist ethnographer who was surreptitiously trying to extract from her informant an answer that would correspond to her own assumptions? To whose needs did my question respond? To those of an elderly woman migrant storyteller who had returned to Italy to spend the last part of her life near her birthplace, or to those of a researcher seeking data on the potential for transformation and emancipation in the identity of Italian women through the process of their migration to Australia? Indeed, did Gelsomina want or need to be free and independent—in the way that I think one needs to be free and independent? And what really was independence for her (instead)? Most of all: why was it so important for me to ask her that specific question? Why did I want to know when she acquired an awareness of her own freedom to choose for herself?

This is the question that should be answered before moving on to all of the other questions raised in this thesis. To respond to this question, it is necessary to take a few steps back in time to the year 2005. At the time, I had temporarily returned to my hometown in Italy to complete my degree in philosophy at the University of Trieste,
after working overseas for a few years and travelling widely for leisure, business, and to carry out political activism.

I was happy to finally have the opportunity to complete my tertiary education, which I had suspended several years earlier due to the need to work full-time to support myself. I was enjoying the return to my studies as well as being back in town for a while. What once looked like a boring and conservative small countryside village had now acquired an alluring flair when I returned to it after living in a northern European metropolis. Having found the necessary space to expand myself in London’s welcoming anonymity, I found life in the province near the Mediterranean somehow romantic... Everybody knows each other (according to the local understanding of whom they should be), and I liked the fact that I could chat with the baker across the road, or go to the bar before lunch for an ‘aperitivo’ and a lively exchange with the co-townies about politics or football. Nevertheless, my existence was much more complex and articulated than what I felt that I could share with most of the people who lived around me. I was no longer the same Friulan woman who had left Aiello several years prior. As if I were a stranger to it, my own cultural background had turned out to be a “questionable topic of investigation”.11 Paraphrasing Pierre Bourdieu, I would say that I was finding it difficult to conjugate the person I had become with the local way of rendering reality self-evident.12 I could no longer discount the fact that I had experienced other ways of categorising and evaluating the world, and dealt with other ‘genealogies of morality’, which had profoundly affected my way of perceiving myself and making sense of the events happening around me. Despite the fact that I often spoke on the radio and published in the local language about my worldwide activities, I felt that my female (and hence, from my intimate point of view at the time, still minority) voice did not have sufficient capital13 to break through the barriers of intelligibility firmly erected by the tradition of thought encircling me... The same tradition that had ultimately raised and nourished my own

13 Bourdieu, Distinction.
habitus, my own vision of the world, and my own way of interpreting reality,\textsuperscript{14} possibly contributing to making me perceive my female voice to be less valuable than others.

I then started to spend some of my spare time with my 1945-born aunt and neighbour Artemisia, who had also lived overseas. In spite of her older age, she was nevertheless familiar with the lifestyle and \textit{mentality} that I had become used to. It was then that I discovered that Artemisia actually had many interesting stories to tell me. Having lived in Rome and Venice in the 1970s, she had been involved with the Italian feminist movement and was quite familiar with its proceedings. Although I did not agree with all of her ideological positions, it was fascinating to spend the evenings listening to her narrations of how she had transitioned from inhabiting the habitus of a post-WWII, middle-class woman from a small northern Italian town to acquiring a consciousness of her female condition.

Artemisia also owned a large collection of books—including those of Luce Irigaray\textsuperscript{15}—and magazines published by or popular amongst the feminist groups with whom she had been in contact in those days, which she lent to me to read. I immediately began studying them and was totally mesmerised by the material. Reading through the pages written in the late 1960s and 1970s by Italian women who had just begun the \textit{autonomous} (re-)cognition of their rights, their bodies, and their intimacy was an illuminating experience. The literature guided me through their journey, letting me sense the drive that fuelled their path to self-knowledge and liberation.

\textsuperscript{14} Bourdieu, \textit{Outline of a Theory of Practice}, p. 164.
p.a.1) The Italian Feminist Self

Carla Lonzi’s writings\(^1^6\) and the practice of ‘autocoscienza’ (‘consciousness-raising’) captured my attention in particular. The concept was central to Italian feminism as I discovered, and as shall become evident, it holds also an important position in this thesis. In the view of those who practised it, ‘autocoscienza’ was in fact a feminist process of self-discovery and self-acceptance:\(^1^7\) carried out in small groups of women, it was supposed to allow participants to independently discuss their perception of their identity and evaluate it according to their own standards.\(^1^8\) As described by oral historian Luisa Passerini, at the time women were “increasing their presence in the work force” and finding themselves “on the brink of vast social, economic and psychological changes”.\(^1^9\) It was therefore important to have a space where they could also elaborate the transformations through which they were living. In Non credere di avere dei diritti,\(^2^0\) a more recent publication aimed at retrospectively explaining the processes that occurred between 1966 and 1986 in the Milan feminist context, the role of ‘autocoscienza’ is described as follows:

For many [women], the small consciousness-raising group represented the social place in which they could, for the first time, speak openly about their experience, and their words held a recognised value. Before [consciousness-raising], their experiences were invisible and dispersed human material that the social body consumed without even being aware [of doing so], and to which no value used to be given [my italics].\(^2^1\)

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\(^2^0\) Libreria delle donne di Milano, Non credere di avere dei diritti, Turin, Rosenberg & Sellier, 2005.

\(^2^1\) Ibid., p. 33. My translation: “Il piccolo gruppo di autocoscienza fu per molte il luogo sociale in cui poterono per la prima volta parlare apertamente della loro esperienza e questo parlare aveva un valore riconosciuto. Prima, essa era materia umana invisibile e dispersa che il corpo sociale consumava quasi senza saperlo e alla quale non si dava prezzo”. 
As previously mentioned, although I used to perceive that my female voice was not considered (by others or by myself) to be as valuable as men’s, while still largely misestimating the legacy that the internalisation of the devaluation process had on me, I thought that having a place to speak had never been a problem for me. So I assumed that ‘autocoscienza’ must have been a very empowering practice for my predecessors, who subsequently passed on to my generation the spaces that they had conquered.

The theme of sexual liberation also held an extremely important place amongst those treated by the feminist movement. The ownership of one’s body and control over its reproductive power were the main points of attention, as were the discourses over (the right to) sexual pleasure and the ways in which women had been supposedly conditioned to conceive it.\(^\text{22}\) Comparatively, I felt that these issues did not apply to my persona, as I considered myself quite liberated in that sense. Yet I nevertheless found the 1970s feminists’ work of extreme interest: I reckoned it was (also) thanks to them that I was able to freely investigate my desire and choose not to adhere to traditional (and in 1970s feminist terms, patriarchal) sexual mores.

At the age of 19, I had unexpectedly fallen in love with a woman. I had never previously felt attracted to women and only knew one other lesbian in my town. Homosexuality was (and still is in many ways) a large taboo in (provincial) Italy. And yet I was extremely comfortable with my same-sex desire and dived into the relationship without second thought. Making love with a woman immediately felt the most natural thing: Fiorella let me discover my body, my feelings, and my pleasure. This corresponded to (how I wanted to express my senses in) my inner world, which all of a sudden had started to make sense. I therefore felt it was right, and liberating, no matter what other people thought—or wanted me to think.

\(^{22}\) See, for example, Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel*, pp. 77-85.
Italian feminism was then centred on *self-knowledge of/through one's body*, and as noted by Allum\(^23\) Ergas\(^24\) and Becalli\(^25\) it also focussed on *liberation* rather than on *emancipation*: the movement theorised the exit from the patriarchal order as opposed to only seeking ways to facilitate the occupation of spaces within it. “La vanificazione del traguardo della presa del potere”, wrote Carla Lonzi, “è l’elemento che distingue la lotta al sistema patriarcale”\(^26\) (“Doing away with the goal of seizing power is the element that distinguishes the struggle against the patriarchal system”). Women’s autonomous *empowerment* was then speculated to happen outside the forms of hierarchical power that patriarchy traditionally allocated to them, such as the authority to manage the household and the children... on men’s behalf.

Following from this, Italian feminism also questioned the gender roles on which life was structured, and especially the fact that they were based on *men’s interpretation* of women. The *Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile (Manifesto of Female Revolt)*, first published in 1970, stated for example that “the feminine image with which man has interpreted woman is his own invention”.\(^27\) And according to the stencil-written production of Gruppo Demau (where Demau stood for ‘Demystification of Patriarchal Authoritarianism’), in order to move out of the masculine structures through which women had been theorised (by men), a woman had to “first of all abstract herself from her own sex”.\(^28\) Such wording notably conflated the notions of chromosomal sex and gender as a cultural construction. However, what was meant was that women had to escape the (gender) role—described by Gelsomina earlier in this Preface—that wanted them in the house cooking dinner and making babies. At the time, this was an extremely revolutionary affirmation. Making reference to the work of Lumley,\(^29\) Percy


\(^24\) Y. Ergas, ‘Feminism and the Italian Party System’, *Comparative Politics*, vol.14, no. 3, 1982, p. 259

\(^25\) B. Becalli, ‘The Modern Women’s Movement in Italy’, *New Left Review*, no. 204, March-April 1994, p. 95

\(^26\) Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel*, p. 27.

\(^27\) Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel*, p. 12.


Allum was, in my opinion, right to argue that the 1970s Italian feminist movement, no matter how diversified and fragmented,30 “was the most influential cultural agent of the cultural revolution that occurred in Italy in the 1970s because it created a new awareness of the dimension of sexual inequalities [my emphasis]”.31

Through the grassroots production of the Italian feminist movement, I finally came to realise that the 1970s Italian feminists and I inhabited partially different female selves. Not that I believe that (my) liberation is (or shall ever be) completely achieved: I learned through the self-reflexive ethnographic process of this very research how distant I had been in certain circumstances from myself. But the freedom that for them had been an incredible conquest was for me—and also thanks to them!—a starting point from which to expand. The fact that I have (thus far) lived my life the way that I have was also permitted by the social, intellectual, and emotional changes that the feminist struggle had produced on Italian society. Although it was primarily an urban, middle-class32 phenomenon, directly or indirectly, everyone was affected by it to some extent. My mother, for example, who was raised in a small provincial town and is from working-class background, took an active part in the student and workers movements of the time, but has never called herself a feminist. On matters of gender (equality), my mother would instead refer to the emancipatory line of the Communist Party, which, as briefly summarised in Chapter Three below, was centred on the acquisition of rights rather than the liberation from patriarchal narratives. And yet, despite her limited exposure to it, my mother nevertheless brought me up according to the teachings of feminist literature that she had been in touch with when I was little. She confessed that it gave her some strength to support her Engels’s33 idea that women had equal rights to men and that baby girls should be educated to believe so.

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32 Ibid., p. 32.
What I found particularly fascinating about the magazines and books that I had been given by Artemisia was the quality and accuracy of the critical feminist thinking contained within them, which, in my view, contrasted enormously with the banality of the sexualised images of femininity so ubiquitously and commonly portrayed by Italian media or staged in popular culture today... Where had all that depth gone, then? And what was left of the feminist movement? Contemporary Italy seemed to have forgotten the self-awareness and revolutionary potential that it had been capable of only three decades before. The consciousness that men had an enormous amount of power over women had apparently disappeared, and centuries of subjugation seemed at times to have never existed. Since I had also worked in Sudan the previous year, hence enabling me to compare my (relative) freedom to the daily struggles and excruciating experiences of repressed femininity (such as infibulation) faced by my local friends, I decided to write my Bachelor’s degree thesis on Italian feminism and its relevance to contemporary North American feminist thought.

**p.a.2) Breaking with the Past: Italian Feminism and the Women who Migrated**

The more I investigated the history of Italian feminism, the more I realised that I was studying a revolution of a truly extraordinary scale and quality that has allowed the Italian women of my generation—those born from the second half of the 1960s onwards—to potentially access, en masse and from their early years, levels of freedom, self-awareness, and independence that the previous generation had struggled for and that could not even have been conceived by most Italian women coming before them. The gap in the perception of the self between my grandmothers’ generation and mine was enormous. For the vast majority of such women, it would have been simply unthinkable to do a PhD or migrate to Australia or anywhere else by themselves: indeed, the only exception that I am familiar with in this respect is Franca Arena, who, born in 1937, went on to be elected a Member of Parliament in NSW (the first foreign-born female to be so). Others had experiences of solo internal or intra-European migration, but were predominantly tied to living and working in supervised
environments. I then became very interested to understand how such a mental leap had occurred. What had made it possible for Italian women during the 1970s to leave behind the (gender) role that had been stitched onto them at birth and acquire an awareness of their right to freedom and independence?

I found that the flourishing of new identity possibilities had been rendered possible in Italy from the 1950s onwards by several factors, including the so-called “economic miracle”34—boosting the country’s economy from 1958 to 1963—the (at times illegal) spreading of contraceptives, and a steep increase in female higher education.35 Also, as reported by Simonetta Piccone Stella, apparently of some importance in this sense was the “success of television, the general expansion of mass media, the influence of advertising, some new consumerist trends, a [new] modality of approach to the phenomena related to sexuality and—even more—the growth of cities, [and] the increased secularization” that had been initiated in previous decades.36 For these reasons, as Allum reports, according to certain lines of thought, “the [1970s] social movements (including the women’s movement) merely accelerated changes that were already under way as a result of the modernization set in motion by socio-economic changes of the late 1950s and 1960s”.37

However, this view—with which I do not agree—does not take into account the fact that the late 1960s witnessed a real worldwide explosion of social revolutions. It also discounts the quality of the changes that they produced, especially in Italy, where such revolutions have been of a unique type and duration.38 Apart from the feminists, students and workers had also taken to the streets from the late 1960s throughout the 1970s to claim—and partially obtain—radically new ways of living. The heavily class-

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35 Ibid., p. 27.
38 Barański and Lumley (eds.), Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy.
based Italy of the ‘economic miracle’, which Ginsborg reported to have still been a “society full of taboos about sexual behaviour”, was to be dramatically challenged by the narratives of the late 1960s and 1970s movements and by those of feminist groups in particular. Very importantly, as indicated by Lumley and Barański, in those years, “students demanded for the doors of the universities to be opened to the working class”—an unprecedented circumstance!—and “there was a tremendous desire to democratize culture”, which was to be explored anthropologically through the “challenging of orthodoxies and recognizing of ‘lower’ forms of art”, and fundamental to this process was the “acquisition of consciousness, and self-consciousness, about the organization and experience of everyday life [my italics]”. Lumley and Barański furthermore emphasise:

The 1970s represent a crucial period [in this respect], since traditions were challenged by showing that they were not absolute; rather, they were shown to be products of a particular society at a particular point in time and to have no special claim to superiority [my italics].

In the above landscape, the Italian feminist movement, in alliance with the Radical Party, the Italian Socialist Party, and the Italian Communist Party especially, also managed to produce some vital transformations in gender-related issues of government legislation, such as the legalisation of abortion (in 1978) and divorce (in 1970, confirmed by referendum in 1974). Yet what especially seemed to have been changing for Italian women was the possibility of finally achieving the intimate feeling of entitlement to be the individual whom one wished to become. I believe that this has indeed been the most difficult achievement. Entitlement is in fact a tricky matter, as it

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41 Ibid.  
42 Ibid.  
43 Ibid.  
44 Ibid.
is related to what Bourdieu defined as the “(structuring structured) structure” through which we acknowledge accepted social practices: being informed by (and informing!) the habitus—the overlapping (of reciprocally challenging understandings) of layers of customs, affects, material possibilities, and shared morality—it locates within one’s (sub-)consciousness the (emotional) impediments to be overcome in order to achieve a sense of it. In such a process, there is no external enemy: one is the adversary of oneself. Irrespective of the law and class differences—the importance of which I do not intend to underestimate—a woman can only try to fulfil her own desires once she feels that she has the right to them: as noted by Angela Davis with reference to the writings of Frederick Douglass, an enslaved person can only fight for her freedom once she has acquired the consciousness to having the right to it. And in order to take possession of such right, one may have to clash with and dismantle the power structure that supports the moral (self-)judgement inherited from previous generations, which is conveyed and consolidated in one’s understanding of both herself and the external reality primarily manifest through the love of the parents.

“Power”, wrote Judith Butler, “imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force we come to internalize or accept its terms”. She then clarified that “the ‘we’ who accept such terms are fundamentally dependent on those terms for ‘our’ existence”. And the “dependency on a discourse [my italics]” that was not autonomously chosen but is rather the source of one’s (or, as she says “our”) agency is the inevitable characteristic of the relationship of a child with her carers. In her article ‘The Break-Up: Hardt and Negri’s Politics of Love’, Melissa Gregg instead elaborated on the

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45 Bourdieu, Distinction, p. 170.


49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., p. 8.

disenchanted work of Lauren Berlant,\textsuperscript{53} who dissected (the \textit{unconscious} emotional entanglements entailed in what we call) ‘love’ from (\textit{inherited} ideas about) its performance, in order to show that we tend to repeat the (unspoken) strategies (including potential manipulative conducts) learnt from our predecessors in the domestic environment. Gregg argued that love is actually the product of “scripts and plots”\textsuperscript{54} that constitute a form of socially accepted “repetitive-compulsive behaviour”.\textsuperscript{55} And as noted by Aureliana di Rollo and highlighted by Gelsomina’s recounting of her youth, women in the Italian context especially had to confront themselves with the (sub)conscious script represented by the lives of their mothers:

Since notions of a woman’s role and identity have usually been handed down from mother to daughter, the mother-daughter bond becomes crucial too in the formation of a woman’s identity. In fact, in a patriarchal context daughters had little choice but to follow their mothers’ path and model, even when the mother figure was far from attractive.\textsuperscript{56}

Women were not powerless in the Italian context, but their rule was confined within the borders of the house, subjected to the recognition of patriarchal authority, and necessarily associated with the notion of ‘proper female behaviour’, which, as we shall see in Chapter Three, included strict (a)sexual conduct. According to Pallotta-Chiarolli\textsuperscript{57} and Orsi,\textsuperscript{58} such a model was also exported by migrants to Australia and the United States. Thus, in those days, for Italian women to acquire a sense of entitlement to their own narrative of themselves, they also had to sever the material and emotional links that kept them chained to the model represented by their mothers. To

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Gregg, ‘The Break-Up’, p. 398.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p. 398.
\item A. Di Rollo, Two Sides of the Same Coin: Challenging the Mother-Daughter Trope in Contemporary Italian Women’s Writings, PhD Thesis, Monash University, 2013, p. 28.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
many of them, a rupture with the moral customs of the previous generations therefore seemed necessary, and with those of one’s parents in particular.

Breaking with the past had in fact been one of the very aims of the revolutions of the late 1960s and 1970s—not unintentionally known as ‘gli anni della contestazione’ (‘the years of contestation’)—of which the feminist movement was a leading force. These movements also made reference to the writings of authors such as Herbert Marcuse, who advocated the challenging of the established norms.59 This process involved complicated and painful intellectual and emotional choices, the importance of which at the time is highlighted by Luisa Passerini’s decision to entitle the second chapter of her Autobiography of a Generation, ‘Choosing to be orphans’ (‘La scelta di essere orfani’).60 Here she recalls that “at the end of the sixties orphanhood will become a slogan, derisory and profane”.61 She continues by asserting that “in the formative moments of the new cultural attitude, following a period of vague and impatient waiting, an estrangement from the entire past, the impossibility of identifying with any part of it had to take precedence”.62 Passerini also noted that “not wanting to be like one’s mother”63 was highlighted as an important theme for many of those who had taken part in her book project.

**p.b) The Migration Process as a Feminist Project**

In order to proceed towards a new (liberated) self, women (and men!) had to question the past and their relationship with those who represented it and tried to make them reproduce reality as they knew it—or, at least, had known it thus far.64 It was a matter of re-writing one’s self-identification by breaking with tradition. At that point, I realised that migration had somehow worked in the same way for me, powerfully

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61 Ibid., p. 29.
62 Ibid., p. 30.
63 Ibid., pp. 33-34.
64 Ibid., pp. 22-36.
displacing me from the forms of self-recognition to which I had been accustomed. Whilst completing my BA thesis, I therefore thought that it would be interesting to investigate how the feminist narratives of the ‘years of contestation’ had been lived by the Italian women who had left the country in the 1950s, when the seeds of change had been planted but before the feminist movement had flourished, and the conditions for social and individual transformation had finally matured. The questions that puzzled me were the following: how had the Italian women who had migrated overseas in the post-WWII decade in search of better opportunities perceived the radical modifications that their country of origin underwent in their absence? Did they know about them? And, especially, did the migration process serve to emancipate them? For example, (how) had their (gender) identities changed? Which path had they followed? How had their new homes impacted on their feminist consciousness? What did they know and think of (Italian) feminism?

The construction of gender in transnational families is a central question in the debate about women and migration. Some scholars (for example, Parreñas, Abrego, and Dreby) argue that gender is maintained and not contested in transnational households. Others support the possibility that migration liberates women (for example, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Mahler and Pessar). In the mid-1980s, Morokvasic instead maintained that the study of women in migration was influenced by male bias and that “many questions of relevance to the theory of migration remained unanswered simply because they were never asked”. From this

perspective, I am in agreement. For this reason, I aimed to investigate and give voice to what Donna Gabaccia described as “the internal world of the immigrant women”\textsuperscript{71}—their aspirations, beliefs, perceptions of life, and fears. Through their words, I intended to draw a picture of how their habitus—“the generative principle” and “the system of classification” of social practices\textsuperscript{72}—was re-arranged by the migration process.

The women who had migrated to Australia seemed to perfectly correspond to my research objectives. First of all, I had always had a personal fascination with Australia, which at the time had, in my imagination, appeared to be a very progressive and egalitarian liberal democracy. Furthermore, the diversity of the languages and customs in use in the country, and especially the fact that some Australian states had been global pioneers in granting (white, I later discovered!) women the right to vote as early as 1894, were key factors in my choice of the country for conducting the research. Importantly, due to the enormous geographical distance between the two countries, the 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia had been forcibly physically separated from their families of origin for prolonged periods of time, thus unwittingly anticipating the material conditions for the break with the past that was later theorised and pursued by the movements of the 1970s. It was only thanks to the relatively recent revolution in transport and communication technologies that the reconnection of families has been facilitated and transnational exchanges have become easier.\textsuperscript{73}

I then chose to carry out an ethnographic study on the identity of the 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia and applied for a PhD. Keeping in mind the themes that were crucial to 1970s Italian feminism and the transformations that had—as will be


\textsuperscript{72} Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction}, p. 170.

seen in Chapter Two, controversially and heterogeneously—affected Italian society and Italian women’s perception of themselves after the migrants’ departure, I wanted to understand how the lives of the subjects of my study had developed and their self-identification as women progressed. The Italian women who had migrated to Australia in the post-WWII years, I supposed, would have had the opportunity to deal with radically different types of cultures and femininity, and to do so away from the moral influence of their families of origin. Did this allow them to autonomously invent and inhabit a different female self? Furthermore, Italian women had been granted the right to vote—and could hence allegedly select their own representatives at the government level—only in 1946: how did they compare themselves to their Australian peers, whose legal citizenship had been officially recognised half a century earlier, even before they were born?

Through literature\(^7^4\) and fieldwork, I later discovered that such questions and many more to which I sought answers were not really applicable to the case of the subjects that I had chosen to investigate, at least not in the way that I had conceived them. I discovered that the post-WWII migrants instead had to face and solve completely different sets of issues; they were often not as concerned about voting rights as they were about settling down, acquiring financial stability, and eventually integrating into Australian society. Amongst their primary goals was finding a “sistemazione”,\(^7^5\) a way to set themselves up. The break with the morality and traditions of the older generations in the Italian migrant communities was not always as drastic and evident as I had assumed it to be. Finally, due to the peculiarity of the circumstances, the


\(^7^5\) Baldassar, \textit{Visits Home}, p. 13.
emotional deprivation produced by the forceful break from the support provided by the family was at times for the women migrants a source of sorrow and misery.

As mentioned at the beginning of this preface, the question posed to returned-migrant Gelsomina—“when was it that you acquired an awareness of your freedom to choose for yourself?”—would therefore stem from my need to collect information that would respond to my initial research question: what emancipatory and/or liberatory effect did migration have on the Italian women who left their country of origin before the rise of the feminist movement? Significantly, I probed Gelsomina on this issue because her autonomous narration of herself was devoid of any explicit references to similar matters, which nevertheless surface from the analysis of other aspects of storytelling, notably the silences, discrepancies, and omissions. What later emerged from the analysis of that interaction is that my question had not taken into account the fact that Gelsomina perhaps did not feel like the ‘marginalised and subjugated other’ that I myself would have felt like in an environment that, from my contemporary queer feminist perspective, submitted women to men, deprived them of (my perception of) personal freedom and relegated them to certain culturally defined roles.

As highlighted by Sangster:

> By necessity, historians analyse and judge, and in the process, we may presume to understand the consciousness of our interviewees. Yet our analysis may contradict women’s self-image, and our feminist perspective may be rejected by our interviewees.76

As also noted by Susan Geiger,77 this might have distorted my interpretation of Gelsomina’s subjectivity. As will be described in the following chapters, in view of the premises on which the research is based, I nonetheless consider this very incommensurability to be part of the data of this feminist self-reflexive ethnographic

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research and the related question of how to capture the voices of women migrants with ethnography.
INTRODUCTION

FEMINIST ORAL HISTORY:
BUILDING A HABITUS OF COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

In this chapter, I introduce the subjects to whom I attempt to give voice with the aim of investigating the potential emancipatory and/or liberatory effects that migration has had on them. I also begin to outline the methodology and explain how I carried out the fieldwork and recruited the participants. Lastly, I engage in an explanation of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus—the tool used to examine how change occurred—and provide an outline of the content of the following chapters.

i.a) Writing Women Migrants’ History

In Fascism in Popular Memory, a text in which women’s perspective is integrated with men’s with regard to the events under investigation, Passerini states that:

It is an irony of history—history in the sense of men’s actions—that what is written about it so largely ignores the personal lives of individuals in the very period (the past hundred years) when individual subjectivity has been transformed, becoming an important area of scientific study and political interest.78

My self-reflexive ethnographic investigation in this thesis thus aims to contribute to filling that very gap with reference to the emancipatory and/or liberatory function that migration has had on the Italian women who left Italy in the 1950s. Indeed, Italian migrant women have often been disregarded by traditional historiography,

whilst they also seem to have been predominantly invisible to the Italian feminist movement.

In a milestone book on Italian history such as *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988*, women are at times ‘talked about’, but very seldom given a voice. In spite of the proportions of the phenomenon—“between 1946 and 1957 the numbers of those leaving Italy for the New World exceeded by 1,100,000 the numbers of those returning”—the topic of migration is only briefly covered, mostly in reference to the 1958-1963 ‘economic miracle’, and without distinguishing between internal and overseas migration. The microphone is, moreover, never handed to the woman migrants themselves. The volume *Italy since 1945* edited by Patrick McCarthy contains a chapter on 1970s women’s movements written by Percy Allum, but it overlooks the experience of the Italian women migrants. Importantly, *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, edited by Barański and Lumley, touches on the changes to women’s role within the family, whilst also acknowledging the importance of the women’s movement. It also addresses the issue of how Italian women were at the centre of the consumer culture in the post-WWII era. However, once again, no space is dedicated to the expression of the lived experience of migrant women. This also applies to a text such as *Women and Italy*, although it is completely devoted to describing the position of women in Italian society and culture.

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79 Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*.
80 Ibid., pp. 77, 196, 224, 369, 394.
81 Ibid., p. 211.
83 Allum, ‘Italian Society Transformed’, pp. 10-41
84 Barański and Lumley (eds.), *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*.
85 Ibid. p. 34.
86 Ibid., pp. 117-120.
87 Ibid., pp. 34-35.
With very few exceptions,\(^9\) the experience of the women who left the country after WWII has likewise not generally found space in the writings produced by Italian feminists. In particular, the departure of those who went to Australia seems to have gone mostly unnoticed. Furthermore, most of the literature specifically reporting on Italian post-WWII migrants in Australia overlooks how the process was lived by women.\(^10\) An exception is constituted by the work of Gillian Bottomley\(^11\) who reflects on some of the sociological aspects of Italian female migration. The lives of Italian migrant women have instead been recorded by their descendants like Donna Gabaccia\(^12\) in the United States and Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli in Australia.\(^13\) Many of these so-called diaspora authors have included the perspective of women in their studies of Italian migration, often integrating their own positioning with respect to the matter. Loretta Baldassar\(^14\) wrote about the transnational aspects of Italian migration to Australia, and with Donna Gabaccia, she focussed on matters of intimacy and gender. Adele Murdolo\(^15\) identified the distance between the Italian women migrants and the Australian feminist movement. Adriana Nelli\(^16\) concentrated on migration from the city of Trieste, including in her work an overview of how gender was lived by Triestine women in both Italy and Australia. Ellie Vasta\(^17\) collected data on the

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\(^13\) Pallotta-Chiarolli, *Tapestry*.


\(^17\) Vasta, *If You Had Your Time Again, Would You Migrate to Australia*?
lifestyle of the migrants in Brisbane. Susanna Scarpardo\textsuperscript{98} and Susanna Iuliano\textsuperscript{99} wrote about proxy marriages. Francesco Ricatti\textsuperscript{100} analysed the letters that the women migrants used to write to the Australia-based Italian newspaper ‘La Fiamma’. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli\textsuperscript{101} instead specifically investigated matters of gender identity amongst Italian migrant women, and described in her novels their intergenerational relationships. Her autobiographical book \textit{Tapestry},\textsuperscript{102} which intertwines the life stories of five generations of women in her family across Italy and Australia, has been of particular importance to this research, as it provided valuable ideas in terms of both style and contents.

Other non-academic sources are those represented by the few literary publications autonomously produced by women migrants themselves.\textsuperscript{103} However, no extensive academic research focusing exclusively on Italian women’s post-WWII experience of relocating to Australia was conducted prior to this study. What I intend to let transpire from my queer feminist analysis of the subjectivity—meaning “that area of symbolic activity which includes cognitive, cultural and psychological aspects”\textsuperscript{104}—of the 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia is if and eventually how migration helped them acquire the perception of their entitlement to the same rights as men, and contextually relinquish their attachments to the traditional order of patriarchy. The point of reference used to gauge their processes of emancipation and liberation through the analysis of habitus, which I will describe further below, are the narratives that emerged from the proceedings of 1970s Italian feminist movement. As mentioned in the Preface, after the post-WWII migrant departures, such narratives had in fact

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\textsuperscript{100} F. Ricatti, ‘Histories of Madness, the Abject Perspective of Italian Women in Australia’,\textit{ Australian Journal of Politics and History}, vol. 54, no. 3, 2008, pp. 434-449.
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\textsuperscript{102} Pallotta-Chiarolli, \textit{Tapestry}.
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\textsuperscript{103} Kahan-Guidi and Weiss (ed.), \textit{Give Me Strength}; Demarchi, \textit{Una triestina in Australia}.
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contributed to producing great changes to the self-perception of Italian women, although, as we shall see, at times this occurred in very contradictory ways.

The method used to collect the data, the contextual implementation of which is elaborated in the next section, is oral history. Oral history responds to the need to (try to) give voice to women migrants. As noted by Joan Sangster:

The feminist embrace of oral history emerged from a recognition that traditional sources have often neglected the lives of women, and that oral history offered a means of integrating women into historical scholarship, even contesting the reigning definitions of social, economic and political importance that obscured women’s lives.\textsuperscript{105}

Oral history, added the author, contributes to “putting women’s voices at the centre of history and highlighting gender as a category of analysis”. Moreover, it provides “the prospect that women interviewed will shape the research agenda by articulating what is of importance to them”.\textsuperscript{106} I will further describe in Chapters One and Two how such a prospect must nevertheless deal with the theoretical ruses entailed in the framing inherent in ethnography.

\textit{i.b) The Staging of Fieldwork}

Hesse-Biber and Leavy describe oral history as a “collaborative process of narrative building”\textsuperscript{107} that allows researchers to conduct “intensive biography interview[s]” through which they supposedly “learn about the respondents’ lives from their own perspective”.\textsuperscript{108} In contrast to in-depth interviews, oral history does not limit the focus of study to a specific topic, but can rather be applied to the investigation of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{105} Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 87.
  \item \textsuperscript{106} ibid., p. 87.
  \item \textsuperscript{108} ibid., p. 151.
\end{itemize}
processes\textsuperscript{109} that span over a long period of time,\textsuperscript{110} linking “micro- and macro-phenomena and personal life experiences to broader historical circumstances”.\textsuperscript{111} Very importantly, then, oral history fosters a relationship of \textit{reciprocity} between the personal stories and the context in which they occurred. Furthermore, the process of \textit{self-interpretation} that is inherent to the recollection of memories\textsuperscript{112} and entails the woman ‘seeing herself’ in order to narrate her story sets the ground for potential empowering processes of self-awareness.\textsuperscript{113}

Oral history also helps to bring to light “the collective scripts of a social group”.\textsuperscript{114} This allowed me to capture the informants’ relations to habitus: the storytellers could describe, though within the constraints that will be analysed further in Chapters One and Two, their own perception of (themselves in) pre-feminism Italy and of (themselves in) the Australian environment that they experienced after migration. What I wanted to gather from them was a picture not only of the (transformations that occurred to the) environments in which they lived both in Italy and overseas, but also of their positioning with respect to (these transformations in) such environments.

Owing to its intimate nature, oral history research—being limited to a relatively low number of participants with whom it is necessary to spend large amounts of time\textsuperscript{115}—requires the creation of a rapport\textsuperscript{116} between the participant and the ethnographer: trust is a fundamental element in creating the most comfortable environment for the disclosure of personal details that “produce a meaningful biographical narrative”.\textsuperscript{117} Since it is also not possible to know the contents of a personal history before it is told,

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p. 153.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p. 152.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 153.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 156.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 150.
\textsuperscript{114} Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{115} Hesse-Biber and Leavy, \textit{The Practice of Qualitative Research}, p. 157.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 158.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 159.
the ethnographer “cannot define all the topics in advance”,\textsuperscript{118} and must give space to
telling the facets that the participants find of most importance.\textsuperscript{119}

Given these important considerations, I decided to collect the life stories of a total of
fourteen women of Italian origin who had migrated to Australia during the post-WWII
‘migration decade’. Amongst the participants, eleven are based in the area of Brisbane
(QLD) and one in Melbourne (VIC), whilst two have since returned to Italy and are
now based in Friuli. Seven of the fourteen participants had migrated as adults, and
will be identified as \textit{generation 1}; amongst them, six arrived in Australia as spouses of
their migrant husbands, whilst one (who died during the course of this research)
migrated with her parents at the age of 18. The remaining seven participants had
travelled to Australia with their families as children; they will be identified as
\textit{generation 1.5}. This differentiation is of relevance in relation to the findings and will
be further analysed throughout the thesis. In addition, I also conducted one in-depth
interview with a more recent Italian woman migrant who is based in Sydney. My
motivation was that she could provide a professional opinion on the health conditions
of the group of women who are the focus of this research.

As per the origin of my informants, although my research makes general reference to
the experiences of women who migrated to Australia from all over Italy, nearly all of
the participants were actually born in the north-eastern Friuli-Venezia Giulia region.
Of those who were not, one was born in the nearby Istrian Peninsula, which at the
time of the informants’ birth was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy but is nowadays
situated in Croatia; another was born in the central Italian region of Lazio but married
a Friulan; finally, one more was born in Romania to Friulan parents who had migrated
there during the Fascist regime.

This choice was determined by the fact that when applying for a PhD, I had asked for
and received a grant from the Assessorato alla Cultura of the Friuli Venezia Giulia

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 87.
region to conduct a preliminary investigation into the linguistic identity of the women who had migrated to Australia. I had therefore constructed a network of contacts for the study. Furthermore, given the necessity to develop quality relationships with participants so as to facilitate the gathering of the information that I was interested in, I continued to build as much as I could on the rapport that I had already started to develop. Hence, although the actual fieldwork occurred from 2010 until the end of 2011, I had already met and started to become acquainted with ten of the informants as early as 2008. These initial contacts then led me to meet the other storytellers.

It could be argued that the selected sample of participants is not representative of the entire group that this research is focussed on because of its uneven geographical distribution. This, however, could be relevant to studies carried out with quantitative methodologies. My research is instead based on a qualitative method, aimed at interrogating the emancipatory and liberatory function of migration. It can hence do away with the need to try to represent all of the subjectivities involved in the extremely culturally complicated dominion that in national terms is called ‘Italy’. Also, a consideration of the vastness of the receiving country would have eventually rendered the mission of equal geographical representation even more challenging. As will be discussed in the next chapter, I deem full representation a theoretically unattainable goal; the analysis of its unfeasibility can nonetheless provide interesting angles on the complications entailed in the attempt to give voice to the women migrants.

Regardless, from 2009 to 2011, I regularly took part in the meetings of the Sydney (NSW) branch of the 1985-founded National Italo-Australian Women’s Association (NIAWA—Associazione Nazionale Donne Italo-Australiane). At these meetings, I could talk to dozens of women migrants from all areas of Italy and observe their appearance, activities, and behaviour in the context of a women-migrant-centred association founded and led by migrant women themselves. Those conversations reminded me of the diversity of experiences lived by the migrants, and of how profoundly the backgrounds of the women arriving from the north, and the
backgrounds of those arriving from the south of Italy, could differ. Some of these women then became ‘occasional informants’, meaning individuals whom I have asked to report about specific matters because of their role, qualifications, and expertise. Whilst some would have been willing to become storytellers for the project, I had to turn down their offers due to an insufficiency of time and resources.

The storytelling demanded that I spend long hours at the premises of the women migrants, which were often located in suburban Australia and hence not always easy to reach by public transport. The choice of the location was determined by the fact that whilst I was in Brisbane, I was staying in guest houses, which in terms of mobility, privacy, and comfort would not have been the most suitable places to conduct the interviews. I had to consider that some participants in my study were elderly ladies, whose physical condition did not always allow them to move about independently or to be away from home for too long, as they also often had non-independent husbands to look after. In addition, I wanted to observe how the women acted and spoke within their domestic walls, which I felt would have provided them with the comfort and reassurance necessary to talk about very intimate matters. As discussed below, however, there were some exceptions to this rule. Notably, due to the location of the interviews, husbands were often inevitably part of the storytelling too, at times even as invasive elements as they, from my point of view, took over their wives’ speech. However, the men’s reactions and positioning with respect to their wives being at the centre of the stage as such provided material for participant observation.

At times I was actually offered to stay at the migrants’ homes whilst conducting the ethnography, which in addition to giving me a very close insight into their lives would have saved me a lot of money. However, I considered it inappropriate because I thought that it might have created jealousy amongst the participants. I hence only accepted the proposal once, when it was necessary time wise and logistically. Moreover, becoming familiar with the participants was a gradual process that I myself had to grow accustomed to: I did not want to be drawn into their lives too suddenly
and needed my own space to write and reflect on how I was feeling about the relationships that were developing.

In this sense, I must finally add that due to the delicacy of the matters treated in this thesis, to protect the identity of the informants, I unilaterally decided to use pseudonyms for all of them.

\textit{i.c) The Characters of the Story}

As noted, in early 2008 I had contacted the Friulan and Triestine communities in Australia to find participants for a preliminary investigation that I conducted before commencing this PhD. At the time, I discovered that not all migrant communities were happy to welcome researchers, especially those from overseas. I came to know that some of the migrants had become quite resentful in respect to the representatives from the headquarters of migrant associations, for whom I could have initially been mistaken. Such figures were apparently perceived as interested in migrants only for matters of profit and personal advantage (specifically, according to the complaint that most frequently reached my ears, for travel overseas at the expense of the association to eat and sleep in good hotels for free). Many migrants—according to what I was told—had felt let down by their countries of origin as much as by the receiving country when they were in need of help. However, in March 2008, I found it relatively easy to fix an appointment in Melbourne, and a few months later, several others in Brisbane, where unlike other parts of the country, the aging Friulan community is still very active.

Of those who became the participants of this study, the first person whom I met in March 2008 was Melbourne-based \textit{Gabriella}, who, as she proudly emphasised, was born in the “Territorio Libero di Trieste” (“Free Territory of Trieste”)\textsuperscript{120} in 1952 and had migrated to Victoria with her urbanite parents in 1957, aged 5 years. The

\textsuperscript{120} Gabriella, interview with the author, 2010, Melbourne, VIC.
migration of her family, as she promptly noted, was primarily related to the fact that in 1954, Trieste and its surrounding territory had been annexed to the newly created Italian Republic. Trieste and south-eastern Friuli (including my hometown) used to be part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before being integrated into the then Kingdom of Italy at the end of WWI. Some areas of present-day Slovenia and Croatia were also annexed to the Kingdom at that time. Due to the mixed ethnic composition of the area, historically inhabited by Italian-, Slovene- and Croatian-speaking populations, between 1945 and 1954 the border city once again found itself at the centre of a territorial dispute between Italy and Yugoslavia; it was subsequently temporarily placed under the administration of the Allied Military Government.\(^{121}\) When Trieste finally 'became Italian', many of those in favour of keeping the Territory independent preferred to leave.

Gabriella, who completed postgraduate studies and lived part of her adult life in Italy, is very fond of her Triestine identity. This is of importance to her, especially in terms of her status as a woman. As will be seen in Chapters Three and Four, in formerly Habsburg Trieste, women across all classes were believed to have a relatively more emancipated lifestyle than those in most other parts of Italy.

Later in the same year, I contacted *Maria* through the Friulan migrants association (the 'Fogolâr Furlan', literally the 'Friulan Hearth') of Brisbane, which regularly holds meetings on the land owned by the organisation in Pallara (QLD). Maria was born in Morsano al Tagliamento (Province of Udine, Italy) in 1956 and migrated to Australia with her parents in 1959, aged 3 years. She is the only informant whose home I have never visited, because at the time of ethnography, she was in the process of building her own house in the outskirts of Brisbane, where she now lives with her husband. Our conversations occurred in her car or at Di Bella Coffee in Bowen Hills (QLD). Maria holds a bachelor's degree and also completed postgraduate studies. I found conversing with her a very interesting experience.

In December 2008, I attended the Christmas meeting of the aforementioned Fogolâr Furlan. In that circumstance, I encountered most of the women who went on to become my storytellers. None of those who eventually accepted to participate in the study had actually volunteered at that time, but my feeling was that they had found the idea of narrating their story exciting. Although such a possibility was never mentioned during the ethnography, with the vast majority of participants not even being familiar with the term, I later thought that for many, the storytelling must have felt like individual feminist ‘autocoscienza’ sessions described in the Preface: spaces where their word was valued and where they could evaluate their lives by themselves. I will investigate in later chapters the extent to which this could then be translated into the thesis.

Nadia, whom I met at that meeting, is the informant born in the Romanian city of Sinaia in 1929 to a migrated Friulan family of bricklayers. She had ‘returned’ to Carnia (the mountainous area to the north-west of the Friuli region), which she had never previously visited, with her mother alone in 1947. She then migrated to Brisbane (QLD) in 1953 to reach her husband, whom she had met in Socchieve (Carnia, Province of Udine, Italy) and proxy married after he had already left to Australia. In spite of her working-class background, whilst in Romania, Nadia had had the opportunity to achieve a high-school certificate unlike the majority of the other migrants of her generation. Her nucleus had been living in the shadow of the noble and influential Romanian family who employed her parents and through whom she was able to gain a scholarship to attend a prestigious girls’ college in Bucharest (Romania). Unfortunately, her education was interrupted by the mounting violence of WWII.

Claudia, who was born in Prato Carnico (Carnia, Province of Udine, Italy) in 1941 and had migrated to Australia with her family of peasants and artisans in 1959 at the age of 18, was extremely enthusiastic about telling me about her Australian adventure. For her, migrating down under had been a very exciting experience. Unfortunately, she died during the course of my PhD.
Rachele was very happy to narrate herself too. She was born in 1932 in Muzzana del Turgnano (Province of Udine, Italy) to a family of small land-owning farmers; she had migrated to Australia in 1956 with her first child and her husband. Since our meeting, Rachele has been torn between her Australian lifestyle and the excruciating, old-age-driven necessity to move back to Italy. We used to meet in her unit in Brisbane, but she also often invited me to have lunch or dinner with her at the Treasury Casino (Brisbane, QLD). I accepted her invitations, as I was very pleased to keep her company and found the experience of interest from an anthropological point of view; however, going there implied that I had to deal with my discomfort in gambling environments, whilst I also preferred to pay for my own meals.

Lidia, who chose not to say much about her family of origin, was born in Majano (Province of Udine, Italy) in 1937, and had started migrating as early as the age of 11, when she was sent to Rome (Lazio, Italy) to work as a tailor. She later returned to Friuli for a few years, but as soon as she became of age, she left again for Switzerland. There she contracted a work-related illness that obliged her to return to Italy to be cured. She later found work in Laggio (Province of Belluno, Italy) in the Veneto region, where she met the man who would become her husband and with whom she migrated to Australia in 1961.

Anna was born in 1935 in Gorizia (Province of Gorizia, Italy), where she spent the first few years of her life, but then grew up in the north-eastern, Slav-dialect-speaking geo-cultural area of Friuli called Benečija or Natisone Valleys (Province of Udine, Italy). Anna had similarly had individual migratory experiences before moving to Australia. At the age of 16, she had to leave the tiny border town where her poverty-stricken family of farmers owned a small parcel of land to work in Milan (Italy) as a domestic helper. She lived in Milan for nearly a decade before deciding to marry a home-visiting migrant and follow him to Australia in 1962.
Anna introduced to me her auntie Giannina, who was born in 1916 in the Benečija village of Codromaz (Province of Udine, Italy), right on the border with what used to be Yugoslavia. Like Trieste, the areas of Benečija had also been involved in the frontier disputes between Italy and Yugoslavia in the immediate aftermath of WWII. At the age of 15, she was sent to Naples (Italy) to work as a domestic aid. She then settled in Ukanje (Ucagna in Italian), where her father had meanwhile gone to live. Due to the abovementioned re-arrangement of national borders, Ukanje used to be part of the Italian Kingdom before ‘becoming’ Yugoslavia; it is nowadays situated in Slovenia. As will be seen in Chapter Three, after WWII Giannina fled with her nuclear family to Italy, which lay just across the valley. Giannina, her husband, and their daughters—technically, a refugee family—finally boarded a Swedish ship to Australia in 1951.

Amanda is another war refugee whom I met through the Brisbane branch of the Fogolâr Furlan. She was born in 1943 in an Italian/(Triestine)-speaking family in the Istrian town of Montona (Motovun in Croatian). The Istrian peninsula had also been part of the Italian Kingdom between WWI and WWII, but remained Yugoslav territory after the end of WWII. Having been given such a possibility by the Yugoslav government, her parents chose to move to Italy right after the conflict. Amanda attended her first year of school in Trieste, but boarded a ship to Australia with her family in 1950, when she was 7 years old.

Rosanna was born in Castelforte (Province of Latina, Lazio, Italy) in 1947 and migrated to Australia with her mother and sisters in 1954. Her father had already settled down under a few years prior. Rosanna comes from an extremely poor, sexually segregated, and regimented background. She is the person with whom I initially spent an entire ‘Friday to Sunday’ weekend. She lives south of Brisbane with her Friulan husband, and staying at their home near the beach was a necessary pleasure, which combined both their willingness to take me around the area and my need to use the time as efficiently as possible. Being their guest also gave me the chance to interact with Rosanna from morning coffee until bed time.
Virginia's family was not as poor as others, as they owned some land in Bertiolo (Province of Udine, Italy), where she was born in 1946. As will be reported in Chapter Five, her father migrated because he wanted to gain some independence from his mother, Virginia's 'nonna', who used to run the finances of the entire family, leaving him little freedom. He left for Australia in 1951, and Virginia and the rest of the nuclear family reached him the following year. Virginia is someone whom I also saw in Italy when she visited her relatives in Friuli, and who has twice reciprocated the courtesy (in 2010 and 2012) by coming to my house in Aiello. We also spent time together at the Minto Guesthouse in Highgate Hill (QLD), where I was staying in December 2011.

Gisella, whom I perceived to be a very reserved person, was born in Codroipo (Province of Udine, Italy) in 1947 and migrated to Australia with her family in 1955, at the age of 8. She did not say much about herself and preferred that I divulge even less, which I found unfortunate as she narrated some quite interesting stories about her attempts to resettle in Italy as an adult. However, she seemed to have enjoyed our conversations, and when necessary, she steadfastly provided me with technical information related to the migrant communities in Australia. I used to meet her in her apartment in New Farm (QLD) where she lived with her mother, who was also present during the course of the storytelling and who died during the writing up of this thesis.

Mother and daughter, Gelsomina, whose words I reported at the very beginning of this thesis, and Aurora, were born in Joannis (Province of Udine, Italy), in 1930 and 1953, respectively. I met them both through a common friend who had informed them of my research. They used to be based in Sydney, where they had migrated in 1955 as a family, but are now both returned migrants based in Cervignano del Friuli (Province of Udine, Italy). At the age of 19, Aurora paid a return visit to her hometown, where she met her current husband and ended up staying. Gelsomina instead tried to resettle in Italy during the 1990s with her husband, Aurora's father, but then returned to Sydney for another decade after his death. She finally decided to leave Australia
indefinitely in March 2010. I interviewed them in their apartments in 2011, both together and separately.

Finally, I interviewed 1946-born Ornella, who is from Rome (Lazio, Italy) and whom I met in Sydney though NIAWA. Having arrived in Australia in 1968 as a professional, Ornella does not belong to the migration wave that I am focussing on. However, because of her experience with women migrants’ health and migration policies, I tape-recorded her words on such issues.

The oral narrations of the subjects of this research will be analysed (and problematized) through the lens of habitus. Such a choice was determined by the fact that habitus caters for the need to capture the dynamism of social changes, thus allowing us to highlight the overlapping of forces that influence such processes, including the contradictions inherent to them.

**i.d) The Structuring Structured Structure**

Passerini indicated that what “must emerge in research which aims to safeguard the integrity of the individual” is “the tension between individual reality and general process [my Italics]”.\(^{122}\) The tool through which I assessed such tension with reference to the emancipatory/liberatory potential of the migratory experience of the ‘Italian’ women who settled in Australia during the 1950s is Bourdieu’s concept of habitus.

*Habitus* is a term that Bourdieu used to describe the system of values and dispositions —meaning the schemas according to which reality is classified—upon which a social group bases its accepted communal behaviour. It is “both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (*principium divisionis*) of these practices”.\(^{123}\) More specifically, it “is not only a structuring

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\(^{122}\) Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*, p. 11.

\(^{123}\) Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 170.
structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure [my Italic], meaning both a principle according to which reality is recognised and divided into classes, and the result of such division itself. The etymology of the term is to be found in the Latin word ‘habere’, which signifies ‘to have’ or ‘to maintain’, and is also the root of the English verb ‘inhabit’ (‘abitare’ in Italian). In Outline of a Theory of Practice, Bourdieu moreover states that:

The ‘unconscious’ is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus: ‘in each of us, in various proportions, there is part of yesterday’s man [and woman!]; it is yesterday’s man [and woman] who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. Yet, we do not sense this man [or woman] of the past, because [s/]he is inveterate in us; [s/]he makes up the unconscious part of ourselves’.125

Bourdieu further clarifies that habitus is the result of the “inculcation and appropriation” of the products of collective history, and that the very uncritical acceptance and internalisation of such products—meaning “the objective structures (e.g., of language, economy)”—generate dispositions in individuals.126 Such dispositions, being their very product, tend to reproduce the same material conditions of existence that allowed the aforementioned process of naturalisation of the objective structures to happen. This progression, however, is not necessarily inescapable. The doxa—that Bourdieu defines as the experience of “when there is a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization” that makes “the natural and social world appear as self-evident”127—involuntarily aims to reinstate the habitus; nonetheless, it undergoes changes when conditions permit that the tradition of thought that produces it and to which it refers is rendered conscious and (hence) no longer taken for granted.

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124 Ibid.
125 Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, pp. 78-79.
126 Ibid., p. 85.
127 Ibid., p. 164.
“The social world is accumulated history”, stated Bourdieu, and in his opinion it is necessary to “reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it, accumulation and all its effects”. He outlines as follows the forms into which he thinks capital is divided:

Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility.

Bourdieu moreover adds that the symbolic capital, which he defines as “the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate [my Italics]”, becomes spendable thanks to “the intervention of the habitus, as a socially constituted cognitive capacity”. In his view, capital is therefore only valuable if the field in which it operates acknowledges it as such. Importantly, it is the interaction of economic, social, and cultural capital occurring in compliance with the parameters of the system of values according to which reality is circumstantially classified that informs the creation and maintenance of taste, which Bourdieu believed to be what determines and reinstates class difference.

Following on from this, it can be said that processes of (national, gender, and cultural) identification are based on dispositions. They are therefore unconsciously informed by the overlapping of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives133 that at any given

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131 Ibid.
132 Bourdieu, Distinction, p. 170.
133 With the term ‘hegemony’, I make reference to the work of Gramsci; see, for example, A. Gramsci, Quaderni del carcere, Turin, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2007.
time pertain to each locality, which is likewise self-referentially fed by culture-specific readings of the occurring events. Migratory processes displace the dispositions from the field in which they have originated, allowing space for the re-arrangement of the doxa and consequently of habitus.

**i.e) Chapter Outline**

In the following chapters, I apply the concept of habitus to my feminist self-reflexive ethnographic experience of the subjectivities of the women who left Italy in the 1950s to migrate to Australia. In this Introductory chapter, I presented the subjects to whom I attempt to give voice for the aim of investigating the potential emancipatory and/or liberatory effects of migration. I also outlined the methodology, which is indebted to the tradition of oral history of Luisa Passerini, and explained how I carried out the fieldwork and recruited the participants. In Chapter One, I further interrogate methodological questions, with particular reference to the production of Judith Butler and the authors of *Writing Culture.* I also introduce self-reflexivity and proceed to explaining how ethnography mutes the subjects whilst attempting to give them voice.

In Chapter Two, I further disentangle the theoretical complications that I have had to deal with during the course of the research. Inspired by the work of Loretta Baldassar, I clarify the importance of positioning myself in the field. I thus enter the debate over the insider/outsider status of the anthropologist, test the potential of self-reflexivity by applying it to such discussion, and elucidate some ethical points. These operations require that I inevitably ‘occupy’ with my own narration some of the space that should supposedly be dedicated to the stories of the women migrants. As shall be

134 Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory.*
137 Baldassar, *Visits Home.*
seen, this is nevertheless a necessary step to provide examples of both the ways in which 1970s feminism interfaced with habitus in Italy, and the type of self-narration that has been rendered possible by ‘autocoscienza’. During the course of the thesis, I analyse the contents of my informants’ storytelling, as well as juxtapose the migrants’ ways of speaking about themselves to the possibilities of self-description rendered available by the feminist movement after their departure.

Following on from Passerini’s statement that “essential for an understanding of history is not just knowledge of the lives of obscure and ordinary individuals (all of us, in one way or another), but information about the ideas feeding into their everyday experience”, in Chapter Three, I intertwine the narration of the storytellers with the work of other scholars—primarily Luisa Accati, Lesley Caldwell, and Donna Gabaccia—to provide an overview of what Gelsomina called ‘the mentality’ that, in my opinion, informed and was informed by the perception of the (gendered) self of the participants in this study. My aim is to bring to light the migrants’ dispositions and past (perceptions of) doxic individualities. In doing so, I notably have to let my writing oscillate between the voice of the participants and my own, whilst highlighting the differences in positioning with respect to official historiography.

In Chapters Four and Five, I use the voices of the informants to describe their settlement in Australia, whilst making reference to the work of historians—John Murphy, James Jupp, and others—to give an account of the social and political circumstances that affected the emancipation of women migrants. In view of the fact that, as pointed out by Joan Sangster, “revelations may also come from silences and omissions”, I then dedicate the first part of Chapter Six to examining the silences

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141 Gabaccia, Italy’s Many Diasporas.
142 Murphy, Imagining the Fifties.
143 Jupp, Immigration.
144 Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 90.
that have riddled the fieldwork: I demonstrate how they reflect on the process of habitus formation through the analysis of the ethnographic interface between one of my informants and myself. I then describe the liberating power that self-reflexive ethnography can have. Pnina Werbner and Nira Yuval-Davis noted that multiculturalism can “transfer too many decision-making powers to unelected ‘traditional’ communal male elders”.145 I then apply the theoretical framework described in Chapter One to the investigation of (the silencing effect of) 1970s Australian multiculturalism to show how it related to the emancipatory path of the Italian women migrants.

To further examine the complications entailed in the process of studying emancipation and liberation through habitus, in Chapter Seven, I resort once again to self-reflexivity to analyse the ‘defensiveness’146 inherent in the modality of the self-representation of the informants of generation 1. I then juxtapose this analysis to that of the contents of the narrations of both generations of migrants considered in this research. I finally draw together my findings in the Conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

(IM)POSSIBILITIES OF SPEECH

In the Preface, I explained how I conceived this research, which examines the life stories of women who left Italy in the 1950s before the start of the feminist movement in order to evaluate the eventual emancipatory and/or liberatory effect of the move overseas. In the previous chapter, I introduced the storytellers, the methodology, and the conceptual tool—habitus—through which I assess from my queer feminist perspective the women migrants’ acquisition of (a sense of entitlement to having) equal rights to men and/or their escape from the narratives of patriarchy.

In this chapter, I challenge the feminist approach by questioning the very possibility of creating ethnographic spaces for women’s stories: I explain how the oral history was conducted, define the field, and finally begin to elaborate the theoretical complications troubling the very attempts to give voice to the subjects of this study. Amongst the key concepts introduced are ‘framing’ and ‘self-reflexivity’, which I then analyse further and provide examples of in the chapters that follow.

1.a) The Storytelling

Every dialect is a way of thinking.147

One of the consequences of Italy’s late ‘unification’—the nation was officially formed in 1871, but as seen in the previous chapter, its borders were re-arranged until

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1954—concerns the country’s great variety of local traditions and languages. In the Friuli Venezia Giulia region alone, which comprises 1,235,000 inhabitants, German, Slovene, Triestine, at least two Slav ‘dialects’, and several different types of Friulan are spoken in addition to Italian.

The spreading of standard Italian as a means of communication amongst Italians in Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon, which was facilitated from the 1950s onwards by the media and the increased levels of schooling and literacy. According to linguist Tullio De Mauro, in 1861, only 2.5% of the population living on the Italian peninsula was able to speak the language, whilst at the end of WWII, most non-formally educated people were still unable to master it: if necessary, they could communicate in “italiano popolare” (“popular Italian”), a form of the national language heavily influenced by the syntax, grammar, and lexicon of the local idioms. Antonia Rubino maintains that this scenario was reflected amongst the post-WWII Italian migrants in Australia:

If we take into account Italy’s sociolinguistic situation in those decades, we can assume that the hundreds of thousands of migrants who arrived here [in Australia], mainly from small rural centres and the most depressed regions of Italy at the time (Sicily, Calabria, Veneto, Campania), spoke dialect as their first language and Italian as their second.

In this thesis, I will not have the opportunity to dedicate space specifically to the investigation of the linguistic aspects of the migrant condition. It must, however, be noted that languages are informed and inform habitus, the reason for which the choice of language for the storytelling was of relevance to this study. As described by

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149 Ibid., pp. 70–71.
151 De Mauro, Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita, cited in Lepschy, ‘How Popular is Italian?’, p. 68.
Alessandro Duranti, languages make sense in specific social contexts, and the cultural connotations attached to some expressions well exceed the limits imposed by translation. They consist of changes to the register (from formal to informal and vice-versa) as well as to the syntactic structures, which define the informants as much as the words being used. Language, moreover, influences the choice of what is told: matters that would be irrelevant in a specific linguistic socio-cultural context instead assume importance or make sense in another. As Duranti explains:

It is one of the theses of the ethnography of everyday speech that fundamental elements of social living can be found even in a simple informal conversation, and that the roles and the expectations that are at the base of any social system are concealed even in the apparently most spontaneous exchanges.

Goldschmidt confirmed that “to be fully conversant with one’s informant’s utterances”, as he puts it, “[with] the nuances of their meanings, and the assumptions underlying their meanings is a very great help in understanding what is going on in their minds”. If, for example, an old Friulan woman says to me “L’è misdi, ài di meti su al gustà”, I must consider that she is saying much more than just “It’s midday, I should prepare lunch”. Amongst other things, she is contextually implying that she—as a woman and a wife—is in charge of food preparation, and that I know that this is how things are—because such things have always been so in the Friulan context. This is implicitly understood between us, because as a native speaker, she probably assumes that I know this and that she is just behaving accordingly. She is also likely to convey the message that as a guest, I am not expected to help and that I should instead start preparing for the meal, because we are approaching the historically and culturally designated time for it.

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154 Ibid., p. 76. My translation of: “E’, infatti, una delle tesi dell’etnografia del parlare quotidiano che anche in una semplice conversazione informale si possono trovare gli elementi fondamentali del vivere sociale, e che anche nei dialoghi apparentemente più spontanei si nascondono quei ruoli e quelle aspettative che sono alla base di qualsiasi sistema sociale”.
My informants and I could choose the language in which to communicate with each other from amongst those that we had in common. The language selected by my informants for their storytelling, however, inevitably set some boundaries and affected interpretation: the use of English implied that I did not have to translate the migrants’ words for the PhD research, but also that they inhabited—and narrated!—Anglo personas; the speaking of the migrants’ original languages instead implied that I then had to transpose their words and thoughts into English, with the obvious consequence that some other meaning was lost in translation.¹⁵⁶

The older generation generally spoke their language of origin: Friulans conducted the storytelling in the variety of Friulian spoken in their hometowns, and those whose mother tongue was Beneciano, a Slav idiom that I am unfamiliar with, narrated themselves in ‘popular Italian’. Some English or hybridised words did, however, frequently slip into the conversations. The returned migrant Gelsomina, introduced in the Preface, was the only informant to speak the very same variety of Friulian as I do, but she made a point of speaking in English and would systematically revert to it if side-tracked by my spontaneous interventions in our local idiom. At first, this felt awkward, and it took me a while to become accustomed to the discrepancy that such a modality of communication was creating in (what I thought was) our shared habitus. Her choice, however, was probably part of her way of conveying to me her explicit desire to keep hold of her acquired and beloved Australian identity.

In contrast, the general orientation of the younger generation—meaning the migrants who were born overseas and had arrived in Australia as children with their parents during the migration decade—was that of conveniently swapping from one language to another: our ethnographic language became a mixture of English, Italian, and other languages that we knew, spoke, or understood. The choice was thematic: food, for example, was always discussed in Italian or Friulian. At times words and syntactic structures of different idioms intertwined in the same sentence. I later thought that this was quite interesting in terms of the younger women migrants’ habitus, as it did

speak of the ways in which they perceived themselves and the world around them, as well as the reported difficulty of making themselves intelligible to those who did not share their same plurilingual migrant experience. Aurora, Gelsomina’s daughter, however, predominantly spoke in Italian—with a slight English accent.

Allowing the informants to choose their language of communication was one way that I hoped to have as little impact as possible on my informants’ narrations. However, as will be further emphasised below, it is impossible not to influence them at all. Indeed, any question that one asks, no matter how open-ended, inevitably guides the narrations along a specific path. Moreover, even if a narrator is left free to speak, the very gaze of the ethnographer, her facial expressions, or even her posture, unwittingly convey information about what she thinks, thus inadvertently implying that the counterpart might adjust her communication accordingly.

As suggested by Passerini,\textsuperscript{157} I decided that I would let the participants speak as freely as they wished and would only intervene when I reputed that it was necessary in order to prompt them to avoid losing the thread of the story, or if I wanted to know something in particular. My probing was tailored to each informant’s narration. Sometimes I prepared questions based on the content of the previous session, whilst at other times, I asked for clarifications on the spot. In such cases, the storytelling on occasion transformed into “semi-structured conversation[s]”\textsuperscript{158} aimed at “drawing out forms of cultural identity and shared traditions”.\textsuperscript{159} This indeed affected the chronological order in which events were narrated, which, as noted by Roseneil,\textsuperscript{160} is an instance that holds in itself importance because it indicates the priorities of the interviewee. It was, however, necessary in terms of obtaining information on the topics that interested me. Although, as I will thoroughly investigate in Chapter Six,

\textsuperscript{157} Passerini, \textit{Fascism in Popular Memory}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.

omissions are also informative, and as proposed by Sangster, it is necessary “to unearth the underlying assumptions [...] and analyse the subtexts and silences as well as the explicit descriptions in the interview”, when circumstances render this possible, it is in my opinion advisable to try to obtain the “missing data”.

The informants were not always comfortable with the idea of being tape-recorded. My desire to investigate whether emancipation and liberation from patriarchy took place was likely to require the exposure of very intimate feelings and facts: family ties, management of affection, relationships to husbands, and (lack of) love for the self. I considered that such potentially shame-inducing practices, which demand bringing to light a usually very private part of the self, would have doubtfully surfaced under the monitoring eye or ear of a recording device.

I then chose to record the conversations only when I deemed it possible after discussing the option with the participants; yet only rarely was I satisfied with the result, as the participants of generation 1 in particular often seemed to ‘perform’ in those circumstances. Furthermore, they were always very aware of the presence of the recording device, and often asked me to turn it off when they were about to say something that they wanted to keep between us. As a general practice, I took much less invasive handwritten notes of their narrations. I then wrote down the stories in the third person and submitted them individually to each informant for approval and eventual amendments. This, of course, meant that I do not have a traceable record of every word that was said, and that some parts of their narrations may be informed by my own perspective: I am indeed likely to have omitted or not emphasised enough the facts that they would have considered important. The participants, however, had the faculty of adding or removing anything that they considered relevant or too personal once the story was on paper. To give coherence to the final English version, sometimes I changed the order in which facts were told, but kept a record of the original arrangement. Also, the participants and I often discussed in the ‘privacy of the

163 Passerini, Fascism in Popular Memory, p. 12.
ethnographic environment’ the contradictions and inconsistencies that had arisen in the storytelling. Such debates at times became part of the narrations in the form of my notes.

Generation 1 Nadia, for example, spoke at length of the anguish and fear of when, towards the end of WWII, Romania had become a very dangerous war zone. She and her mother had to keep running away from bombings and hiding from soldiers, who were violent and abused women. It was extremely distressing for her to dig into such memories, and she told me that she had lost sleep over them for a couple of nights. However, her recounting of the facts seemed at times to lack accuracy. For instance, she held the Russian troops responsible for killing the local Jews and creating havoc, whilst it is proved that it was the Germans who had done so. Also, she did not have a very clear idea of Romania’s role during the war. I therefore did some research and gave her some easily readable material from which she could evince how things had gone according to official historiography. So the story that Nadia eventually approved with respect to that period of her life contains both her narration and my fieldwork notes of the period. A part of it reads as follows:

Romania in reality was an ally of the Nazis, to whom it provided oil for the war, troops, and logistical support. But when I originally mentioned these facts to Nadia, she told me that she didn’t know about them: in general, she remembers very little of what happened with reference to the war, and this in a confused manner, almost as if she had removed it from her memory. After our third encounter, however, during which she had mentioned the possibility that my objections regarding the history of Romania were founded, I gave her some material that I had printed from Wikipedia on Antonescu and the role of Romania during WWII. After reading it, one day she told me on the phone that her memory was getting clearer; before, she confirmed, she couldn’t remember well, and many things she simply never knew about, partly because she was very young and partly because they were not released to the public.

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In addition to asking the migrants to narrate their stories, I invited them to show me photographs taken during the course of their lives. Some privately selected a few and then gave them to me to scan and attach to their narrations. Some retrieved old boxes from the closet; we went through a huge number of photos together and selected those to use with their oral histories. Going through hundreds of images together—as I did, for example, with Claudia, Nadia, and Amanda—allowed for the participants to remember forgotten details and for me to pose questions not previously thought about. Also, I became more familiar with their daily activities and work places, and I was also furnished with details that were of importance to me, but that they had omitted from their story telling, such as, for example, how they dressed or presented themselves in public. I decided to use a few of the migrants’ photos to articulate and/or exemplify the content of certain passages of my writing. I also added two photographs from other photographers in support of my description of the changes to women’s conditions in Italy during the course of the 20th century.

As a last point, I must add that generally each initial session of storytelling in Australia took place from around 9am. Before starting, we would regularly have coffee—often with homemade pastries—and around midday the narration would be interrupted for the preparation of lunch, which was to be consumed with other members of the family if they were present. The session would generally be resumed after the meal and continue into the afternoon. Although this may give the impression of validating a stereotype, I cannot not stress that the fieldwork occurred around an overabundance of food, most of which can be said to relate to Italian tradition(s). In my opinion, this is relevant to the extent that it contributed, like the language, both to bonding and the process of reciprocal cultural recognition. Such a process, it must be noted, pertains to the ways in which we relate to habitus. I will analyse in Chapter Two how reciprocal recognition signified our respective positionings and how it influenced our relations. In the next section, I instead begin to examine the theoretical complications

165 Although I do not completely agree with Cinotto’s argumentation, a description of the complexity related to what is referred to as ‘Italian traditional food’ can be found in the introduction to S. Cinotto, The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City, Champaign, USA, University of Illinois Press, 2013.
inherent in having to (im)possibly define the very subjectivities on whose eventual emancipation and liberation this research is focussed. I then proceed to describe the effects of ethnographic framing.

1.b) (De)Stabilised Definitions

Joan Scott underlined that identity categories are fictions that are taken for granted. Butler defined them as “instruments of regulatory regimes”. Aleksandra Ålund warned that “conceptions of what ‘identity’ is are frequently based on reductionist assumptions of cultural homogeneity”. Mary Spongberg moreover noted that after post-structuralism, women “no longer can be considered a unified subject”. One of the complications that this research has had to deal with relates to the fact that the subjectivities that I intended to (try to) give voice ultimately escape any attempt to make up a consistent dominion.

Italian-ness, Australian-ness, womanhood, and migrant subjectivity are problematic classifications, (the becoming of) which cannot be fixed into categories without doing away with a certain degree of essentialisation, which would lock identities into boxes that can never fully contain them. Hence, (how) could I level the subjects of my research into a coherent dominion—the 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia—without producing elisions likely to erase or oversee important aspects of what constituted them? To what extent is, for example, a ‘Friulan’ also ‘Italian’? And what makes a woman to start with? And a migrant? And what is (stereotypically considered) Australian? What is (stereotypically considered) Italian? And how are the

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(stereotypical, nationalised) representations of both “imagined communities”\textsuperscript{170} formed? How do the very life experiences of the migrants problematize them? What is the \textit{(in)visible difference} that (discursively) creates the (un)stable dominion that the subjects of this research are appointed to? How is it (mis)recognised? And how does habitus come into the picture?

Not all of the above questions could find a proper response in this thesis, not suggesting that they can anywhere else. Throughout this study, I have, however, had to deal with the ruses entailed in describing the subjects of my research in terms of gender, nationality, status, and ethnicity. One of the solutions that I—where feasible—circumstancially adopted is that of assuming the point of view of the subjects themselves. This strategy not only created \textit{attempts} to allocate agency to the storytellers, which, as shown in the following section, is never a fully attainable circumstance, but it also helped to highlight (from my point of view) the habitus to which they made reference. In their stories, each informant did provide some, although at times \textit{contradictory}, indications—either through explicit references or through their \textit{eloquent silences}—about their perspectives in such regards. It has been through these indications—ultimately filtered by my own perspective—to which I refer whilst in the process of having to inevitably mention (and hence implicitly define with tacit, culturally-informed connotations) certain dominions.

During fieldwork, for example, none of the subjects of this research questioned the signifiers that traditionally and retrospectively determined their womanhood. They did not de-naturalise the factuality of sex binarism, as Judith Butler\textsuperscript{171} has instead done, or highlight that gender is a cultural construction “produced and organised over time”\textsuperscript{172} through the performative reiteration of hegemonic norms,\textsuperscript{173} as the same


author has theorised. Although some participants did openly question the general attainability of fixed definitions, and, as narrated in Chapter Six, vainly probed me about gender identity, they all seem to have so far considered themselves ‘women’ as per the binary definition of the term. This is also how reality was catalogued in their environments at the time of their departure from Italy, as such informative of the habitus to which they made reference. Not to be forgotten, this is also the way in which the institutions producing the policies that regulated their existences have conceived the migrants’ gender condition.

As per matters of class, Castles noted that most of the post-WWII migrants “were from rural areas, particularly from small towns”, were poor, and had generally received little formal education.\(^{174}\) This corresponds to what was reported by my informants, who were *predominantly* from peasant or working-class backgrounds. The women who left Italy in the aftermath of WWII were generally those who, forced by material conditions, decided to look for opportunities to build a ‘better life’ overseas. For many, nevertheless, the choice to leave was not entirely free, but rather determined by *the need* to escape misery: as eloquently described by Friulan poet and migrant from Carnia, Leonardo Zanier, migrants were “Liber[i]s... *di scugni là*,\(^ {175}\) “Free... to have to go”.

I instead described in the previous chapter how fixing the participant’s national belonging is an operation that is moreover complicated by the history of the area where most of my informants come from. For example, my informants Giannina and Amanda used to reside in former Yugoslavia before their departure, but they both described themselves using the adjective ‘Italian’. Also, Giannina’s mother tongue is a Slav dialect, although she is equally fluent in Italian (and now English!). Similar situations are part of a broader trend—many people left Yugoslavia to move to Italy

\(^{173}\) Butler, *Gender Trouble*.


right after WWII\textsuperscript{176}—and do not represent exceptional cases. Nadia was instead born in Romania. And although she has always legally been an Italian citizen and was considered as such by the Australian authorities in terms of her migration, she was raised and has lived most of her life overseas. Her mother tongue is Romanian; she learnt a bit of Friulan in the house, but only became fluent in it when she ‘returned’ to her parents’ village after WWII at the age of 18. Her direct experience of Italy—or, more specifically, of a tiny, mountainous, Friulan-speaking, Austria-bordering hamlet in the north east of the country—is limited to the five years spent there between her escape from post-WWII Romania and her departure for Australia. Outside of that time frame, the ‘Italy’ that she has known is only that represented by the Italian communities ‘down under’. Such communities have, however, long tended to replicate the same habitus that they had carried with them from Italy in terms of gender relations. Thus, although Italy was meanwhile changing, Nadia like others had limited opportunities to directly relate to the transformations occurring in the ‘country of origin’. Which ‘Italian-ness’ is she then a representative of?

There are indeed discrepancies between what ‘Italian’ meant at ‘official’ and personal levels. And yet, because the migrants’ (presumed) ‘Italian-ness’ assumed particular significations in Australia, I could not but define the fields in national terms. Nonetheless, I contextually assumed the informants’ points of view over their positioning in such respect: if a woman felt ‘Italian’, whatever that meant, I considered her such. Where possible, I tried to expose how one’s ‘Italian-ness’ differed from or reflected that of others. And in order to provide a picture of how habitus had been changing, I also juxtaposed the informants’ ‘Italian-ness’ to my own national condition from a queer feminist perspective.

I also acknowledged the complications that arose in this sense during fieldwork. During a storytelling session, my informant Virginia said what follows:

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\textsuperscript{176} S. Volk, \textit{Esuli a Trieste}, Udine (Italy), Kappa Vu, 2004.
'Oh' they will say: 'You’re from the north, I can see you’re from the north ‘cause you’re tall!' They'll make that distinction [...] They already distinguish from north Italy to south Italy, I don't have to say anything, they ask me the question, ‘Where are you from’, and I'll answer them... But what difference does it make to them? Oh, I don’t know [my emphasis].\textsuperscript{177}

In this case, the pronouns ‘they’ and ‘them’ circumstantially refer to the category of ‘Australians’, in which Virginia did not include herself in spite of the fact that she has been a citizen of the country for over fifty years. On other occasions, however, the ‘they’ that she pronounced referred to the category of ‘Italians’, of which citizenship-wise she also is a member.

In order to try to translate the content involved in these ruses, which are relevant to the research to the extent that they intrinsically (de)stabilise the very attempts to give voice to the dominion classified as 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia, I tried to overcome where feasible the limitations inherent in the language traditionally at disposal by highlighting through it the (in)consistency of the categories being named: I problematized such categories by bringing to surface some of the phantoms that they contain. With reference to the above case, for example, the ‘they’ mentioned by Virginia referred to the subjectivity that she perceived had owned the public space in which her (‘Italian’) life had been grafted, meaning the (‘Anglo-’)Australians’. Yet such specification did not need to be made between us: as I will describe in Chapter Two and in later parts of the thesis, the communication between the migrants and myself was influenced by my positioning as an individual who is, like them, at the verge of the cultures of reference. This instance, which contributed to framing us into specific power positions, has continued to trouble the possibility of giving voice to the subjects of this research. In the next section, I begin to outline why this is the case and how self-reflexivity can be of help in this sense.

\textsuperscript{177} Virginia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
1.c) Ethnographic Framing

Butler’s discourse on the intelligibility of lives is a long-standing one, the traces of which can be followed as far back as *Gender Trouble*,\(^{179}\) where she started undoing the mechanisms of the formation of (gender) identity and its construction through the performative power of the norm. However, its development in *Frames of War*\(^{180}\) is of particular interest in respect to the condition (of speech) of 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia, since it further explains how the framing imposed on them shaped, in a non-deterministic way,\(^{181}\) the possibilities that they were left with. As noted in the Preface, the self-intelligibility of women used to be firmly framed by patriarchy, and one of the scopes of the 1970s Italian feminist movement was to permit through ‘autocoscienza’ a process of self-interpretation. Moreover, as also noted, the subjectivity of the women migrants has predominantly gone unacknowledged: it was framed out of the literature on Italian history—or rather: (in)visibly embedded in it!—and even out of part of that on Italian migration to Australia. The aim of this thesis is indeed to allow space for the voicing of this history, to assess just how emancipatory and/or liberating the move overseas was for the subjects of this research. But how does the process of self-interpretation reflect in the (ethnographer’s) act of writing it? And (how) is it theoretically attainable to start with? Can (the patriarchal historical legacy of) habitus ever be totally done away with?

In this section, I use Butler’s theory to highlight how the (im)possibility of expressing women migrants’ experiences is articulated and limited by the epistemological framing entailed in the very ethnographic attempts to provide them space for speech.

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\(^{179}\) Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

\(^{180}\) Butler, *Frames of War*.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., p. 4.
I then make reference to the authors of *Writing Culture*\(^{182}\) to explain how feminist self-reflexive ethnography can assist in doing justice to the process of data interpretation.

Butler’s argument departs from the principle of the precariousness of certain lives: before we can actually describe a life as lost, we need to apprehend it,\(^{183}\) that is, to acknowledge, grasp, if not understand, its existence. We are not in a *position* to assert the violence that has eventually been inflicted on it if we ‘cannot see’ such a life, if we first do not give it a perceivable status. She thus states:

The ‘being’ of life itself is constituted through selective means; as a result, we cannot refer to this ‘being’ outside of the operations of power, and we must make more precise the specific mechanisms of power through which life is produced.\(^{184}\)

The framing that contributes to the formation of the intelligible subject is conducted from *outside* the subject itself. It is an ongoing operation that an individual or a group is ‘subjected to’ by the performative power of historically *developed norms*,\(^{185}\) where norms represent the spoken or unspoken lines along which ‘reality’ is made apprehendable (by the dominant culture): subjects are recognised—but not necessarily known!\(^{186}\)—through the ‘lenses’ made available or produced by the reiteration of such norms.\(^ {187}\) Although there are always ways to permanently (but never completely) escape this process (“the job is never done once and for all”),\(^ {188}\) coming to existence in the grid of relations that constitutes sociality implies being *interpreted*, meaning being *translated* into something that is merely partial, if not ‘else’, through a mechanism that can only gather a fraction of the ‘being’, notably the fraction that is functional to the persistence of the power structure itself. Butler moreover explains that:

\(^{182}\) Clifford and Marcus (ed.), *Writing Culture*.
\(^{184}\) Ibid.
\(^{185}\) Ibid., pp. 2-3.
\(^{186}\) Ibid., p. 5.
\(^{187}\) Ibid., p. 3.
\(^{188}\) Ibid., p. 4.
What happens when a frame breaks with itself is that a taken-for-granted reality is called into question, exposing the orchestrating designs of the authority who sought to control the frame [my Italics].

Recognisability has to do with the circumstances that pave the way for a subject to become a recognisable one, by fitting it into a normative scheme that permits the alleged recogniser to ‘see it’. If an individual or a group claims to possess characteristics that cannot be ‘read’ or ‘perceived’ by whoever has to recognise them, such characteristics are phantoms that, as a matter of fact, do not really exist for the latter; at least, until a way is found to make them fall into the field of the knowable.

The framed always exceeds the expectations of the frame(er), becoming its “relentless double”, a ‘shadow’ or a ‘reflection’ that permanently escapes the limits that the frame imposes on it, creating the conditions for a permanent rearrangement of the domain that the frame aims to fix. When undoubted certainties come apart, new possibilities of existence—though always partial in this strategy of thought—“come to life”.

It is in these very new possibilities that this research takes interest: (how) did the women migrants perceive the break with the norm? And what did it mean to them? Was their gender condition improved by what might be described as the rearrangement of habitus? As I indicated in the Preface and will demonstrate in other parts of the thesis, some of the questions that I asked the participants were not relevant to them, but rather responded to my need to interpret their existences according to my own understanding of who they could be. Most importantly, (how)

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189 Ibid., p. 12.
190 Ibid., p. 5.
191 For further theorization about re-cognition, also see Pallotta-Chiarolli and Pease, The Politics of Recognition and Social Justice.
192 The drama of this relates to the fact that even if the dominion of the knowable is in a way progressively inclusive, the mechanism of exclusion that lies at the back of this way of conceiving identity and inclusiveness still stands.
193 Butler, Frames of War, p. 8.
194 Ibid., p. 12.
can ethnography provide spaces for (the disclosure of) emancipation and liberation? Can oral history resemble or even really become a form of feminist ‘autocoscienza’?

With reference to the act of writing culture, Rabinow in this sense warned that “we should be attentive to our historical practice of projecting our cultural practice onto the other”.\(^{195}\) In fact, we inescapably project on ‘our’ others ‘our’ history of knowledge and genealogy of values, ‘our’ way of de-encoding and making sense of ‘reality’; interpretative frameworks that may or may not be relevant to the actual experience of existence of the subjects about whom we are trying to write. As a matter of fact, it is ‘our’ understanding of the very concept of ‘otherness’ itself that the study of cultures conveys. Indeed, the process of subjectification recreates and reinstates the very same conditions of power imbalance that ethnography seeks to overcome.

Science—stretching Mary Louise Pratt’s affirmation\(^{196}\)—therefore ‘kills the subjects’, by framing them within the borders of the cultural and disciplinary necessities of the framer. Haunted by the ghosts of (an unavoidably unobtainable)\(^{197}\) scientific objectivity, it seems then impossible for the ethnographer to do justice to the interpretation and translation of the (cultures of the) other. The very attempts to give voice to the women migrants—the circumstantial other—frame such a voice into the understanding and means of expression of the researcher, who, as noted by Sangster\(^{198}\) and Portelli,\(^{199}\) always retains a certain amount of privilege over the final product.

However, the (lack of) power to narrate one’s own history can be made if not more equally distributed, then at least manifest. To do so, it is necessary to render the


\(^{198}\) J. Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 93.

disparity itself an object of research, to uproot and expose the influences in which the ethnographic discourse is immersed, and to uncover the tacit presuppositions of superiority entailed in it. In this way, the subjectivity of the ethnographer herself is drawn within the domain of the research, contributing to making it a process of “self-knowledge”. Moreover, by highlighting and describing the imbalances that ‘create’ it, we intrinsically imply and acknowledge that there is a never fully ‘containable’ rest that we cannot see, but that we must remain ‘open’ to. As an ontological ghost that becomes lost in translation, such a rest does not make it to the realm of intelligibility produced by the relations of domination in act amongst the players involved in the task: it supposedly can(not) be ‘visualised’ in the portrait being painted; (and yet) it does (not) exist. Fundamentally, what I am trying to say is that the ethnographer can never be sure to have fully expressed the unintelligible—and yet existent!—‘cultural excesses’ that relentlessly walk in and out of the picture that she tries to draw.

Hence, rather than trying to overcome the ruses entailed in universal inclusiveness, the researcher should through self-reflexive ethnography shift the focus of writing away from the original subjects of the fieldwork and instead point to the epistemological projections that inform the researching, and therefore, to the self. Given the in-superability of the problem of doing justice to the voice of the other, the ethnographer should start ‘writing about herself writing’ instead. In this sense, Saukko stated as follows:

The quest to be truer to different lived realities, and the acknowledgement that we can never grasp them ‘objectively’, has led new ethnographic research to appropriate the phenomenological ‘method’ of analyzing other people’s experiences by reflecting on how they are similar to, and different from, our own. Thus, one of the characteristic features of new ethnographic pieces of work is a dialogic shifting between the scholar’s Self and the perspective of the Other people being studied.

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201 For further discussions about privileged positions, also see B. Pease, Undoing Privilege: Unearned Advantage in a Divided World, New York, Zed Books, 2010.
In this sense, influencing the (interpretation of the data provided by the) informants with one’s perspective is unavoidable, but highlighting the effects thus produced in terms of the outcome is part of the feminist ethnographic practice of communally building the narrative. Feminist ethnography, in fact, does not pretend to achieve a theoretically unattainable objectivity, but is rather concerned with bringing to surface the processes, including the unspoken dynamics of power, that otherwise tacitly influence the relationship amongst the parts, and hence the product of it. “In a feminist relationship between oral historian and researcher, existing differences will be recognised and conditions of mutual respect will be sought”,²⁰³ noted Susan Geiger, for instance.

This operation is not always straightforward. As exemplified in Chapter Six, the unspoken inter-relational dynamics that silently inform the interface between the interviewee and the interviewer do not necessarily immediately come to surface. Not only do those whom Hollway and Jefferson called the “defended subjects”²⁰⁴ give what they think is a convenient account of facts because they are weary of what others write about them, or are simply incapable of acknowledging “the emotional reality”,²⁰⁵ meaning the pain related to the memories being recounted; but I also argue that the ‘defended ethnographer’ does so too. In order to hide their unwanted feelings or data that they are not ready to disclose, both parts can (un)consciously fill their narrations with silences, contradictions, and inconsistencies that respond to cultural notions of shame and morality. The modality of the disclosure of information, although non-deterministically mediated by the individuality of each, is related to the normative power of the mainstream discourse—habitus—and this thesis is in fact aimed at investigating when and how the subjects choose/had the chance to distance themselves from it.

²⁰³ S. Geiger, ‘What’s So Feminist about Doing Women’s Oral History?’, p. 175
²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 7.
Feminist ethnography, however, tends towards the intrinsically (im)possible uncovering of such very discursively silencing narratives. Ultimately, “the researcher and the informant create the source together”,\textsuperscript{206} as Sangster importantly pointed out. This, as exposed above, also happens through self-reflexivity.

\textit{Conclusion}

For the purpose of challenging the very (im)possibility of giving voice to the subjects of research through feminist ethnography, in this chapter, I outlined some of the theoretical complications that such process has to deal with. I started by explaining how during fieldwork I dealt with the practicalities inherent in the ethnographic process. I then showed ways to highlight the connotations embedded in the unavoidable necessity to provide (un)stable definitions. I finally defined the inescapability of Butler's concept of 'framing', and suggested how self-reflexivity, the 'turning of the camera towards oneself', can nevertheless assist in dealing with the inevitable ruses entailed in interpretation.

In the next chapter, I further disentangle these issues by applying self-reflexivity to the debate about insider/outsider anthropology. Whilst doing so, I describe the importance of positioning myself in the field and contextually provide an outline of the contradictory ways in which the feminist discourse affected the Italian patriarchal habitus.

\textsuperscript{206} J. Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 88.
CHAPTER TWO

MIRRORING HABITUS, EMPOWERING INFORMANTS

In the Preface, I described the motives behind this project. In the Introduction, I outlined the methodology, presented the key informants, and located them in their historical and regional backgrounds. For the purpose of discussing the (im)possibility of giving voice to women migrants, in Chapter One, I described the (un-)framing power of ethnography and introduced the concept of self-reflexivity.

In this chapter, I further examine the theoretical intricacies inherent in writing women's stories. I then enter the debate over insider/outsider anthropology, and to do so, I exemplify the applicability of self-reflexivity. This approach also allowed me to begin to outline the ‘internal narrative’ against which, according to my argument, the feminist ethnographer shapes those of the storytellers to different extents. This contextually assists in providing examples of both ‘autocoscienza’ and the contradictory ways in which the feminist discourse impacted on Italian society. The aim of this discussion is to show the differences and similarities in the perception of the self between the informants and the ethnographer, and to start to highlight how such positionings relate to the power of the patriarchal narratives that inform and are informed by habitus.

Finally, I apply the feminist framework of self-reflexive investigation to disentangle the inter-relational ethical issues tacitly at play between the ethnographer and the subjects of research.
2.a) The Insider/Outsider Anthropologist: To Be(long) or Not to Be(long)?

Can people study their own culture?
Is what they study their own culture or
some alien subculture within their own society?\textsuperscript{207}

The debate over the distinction between insider/outside anthropology—that is, over
the possibility of naming an anthropologist a \textit{native} of a certain culture, and therefore
\textit{defining} such culture, fixating its terms—is not one of minor importance.\textsuperscript{208} As
mentioned in Chapter One, ‘the familiar’ has tacitly accepted connotations embedded
in it; these connotations make the ethnographer run the risk of interpreting it
according to unquestioned schemes that hide meaning whilst in the process of
disclosing the parts of it that do not challenge the doxa. Conversely, it also assists in
making sense of the grammar of the event being investigated without having to refer
to the knowledge of the figure of the so-called ‘native informant’. Yet, as Narayan
exhaustively argues, who can be said to be a native to start with?\textsuperscript{209} And furthermore,
what are the theoretical implications inherent in the challenge to stably define a
native? Importantly, whose narratives are we actually condoning when we categorise
a person as such?

This matter is of particular relevance to this feminist ethnographic research because,
similarly to what the 1970s Italian feminists maintained that patriarchy did to the
subjectivity of women, the anthropologist inevitably projects her own epistemology
onto the subjects of her study. In such a way, she shapes to lesser or greater extents
the process of data collection and interpretation. In this case, it is the understanding of
women’s perception of themselves that is at stake, which, having being shaped by the

\textsuperscript{207} Goldschmidt, ‘The Unfamiliar in the Familiar’, p. 17.
\textit{Insider Anthropology, Napa Bulletin}, vol. 16, 1995, p. 3; F. Fozdar, ‘Cosmopolitan Estrangement in
Researching Race Relations in New Zealand’, in L. Voloder and L. Kirpitchenko (ed.), \textit{Insider Research on
Migration and Mobility: International Perspectives on Researcher Positioning}, Farnham, UK, Ashgate
95, no. 3, September 1993, pp. 671-686.
power of male epistemology, is a matter strictly connected to the modality of expressing their voices. As I explained in the Preface, one of the key tools used by the 1970s Italian feminists to liberate the self from patriarchy was ‘autocoscienza’, a practice aimed at narrating and interpreting the self according to one’s own understanding of who one is. How then does this translate into the context of an ethnographic study aimed at measuring the liberatory and emancipatory effects of migration through habitus? In the process of analysing the content and modality of the narration of the subjects of this research, I must interpret them, which means intrinsically comparing them to a given standard. In this case, such a standard is that of (the field of the) changes produced by the Italian feminist movement in the effort of “constructing the space of positions and the space of position-takings”, as Bourdieu would say.210 Whilst I tried to let the migrants conduct the storytelling—and I stated in Chapter One how I have intentionally and unintentionally interfered with it—the interpretation of the data is a process that can and has been partly shared with the informants, but that ultimately remains under my control. I can write about them, but they cannot write about me.211 My subjectivity thus informs the reporting of the storytelling and, I argue, must for this reason be disclosed as much as possible.

As will be seen, both my informants and myself are in some way ‘Italian women migrants’, although the hierarchies of power that we abide(ed) by are at times very different. And it is exactly our respective positioning with reference to these hierarchies and their effects on the self, nevertheless defined from the stance of the legacy of the 1970s Italian feminist discourse, that this thesis intends to analyse. Paradoxically, a large section of the participants was not even familiar with such a stance. My very desire to focus on the emancipatory and/or liberatory effect that migration has had on the women migrants frames212 their voices into a feminist mission that the informants of generation 1, for example, predominantly felt to be foreign. In this sense, both they and I to some extent do (not) belong to the same cultures, and do (not) refer to the same habitus.

212 Geiger, ‘What’s So Feminist about Doing Women’s Oral History?’, p. 171.
In view of this, the disclosure of my positioning with respect to the narratives that support(ed) the patriarchal doxa cannot be avoided: this will take up space that should supposedly be allocated to the voices of the storytellers instead, but in my opinion, this is a necessary step to make sense of the ethnographic process. It is against the modality and contents of the self-narration permitted by the changes produced by the feminist movement—the legacy of which I am a declared (queer) bearer—that I compare the self-narration of the informants for the scope of assessing how emancipatory and/or liberatory migration was for them. My own ‘autocoscienza’ moreover exemplifies the complicated and controversial ways in which feminism affected Italian society, at times reaching working-class environments, but at the same time, failing to be applied in the intellectual, middle-class circles where it could have found very fertile ground and the material conditions to flourish and further expand.

2.a.1) Sameness and Otherness in Networks of Power

In the Introduction to Insider Anthropology, Cerroni-Long states:

Pointing out that to make comparisons you must have a way of defining what you are comparing is a truism. It is also undeniable, though, that efforts aimed at de-reifying culture end up eliminating an indispensable element of cross cultural comparisons: cultural boundaries. Without cultural boundaries there is no clear way of defining the relationship of the cultural analyst with the phenomena under observation; consequently, the differentiation between alien and native also disappears, and, as it does, anyone studying a social setting becomes an insider by the mere fact of 'being there' to study it.²¹³

Following this, the failure to define a native of a culture equals the failure to define a culture, which ultimately equals levelling cultural difference, thus leading to the empirically unrealistic scenario in which every human being behaves in the same way

and holds the same beliefs. This is obviously not the case. Moreover, as Narayan points out, when we define ourselves with adjectives that, for example, make reference to modern nation states (Italian, Australian, Chinese, etc.), which is sometimes unavoidable as shown in Chapter One, we fail both to acknowledge the differences internal to the nation and do away with international commonalities, such as those related to class. It is not easy to do away with essentialisation, but it is impossible to draw a line between cultures without tacitly condoning the power of some narratives over others. Who can claim to be a native, then? To make such a claim, we would have to let nationality or other selected elements of the identity that we choose rank above others. The crux of the matter, I argue, is thus: do we really need to categorise ourselves in that sense?

As Narayan suggests, an ethnographer should instead give of herself a much broader description of who she is—admitting that even a similar description can never provide a complete picture of one’s cultural affiliations, not neglecting for example the weight of minority discourses within minority discourses and/or the content of the subconscious. As mentioned, this would allow the reader to locate the unspoken motivations of the ethnographer and the perspectives from where s/he observes the subjects of her research. Loretta Baldassar agrees in this respect:

> Given the subjective nature of social science, it is as important to know the analyst as it is to know the subject; after all, the reader comes to know the subject through the analyst. How I found out about things is as much an artefact of the social and cultural phenomena I am studying as what I found out.

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215 Ibid., p. 673.
216 Baldassar, Visits Home, p. 29.
Micaela Di Leonardo moreover adds that ethnographers should not avoid an “analysis of their own race, class, and gender placements, and their implications”. Writing about her border positioning, Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli in fact makes clear that:

> As an Italo-Australian woman and writer, my gender identity and cultural location should be instrumental in and inform my engagement with the broader socio-cultural, political and economic issues of Australia and the world.

I hence believe that I need to make clear the positioning that my gaze is informed by. In this sense, I need to start by saying that, as already mentioned, I am a 1974-born ‘woman’ of Italian nationality who has travelled extensively since an early age and resided abroad by herself for a substantial part of her life, although who was raised in an overwhelmingly Catholic and sexist village in the extreme north-east of Italy, bordering the former Yugoslavia. In reference to what I said in the Preface about the relevance of inter-generational legacies, I also have to add that both of my highly educated parents were atheists and communists, and that my paternal grandmother Nona Dolores—with whom I actually lived during most of my childhood and adolescence—was a 1911-born non-bigoted Catholic who used to take me to church with her, a circumstance that led me to ‘independently’ choose to be baptised at the age of 8 (though regretting it soon afterwards). Prior to this, I used to be the only non-baptised child in town, apart from the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Of relevance to my study is also the fact that at home we spoke different languages: I would speak Triestine with my parents, which they also spoke between them, and Friulan with my grandparents. My grandparents would speak Triestine with my father and mother, but Friulan between them. I would also speak Friulan to Marisa, the domestic aid, who would instead speak in Triestine to my mother and Friulan to my father and grandmother. Friulan is also the language that I spoke with many other

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relatives and still speak with the vast majority of my co-townies. Also, although my maternal grandmother Nona Nerina, who lived in nearby Monfalcone (Italy), was of Slav origin, I spoke Triestine with her too: because of the nationalistic politics of Mussolini in the 1930s, Slovene was forcibly dropped by my maternal ancestors before WWII.

Moreover, in view of the situation that will be described in Chapter Three, I have to add that my parents divorced in 1983, when I was 8 years old. This event has had a major influence on my own struggle for emancipation and liberation: in fact, they were only the second couple to divorce in the history of the village. Due to the sexist narratives that sustained the local habitus, however, my mother was not recognised as the victim of domestic violence that she was, but rather indicated as a ‘rovina famiglie’ (literally, ‘families ruiner’) and held responsible for the separation, which was considered a major scandal by the community. Because she was a woman, no one gave her any support. She then had to leave the town. My father, who had meanwhile taken me to Rome for the purpose of keeping me some 600 kilometres away from my mother, blackmailed her into leaving me with him and my paternal grandmother, otherwise he would not concede to her divorce. Because he was a man, no one condemned his acts in spite of the fact that he would have been legally liable for kidnap and multiple counts of attempted murder, facts that had been evident to people and for which he actually found support. This discrepancy was due to the fact that in those days—and to some extent still nowadays!—women were expected to selflessly sacrifice their aspirations and accept whatever was coming in order to keep the family united. Those who would not comply with this predicament were considered ‘poco di buono’ (‘worthless individuals’) who did not deserve respect. The ‘social capital’ held by men’s opinion was still, in spite of over 15 years of feminism, disproportionate compared to women’s. Even in intellectual environments like the one in which I was brought up, women were often believed to have to support their men in acquiring prestige and not to work for their own advancement, as my mother

had tried to do. Although the Communist Party and the Italian Left had in general more open positions in this respect, with the emancipation of women being officially amongst the goals of their political agendas, when it came to actually practising these ideals at an intimate level in homes, the Left parties’ lines were not necessarily applied very strictly. An individual’s personal choices had to be weighed against the local hegemonic beliefs. This translated to the fact that female children were still not allocated the same agency as males were.

If, as described in the Preface, feminism had already ‘installed’ in the minds of (predominantly middle class and/or educated) women (and men?) the revolutionary idea that women had ‘independently’, admitting that was possible, re-evaluated their subjectivities, as a matter of fact, such a possibility had to deal with enormous obstacles to reach into the tissue of society. The feminist narratives had to clash against the ‘mentality’ described through Gelsomina’s words at the beginning of this thesis, which seems to have often been sustained within the borders of the Italian communities by the first generation of post-WWII migrants in Australia. Nor was such a mentality immediately and automatically dismantled at the start of feminism in Italy. Women actually had to confront themselves with the image passed on to them by their mothers, and as mentioned, the detachment from it often implied a painful emotional operation.

My mother, for example, was unable to report my father to the police, as she should have done, both because she was left alone by the community and because, as she herself admitted, she had learnt from her own communist and in some ways rather emancipated Triestine mother (Nona Nerina) to ‘accept’ the same authority of men, which she was nevertheless simultaneously trying to (teach me to) challenge. Her failure to pursue her legal rights both as a mother and a victim of domestic violence profoundly confused me about how to do justice to myself: I was alienated from my rights and (hence) exposed to the manipulations of my father, whose (socially accepted) narrative cast him as the victim of my mother, to whose provocative insubordination he could ‘only’ respond with violent rage. As will be seen in Chapter
Seven, the effects of such manipulations, which were condoned by the representatives of the local habitus, became embedded in the inner layers of my persona, long impeding my own speech. The matters treated in this thesis thus regard the condition of (Italian) women in general, but have a strong resonance in my own life.

Furthermore, in my feminist self-ethnographic narration, I think that I should also include that my view of the world and my habits have indeed been affected by the fact that my Friulan father's side of the family was petit-bourgeois, whilst my Triestine mother comes from a working-class background; she could only go to university thanks to a scholarship and because of the reforms introduced to the educational system by the Socialist Party in the late 1960s. Middle-class capital has in this sense allowed me to feel entitled to living a kind of lifestyle that others perceive(d) as a privilege; however, I was at the same time well aware of the state of mind of the working class, especially as I had to support myself completely from the age of 19.

It was indeed unusual for an Italian person of my generation who has gone to university not to be supported by her family during her tertiary studies. Such circumstances contravened both the custom and the legislation in such regard and were the consequence of another unusual—and yet to the feminist self already subconsciously brewing inside of me, 'natural'—circumstance: my open rejection of paternal authority. In spite of having been made to feel entitled to the right to study and travel, I was still a woman, and as such, I was expected to obey the rules of a specific pattern of behaviour and to acknowledge and abide by pre-defined hierarchies of power—according to which my father's views, deeds, and ideas were at the top of the pyramid, whilst mine were seen to be at the bottom; his were supposedly more correct than mine and thus unquestionable. My insubordination—my refutation of the tradition that I was ascribed to by birth—at a certain point made of me an outcast, a 'voluntary non-beloner' to the local (middle-class) hegemony: as a lesbian, I was a 'native' who called herself outside of the culture—or rather, the traditional dominant (silencing) narratives—that she was asked to conform to... And
in fact I was beaten up by my father and thrown out of the house. If I wanted to be
different, and more specifically, if I wanted to be gay, I had to support myself.

My paternal grandmother Dolores, who supposedly commanded the domestic order
of the family house that I had been thrown out of and that she moreover owned, did
not impede the eviction: in her early 20th century view of gender roles, her son, my
father, was (the man) officially in charge of taking the decisions for both of us, and
thought that I also had to (learn to) obey his rule. Unlike my father, however, Nona
Dolores was unconditionally supportive of my relationship with a woman. “Basta che
si oredis ben” ("What’s important is that you love each other") is what she said to me,
a belief upon which she has consistently acted. Even though at a public level she
condoned the patriarchal habitus, at an intimate one, she distanced herself from it,
thus ultimately helping me to develop my own understanding of my sexuality. And
sexual liberation, paradoxically, is what 1970s feminism was centred around. In the
second part of the 20th century, the Italian context had indeed changed in very
contradictory ways; and it is my belief that it is in the interstices created by those
very contradictions that, as will be seen in later chapters, some women, both in Italy
and overseas, could find a few spaces for emancipation and liberation.

To what extent can I then be considered a ‘native’ of ‘Italian’ culture(s)? And, actually,
to what extent are my informants themselves ‘natives’ of ‘Italian’ culture(s) to start
with? Is our different positioning in respect to habitus sufficient to state that they
have more (stereotypical) Italian capital’ than I do? I argue that such appointing
would only reify the patriarchy-abiding aspects of the culture(s) likewise often
sustained in the Italian communities in Australia over the minority discourses that
tried to counter them. So how do we differentiate our experiences?

All of my informants and I speak the same language(s), and we also cook and consume
the same type of meals in similar (hybridised) ways, although they do not all strictly
pertain to the same tradition. My informants and I also received a similar type of
informal education, and I was born and brought up in the same nation-state that they
had left behind two decades before. And as will be shown in Chapter Three, life in such a nation-state was regulated by specific laws with respect to gender relations, which once cancelled or changed would not immediately carry with them the mentality that reflected them. We moreover ‘understand’, refer to, and are able to ‘read’ the same ‘cultural iconography’ and emotional attachments. However, if this means that we did not have to explain to each other how we related to our families, for example, because ‘we knew already’, because ‘we all (supposedly) do it that way’, as outlined above I did not acknowledge my father’s authority over me, as the migrants of generation 1 seem to have predominantly done. This profoundly differentiates our perception of ourselves as ‘Italian’ women. In contrast, the way in which generation 1.5 informants narrated themselves generally differs from that of the informants of generation 1: probably because the former were brought up at the verge of (patriarchal notions of) Italian-ness and Australian-ness, unlike the latter, they had more opportunities to challenge the power of patriarchal oppression and recognise it as such to begin with.

I indeed felt great affinity with the struggle recounted by the younger generation of informants when they were confronted with local Australian ways on the one hand, and with the moral norms brought by their Italian parents from overseas on the other. They are older than me and had lived most of their lives 16,000 kilometres south-east of the place where we were born. They were, however, put by their child migrant condition in the position of being able to gain glimpses into the incongruence between the proposed cultural models. This was also at times permitted by the fact that the older generation needed them because of their linguistic skills and better cultural understanding.

I will return to this facet in later chapters, but I wish here to exemplify through the words of generation 1.5 Amanda how she acknowledged and successfully fought against the dynamics that repressed her. Her father was a man who she defined as “stuck in a time warp”, clinging to what she called in Triestine dialect “tradizioni

220 Amanda, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
vecje” (“old traditions”), who would not let his daughters have friends or go out by themselves. Yet because of his poor knowledge of English, he needed her to carry out many important tasks, such as translating for the entire family in all sorts of official circumstances. As she pointed out, the conditions made some post-WWII Italians in Australia live in what she described as a frozen cultural snap-shot of the country that they had left, meaning that they would struggle to keep alive what they thought was an unchanged tradition along with the static Italian-style hierarchies, particularly in the face of the assimilationist politics of the 1950s and 1960s that will be described in Chapter Four. Interestingly, the arrival of multicultural politics in the 1970s, to be discussed in Chapter Six, also unintentionally contributed to the tendency of reifying patriarchy-based cultural differences as a way of ‘celebrating’ and maintaining ethnic diversity. Overall, the encounter with the local habits and the raising of specific ‘migrant necessities’ meant that some patriarchs, like Amanda’s father-in-law, had to give in to the fact that young women would unexpectedly take rebellious stands in front of them: the old folks were forced by circumstances to rely on those who knew the language and the local ways!

Amanda described her strategy of emancipation after marriage with the following tape-recorded words:

I made him [the father-in-law] understand that I was the boss [...] He realised that, that he just couldn’t boss people around anymore [...] They had that mentality over in Italy, they had that mentality to... That he was the head of the house, he was the boss, and that was it! [...] That was his way of doing things, he probably didn’t think about it, he just... And everybody accepted it [my emphasis]. They probably thought that was the right thing to do, because they [their landlords] did it to them [the peasants], and they [the peasants] did it to them [their own subjects, meaning women and children]... But when [we] came out here it was completely different, and I just wouldn’t take that... I thought, ‘I better put my foot down here, because otherwise this is going to be... Wow!’ [...] Maybe because I was brought up in this country [...] I think about it sometime, but I think what it is... Cos like my grandma said to me once: ‘Amanda’, she said, ‘you’re the first woman in your family who’s strong’, because my grandmother she was... Her

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221 Ibid.
husband was terrible... My mother with my father... My father was a horror too [...] My auntie, her sister, her husband was even worse, and I think, when I... When I came along, I thought, ‘Well I’m not gonna do that sort of thing. I’m not gonna be told what to do...’ So something in my mind triggered that ‘no, I’m not gonna be put under, I’m gonna have to survive this’ [...] Because [...] Walking into a big family, having not much family before, walking into a big family... Everybody was really settled there, and I thought, ‘Well, in a way they’re gonna have to depend on me too because of the language’. And I thought, ‘Well, I’m not gonna be put under!’ If that’s the way they had the custom, well I didn’t have that custom [my emphasis]! [...] I’m not gonna be put under by a male! [...] I had the role more than they did... I found that I was the more... the... Like I had them all out because of the language, they had to rely on me too... They used to go down to hospital with them [her sisters-in-law, who were not as good in English as she was]... She [her sister-in-law] couldn’t speak to the doctors, so I used to be the interpreter.222

In Chapter Five, I will show how generation 1.5 Virginia, similar to what was done by both the 1970s Italian feminists and myself, questioned the patriarchal narratives by interrogating herself over the role of her mother in them.

As will be seen, in general, generation 1 did not even openly question the emotional implications of leaving. The analysis of emotions is a middle class privilege of these days. Having emotions is a privilege of those who can afford them. Their priority was instead to leave behind poverty and the memories of the war. In that scenario, the separation from loved ones appears to have looked more like an inevitable, though still (silently) excruciating, circumstance. I will discuss in Chapter Four how many generation 1 women migrants did nevertheless pay a huge and unreported emotional cost for this. However, my analysis, I wish to restate, is driven by my contemporary feminist necessity to examine their narrations in such a sense, and this does not necessarily correspond to their scopes. I can, for example, point out that following my questioning about how she experienced the process of departure for Australia, Giannina reported to have felt “like lost sheep”.223 Or I can restate that she admitted her very little agency in the process, let alone any space to claim the validity of her feelings. Or that she would, in her opinion just like everybody else, only do what she

222 Ibid.
223 Giannina, interview with the author, 2011, Brisbane, QLD.
was told to do. I can, as I will do in Chapter Three, show how Giannina’s storytelling does skim over her emotions, but she never enters such a field with the intention of actually claiming the right to them. Yet these are concerns that she did not seem to have had independently; they are hence probably the product of the feminist epistemology with which I interpreted her story. Giannina narrated feeling nostalgia for nearly 20 years in Australia—nostalgia is perhaps a more socially acceptable emotion to report than displacement, the articulation of which requires some important self-concessions, such as the sense of entitlement to have a place to start with. She did admit that she cried and could not stop, until she finally managed to return home for a three-month visit (two decades later!), which she specified had been one of the best periods of her life. However, we might never know the exact content of the nostalgia that she felt, and I am not sure that she was even interested in sharing it, in spite of the fact that it could have provided interesting information with respect to the issues discussed in this research. As will transpire from her story—or rather, from my understanding of her story!—Giannina was born in an era when, and in a place where, a woman was given no right to (claim to be) suffering. She would not even ask herself if she was happy about what was happening to her or not; that is something that I made her think about! Happiness is a contemporary middle class concern, not one that a poor female peasant from the same part of the world where I am from would have had in the middle of the 20th century.

And yet, irrespective of these differences, due to the fact that we arrived in Australia with the same national passport, my informants of both generations and I are almost inevitably framed (by the states) and frame ourselves as belonging to the same national ‘imagined community’. And there is ‘some’ truth in it: such circumstantial framing translates into the fact that we can at least partly comprehend each other’s experiences with (our de-nationalised understanding of, our epistemological projections on, and our essentialisation of) ‘Australian-ness’. And this is in spite of the fact that the Italy that I refer to—the social, political, and cultural spaces that I relate to—is often profoundly different from those that they told me about. If nothing else, because of our communal migrant experience, I can connect to the sense of ‘other-
ness’ that they not infrequently reported to feel both with respect to Italian-ness and Australian-ness.

What the 1950s women migrants to Australia and myself then share—and I think I can state that my interpretation on this matter reflects quite closely the storyteller’s perspective—is a habitus of multiple (non-)(national) belonging. We (can) all represent the Other in this study: our mother tongue is not English, and yet it is in English that I narrate through my choice of their words (the emancipatory and liberatory effects of) their (‘Italian’) migrant experience in (formerly white?) Australia. The fact that I have to translate into a language—and therefore into a habitus—that instead “is not mine” (or rather, ours, or that at least wasn’t ours originally, although it may have become such), contingently positions me on the same side as them in the power structure that sustains this research: linguistically, generation 1 informants especially and I inhabit the same place; we are framed by (Anglo-)Australia—the subject we compare ourselves against—as ‘NESB’ and we are therefore “more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around”.

In view of the above, it can thus be said that the migrants and I are insiders and outsiders to our cultures at the same time. If we take habitus as a measuring gauge, it all depends on the point of reference circumstantially considered: as I will highlight in the following chapters, some aspects of the narrations of the generation 1 informants can be said to generally distance them from the nevertheless contradictory Italy influenced by the effects of the 1970s feminist movement. I will show that the migrants of generation 1.5 seem to have had little direct experience of such an Italy, which is the ‘cultural dominion’ that I instead feel that I, in my own ways,

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225 NESB stands for ‘Non-English Speaking Background’, highlighting how English is the norm our diversity is implicitly compared against. Importantly, we could also be defined as CALD, ‘Culturally and Linguistically Diverse’. However, there is no space in this thesis for a fuller discussion of this point.
controversially (also) pertain to; and yet, they seem to share some facets of its (minority?) cultures. As already exemplified with respect to the case of Amanda, I will report through the analysis of their narrations that amongst these facets is the appropriation of the right to their feelings and/or their entitlement to question and/or to try to enter the dynamics of power to which they were subjected.

At the same time, the women migrants of both generations and myself (also) relate, to different extents, to the narratives that informed and are informed by the habitus of Australia. To put it in Bourdieu’s terms, it is our positions and position-taking strategies\(^{227}\) within the intrinsic instability of the impossibly fixable “network of objective relations between positions”\(^{228}\) that this research aims to analyse in view of examining the liberatory and/or emancipatory potential of migration.

**2.a.2) Self-Refexivity: Un-Occulting the Effaced Self**

Representation is imbued with power.\(^{229}\)

I showed above how in order to make comparisons, even using habitus, it is necessary to fix a point of reference. Such a point of reference can be a ‘field of power relations’ rather than a ‘culture’, but even such a field must to some extent be defined: in the case of this research, *I determined* that this field is the one on which the struggle is played between the patriarchal narratives, and the emancipatory and/or liberatory ones, nevertheless themselves captured from the perspective of the legacy of the 1970s Italian feminist movement. A part of the (other) participants in this research (in some ways, I am one too at this point) would not recognise themselves in such a scenario, although *I believe* they are or have been constitutive of it as well. As a matter of fact, my study is aimed at investigating how the participants related to such a scenario. In this sense, my feminist attempt to give voice to the 1950s Italian women


\(^{228}\) Ibid., p. 30.

\(^{229}\) Hesse-Biber and Leavy, *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, p. 171.
migrants to Australia invests them with my epistemology, thus paradoxically silencing them whilst trying to accomplish the mission of giving them space for expression. Inevitably, *I frame the informants’ lives into my own narrative*. This instance contradicts the very feminist approach that I am trying to implement. And yet, paradoxically, the only option that would have completely avoided this situation was silence: if I had not conducted this research, I would not have incurred the possibility of committing the same “epistemic violence”\(^{230}\) through which patriarchy had muted women by defining in an Hegelian approach female subjectivity according to a male understanding of it. In that case, however, not only would they have once more been left without a chance to express their experiences, but I would have muted myself too: ultimately, this is my research, and although I have no right to frame the informants’ subjectivities into my own needs, to be able to speak—which I think I have a right to—I must to some extent do so. This circumstance will, however, be discussed again in Chapter Seven. As mentioned in Chapter One and restated above, I believe that framing is unavoidable, and in this sense, it is fundamental to position the ethnographer’s self in the field, so that her inevitably dominant point of view is at least rendered manifest.

Self-reflexive ethnography highlights the position of the anthropologist in the network of “rapports de force”\(^{231}\) and hence progressively unearths the *perspective* from which the subjects are *framed*—in Butler’s sense—and invested with epistemological projections. It does not prevent the ethnographer from depicting a mere limited representation of herself with respect to the field: because of the (inevitable) *self-framing* side-effect (and consequent creation of shadow areas and ‘culturally informed light-less spots’) of the habitus, self-portraits are never fully comprehensive either; they are blinded by their own shadow, which they inevitably project on themselves, inescapably mute(d) about many aspects of what they attempt to describe. Bias can be “personal or culture specific”\(^{232}\) However, that is not the point: notwithstanding (or

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\(^{231}\) Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 30.

\(^{232}\) Cerroni-Long, ’Introduction’, p. 3.
perhaps exactly because of) the very fact that even self-portraits are “representations of representations”\(^{233}\)—in which ‘the other’, the subjects of research, serve as a mirror—and because they render one’s own (permanently becoming) habitus an object of the study, they also have much to say about the cultural issues at stake. They speak through their silence(d view points), the ‘sound’ of which can eventually be listened to, and re-translated for the (dumb-ed) ethnographer by the audience, the ‘other’ for which the original cultural translation was carried out. As beautifully put by Clifford:

> It has become clear that every version of an ‘other’, wherever found, is also a construction of a ‘self’, and the making of ethnographic texts... has always involved a process of ‘self fashioning’. Cultural poesis—and politics—is the constant reconstruction of self and others through specific exclusions, conventions, and discursive practices.\(^{234}\)

Ultimately, the only subject that one has full right to write about is oneself, and one’s relations to the world around her. The ethnographer can, for example, speak about the estrangement or affinity felt with respect to the material being investigated, or about the emotional reactions provoked when put in front of something that for some reason touches her cords. Self-reflexivity positively challenges the practice of othering by producing a move away from the impossibility not to frame the subjects of research into categories. In this way, however, the feelings, aspirations, intimacies, and subjugated knowledges\(^{235}\) of the women migrants are partly given (the ethnographer’s) voice, whilst at the same time they are silently taken away by it—by the very fact that the focus is not (completely) on them.

Hence, placing together the ethnographer, the actors involved in the ethnographic project, and the hierarchies of power in which they are immersed at the centre of cultural research makes ethnography a (never completed) reflection on the self\(^{236}\) rather than a meagre (and never fully accomplishable) attempt to portray (a never fully definable condition of) alterity. Ethnographic writing then becomes a reflection

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\(^{233}\) Rabinow, ‘Representations are Social Facts’, p. 250.


on the ethnographer’s position of power) through a reflection on the (appointing of
the) culture of the ‘other’ (as ‘other’); a process of ‘consciousness-raising’ that
progressively deconstructs—via the breaches inherent to the (failures implied in the)
reiteration of the norm\textsuperscript{237}—the (un)certainties that frame identities. A practice aimed
at increasing “[the discipline’s] self-understanding”,\textsuperscript{238} at un-occulting the “occult
document”:\textsuperscript{239} the (ethnographer’s) effaced self.\textsuperscript{240}

\textbf{2.6) Ethical Concerns Versus Ethics Approval}

The dynamics of involvement/detachment are extremely complex and are influenced by factors
that the ethnographer can only partly control.\textsuperscript{241}

I mentioned in the previous sections my concerns regarding the (unspoken)
narratives that influenced the ethnographic environment, and therefore, the findings
of this research. The power of such narratives lies in the unspoken aspects of the
relation that is constructed between the ethnographer and the informant. The tacit
expectations that inevitably result from one’s emotional investment in it to greater or
lesser extents address the narration, selectively silencing certain parts. Assuming that
it is possible to create an absolutely ‘neutral’ environment would mean negating the
existence of the very inter-relational dynamics of power in which we are immersed
that feminist—though I should not really have to add the adjective—ethnography
aims to shed light on. The framing effect of the difference of privilege \textit{embedded} in the
relation affects the (im)possibility of giving voice to the subjects of research. If not
brought to the surface, it replicates the conditions of ‘tacitly accepted’ imbalances
entailed in the patriarchal structure of power.

\textsuperscript{237} Butler, \textit{Frames of War}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{238} Pratt, ‘Fieldwork in Common Places’, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{239} Tyler, ‘Post-Modern Ethnography’, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{240} Pratt, ‘Fieldwork in Common Places’, p. 33.
In this sense, at a certain point in the fieldwork, I had to ask myself what had the informants understood about my aims (had I been clear enough about them to begin with?), and how had their expectations with respect to my narration of their life stories affected their narrative of themselves. To what extent, for example, did they hide or disclose specific aspects of their lives with the unspoken aim of trying to fit my grid? To what extent did they frame themselves into it? And (why), I later considered, did I moreover reciprocate such an ‘act of submission’ by failing to disclose elements of my own beliefs?

Initially, as advised by Hesse-Biber and Leavy, I tried to “create clear boundaries regarding the relationship”\(^\text{242}\) that the storytellers and I were in: I explained the aims of my research—and such disclosure in itself is likely to have affected the outcome!—but I did not tell much of myself to the (other) participants in my study and attempted to keep a distance.\(^\text{243}\) This, however, soon proved to be an impossible position to maintain. Its artificiality was constantly destabilised by both the material conditions of the ethnographic field and the content that was being discussed. My informants were disclosing very intimate details about themselves and they started to want to know more about me. I couldn’t not say anything.

Both Sangster\(^\text{244}\) and Geiger\(^\text{245}\) warned about the quality of the relationships produced by fieldwork. “After all”, significantly wrote Sangster, “we are using this material for the purpose of writing books which are often directed, at least in part, to academic career ends. I gained access to women’s memories not as a friend, but as a professional historian”.\(^\text{246}\) And yet, for that very purpose, a relationship of (im)possible reciprocity


\(^\text{244}\) Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 93.

\(^\text{245}\) Geiger, ‘What’s So Feminist about Doing Women’s Oral History?’, p. 176.

\(^\text{246}\) Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 93.
had to inevitably be installed between my informants and myself. Hence, I relinquished the moreover theoretically unstable idea of not becoming involved, and with some participants, I have established valuable friendships.

After all, we were all migrants at the ‘antipodes’ and related to each other in many ways that escaped the immediate scope of the research. In different ways, we represented for each other our links to the (fantasy of the) homeland. Of course, unlike me, they were established in Australia, but, as many of them emphasised, one never stops being a migrant; as noted by Anna, a piece of the self always remains ‘there’. ‘There’, in this case, was overseas, 16,000 kilometres and a minimum of a day and a half of tiring and costly intercontinental travel away. No matter how settled one may be, in these conditions one is generally happy to be with someone who can circumstantially reunite her with what at times can feel like a ‘missing’ part of herself. This created a lot of emotional closeness. Which, to be honest, felt good. I am hence not ashamed to say that I have actually grown very fond of some of my informants.247

I argue that (feminist) ethnography should not reject such a feeling. Indeed, since it refers to the relation amongst the parts, it articulates the very self-reflexive aspects of ethnography. Emotional closeness is the site of misunderstandings (just as much as the fictions involved in attempts to keep distances) to the extent that the underlying narrative that informs the interface between the parts remains covert. Yet, as already stated above, (feminist) ethnography is about the tension towards the nonetheless never completely achievable exposure of the power relationships that are at play ‘behind the stage’. Feelings exist, and rather than denying them, it is advisable to try not to let them remain unspoken. Which, nevertheless, is not always an easy condition to achieve. Many factors, not always immediately evident, intervene in the process.

For the very purpose of maintaining the relationships that the informants and I were in the process of developing, what I said to them about me was carefully selected in

accordance to what I paradoxically thought was ‘our’ habitus. Truly, I did not, for example, disclose to most of the women migrants—and especially to the older generation—that I am a lesbian. When we came to the stage at which they started to ask about me—was I married, where was my family, did I have any children, what did I think about this, that, and the other—in spite of having openly been a lesbian for nearly two decades, I stuck to the comfort of narrating about the various, predominantly insignificant boyfriends that I had had here and there; I did not say that I had split up with my long-term Anglo-Friulan girlfriend in Italy before my departure, that I was then left by my Chilean girlfriend in Sydney—which had left me very heartbroken—and that I liked other women, but was quite upset by the fact that I was unable to win their affection.

This decision not to disclose my sexuality was because I was scared of losing them, both as friends and as participants in my study. The need to do what Italians call ‘bella figura’—to give a good impression, which also often corresponds to adhering to the (patriarchal) norm—was installed in me during my upbringing, superseding in this case the need to restate who I am. In such a way, however, in an act that resembled what A. Jaffe described in her article as the contradictory position that she inhabited during her compulsory term in the army, I condoned the power of the social narrative that I unilaterally ascribed to the 1950s Italian women migrants over me, and submitted myself to it: accepting to undergo the same silencing processes that I had instead thus far so firmly avoided, I ended up adopting what I thought were the views of the majority and framed myself into them. Where had ethnography taken me?

As I will demonstrate in Chapter Six, apart from neglecting myself and failing to respect who I am, by remaining in the closet I avoided the possibility of observing (and living!) their reactions with respect to my outing. Indeed, my fears were not unfounded: homosexuality was a huge taboo in the world that they left behind when

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249 Jaffe, ‘The Limits of Detachment’. 
they migrated, and in many ways, it continues to be nowadays. Perhaps as a researcher, I should not have felt so, admitting that researchers can be in complete control of their feelings, which I do not consider to be the case, but I believed that they would have “fully disapproved”\textsuperscript{250} of my choice, and this acted at a very profound level inside of me. Ultimately, I was the second girl to dare to openly be a lesbian in Aiello in the mid-1990s; the first was a girl who was only a year younger than me. And I was beaten and kicked out of home for it! Would I have still been considered the beloved Friulan ‘grandchild’ that they had adopted? Could I still be part of their families? At the time, I was torn between Italy and Australia, and very much needed to feel accepted. Like many gay persons, including second generation Italo-Australians,\textsuperscript{251} I feared the judgement of those who were important to me: (the disclosure of) my homosexuality had indeed set me apart from my family of origin. Furthermore, the participants were still the subjects of my research... What would have happened if at that stage they had refused me en block and did not want to continue to be part of the project? Whom would I have written about? Apart from the fact that I would have been very displeased about it, I had a very busy working life and felt that I could not afford any delays! The idea that I could still have written about their very rejection in terms of the emancipatory/liberatory function of migration had not come to my mind. Indeed, the emotions attached to this issue, which being related to the identity possibilities available to Italian women is in itself informative of this investigation, were so strong that they blinded me in respect to the long-term effects of my (ir)rational choice.

I should add that the very ethics approval process had made me extremely wary of my relationship with my informants: the ‘safety protocol’ of the Ethics Committee

\textsuperscript{250} Pallotta-Chiarolli, ‘From Coercion to Choice’, p. 58.

contained indications even about the way I should dress ('appropriately'), and advised about the times when interviewing should not have been carried out (before dawn and after sunset). At that time I was simply not in a position to overcome my fears and inhibitions. Yet ultimately, what stopped me from disclosing to my informants such an important part of my life was shame, and shame is a culturally informed feeling: my 'patriarchy-abider' status prevented me from acquiring a deeper insight into my field of investigation. I hid from them the parts of my sentimental life that would have given rise to conflicts that I did not yet have the strength to deal with at the time. So I decided to comply with their expectations about me, thus creating an environment in which they were not forced to eventually disclose—had it been the case—their own homophobia. And, as said, homophobia, a culturally informed sentiment, would have been relevant to this research in the sense that it pertains to habitus.

Therefore, because of the legacy of the habitus that both the migrants and myself had to various degrees originally informed and been informed by, at a certain point I constructed a fiction of mutual expectations that, as a matter of fact, prevented them from saying what they (instead?) thought in their own words. I had taken away the voice that I was trying to give to them by taking mine away from myself. Apart from the theoretical and methodological implications of all of this, I also wondered whether we were actually friends. Isn’t friendship a matter of reciprocal trust and honesty? Indeed, some of my informants’ children confirmed that their mothers had also carried out a selective disclosure of themselves.

The matter of trust was brought to light in a very strong manner by the legalistic procedures inherent in acquiring the participant’s consent to use the ‘data’ (which to them translates into something as personal as their feelings and life experiences). After having already become intimate with them, which as mentioned was an inevitable precondition to conduct the type of ethnographic study that I wanted to carry out, I was required by the Ethics Committee to submit to them an aseptic approval form to be signed, dated, and completed according to one’s desires with respect to the way in which they wanted me to treat the material provided. Such a
process, by implicitly and inevitably posing questions about the quality of our relationships, evidenced the awkward situation in which the (other) participants in my study and I had found ourselves. The curtain finally came down and we were left embarrassingly naked in front of one another. On what terms were we? Where had ethnography taken us?

I had to overcome many very controversial feelings in order to be able to coldly present to them the approval form that I was required to submit—and hopefully retrieve completed, signed, and dated. Although it was requested by the Ethics Committee’s conditions—from the very beginning, I had explained to them orally and in writing that they could have withdrawn from the project at any time before submission—it was obvious that I preferred at that point that they stayed in the study. And I knew that they were attached to me as much as I was attached to them, and that elderly Italian women from a Catholic background would have been unlikely to take advantage of their right to withdraw from the research, knowing that by doing so, they would disadvantage a person with whom they had exchanged so much. Even if they had rejected me because of my homosexuality, withdrawing would have been a difficult thing for them to do, so I assumed. In fact, my concern in that sense was also to do with the fact that I would have potentially put them in a very difficult spot, ‘forcing’ them to stay in the study in spite of the fact that perhaps they would have preferred not to have anything to do with me. It would have been a false situation that I did not want to be in. At the time, it looked like too much to deal with it. So I had chosen an easier false situation, meaning the sadly, more socially acceptable one of not coming out.

Luckily, the informants gathered that the approval form was something that I could not avoid submitting to them. In fact, it was good that I had to do so, for the very reason that the ethics procedure obliged me to initiate an ethical process of disentangling the intricacies entailed in the relationship that we were in. It was in many ways a very unsettling moment for both them and myself, as it finally pointed to the ‘elephant in the room’: it reminded us that regardless of our feelings, I was the one
who collected, wrote, and would make use of the stories that they so wholeheartedly
donated to me. The approval forms, however, implicitly signified that I was then in
charge of their stories and that they were going to speak publicly through the words I
wrote. In a way, the ethics approval was thus an empowering and emancipating
experience for all concerned: it spelled out to the women migrants that they had rights
over their narrative and forced me to highlight the tacit positions of power that we
were in with respect to each other.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I exposed and critiqued the complications inherent to the debate about
the insider/outsider status of the anthropologist by situating myself in the field, and
explained how such a debate pertains to the purpose of giving voice to the 1950s
Italian women migrants to Australia. In doing so, I demonstrated the long-term effects
of 1970s ‘autocoscienza’ and the contradictory ways in which the forces set in motion
in the 1970s by Italian feminism acted on Italian society.

I showed how the voices of the woman migrants can be taken away by the very self-
reflexive attempts to give it to ‘them’, even when such attempts necessarily shift the
focus from ‘them’, to the relationship between ‘them’ and the ethnographer, thus
reducing the epistemic violence inherent in othering: the ethnographic relationship
inescapably implies disequilibriums of power between the subjects of research and
the person who conducts it, which can only partially be restored through the feminist
analysis of the relationship itself.

Finally, I exemplified how habitus can affect the ethical process and how the
‘institutional’ ethics procedure can generate conditions that lead to potentially
empowering situations for both parts.
In the next chapter, I intertwine the words of the storytellers with those of historians to draw a picture of the social, economic, and legal conditions that structured and were structured by the habitus that the participants in this study had brought with them from overseas. This assists in analysing in later chapters the changes produced by migration.
CHAPTER THREE

“COSI’ ERA IL DESTINO”.

HABITUS IN PRE-FEMINISM ITALY

One must have the tradition in oneself,
to hate it properly.\textsuperscript{252}

In the previous chapters, I outlined the methodology applied and the theoretical complications entailed in trying to give voice to the subjects of ethnographic research. I begin this chapter by narrating the pre-departure adventures of generation 1 Giannina, the oldest of the participants in this research. As her storytelling was not tape-recorded, I wrote her story down in the third person according to the handwritten notes taken during the sessions. Giannina’s story provides a valuable example of how peasant and working-class women lived in Italy during the first part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and the way in which they would eventually narrate themselves. Her account then leads to an examination of the factors that informed and were informed by what Gelsomina at the beginning of this thesis called the ‘mentality’ according to which life was negotiated in the Italy that the women who migrated to Australia had physically left behind... But intellectually and emotionally often brought with them. It is on the effects of the legacy of such mentality that Italian feminists acted during the late 1960s and 1970s. The analysis carried out in this chapter will then assist in assessing in later chapters the extent and quality of the distance that migration allowed the subjects of this study to take from the ‘Italian’ patriarchal habitus.

3.a) “Who Would Dare to Rebel?” Giannina’s (Lack of) Agency

“Un poco di movimento mi fa bene” (“A bit of exercise is good for me”)
explained Giannina soon after we met in her house in a bushy area in suburban Brisbane. We
were meant to sit at the kitchen table for coffee and cakes, together with her niece-in-law Anna, who had just introduced us to each other, but the then 94-year-old woman
refused to stay seated: she kept standing up to prepare things (‘appropriately’) for our
introductory morning banquet. Our conversation would have proceeded more
smoothly with homemade cakes in the bellies and the pungent taste of short blacks
entangled around our tongues. She must have been a very proactive woman when she
was young(er), I thought: the elasticity of the swift, although now syncopated
movements with which she stood up and carried out her housewifery chores let
transpire hints of the energy on which she must have been able to rely during her
youth to speedily perform her daily tasks. She has always liked walking, she pointed
out shortly after. Now she cannot see very well, though, and she is no longer in the
condition of doing much exercise. But she does not like being inside. She is an
outdoors person.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Giannina was born in Codromaz, a small town in the
north of Italy. Or, more specifically, in the mountain area at the extreme north-east of
the country named Benečija (or Natisone Valleys), where the local language was and
still is Beneciano, a Slav dialect. As a child she attended school for three years, just
enough to learn to read and write. She still likes reading. Indeed, I considered that her
narration was clear and well-articulated, like that of someone who had accessed a
greater amount of formal education.

Her father was a ‘stradino’ (a street cleaner), not a peasant like the majority of the
people in her village. They owned no land to cultivate. Hence, when she was little, she
was spared from having to perform all the farming chores—such as the spreading of

253 Giannina, interview with the author, 2011, Brisbane, QLD.
manure—that used to come with the peasant condition irrespective of age. During the first part of her childhood, she did not even have to do any stitching or hand washing, as expected from girls in those times. Instead she played a lot, particularly enjoying skipping rope and jumping in manure, which she described as a common activity for all kids in those places. Getting dirty with cow excrements was apparently not a problem. She nevertheless still had to peel chestnuts in the winter evenings, like the other children, whilst being narrated stories. The most popular ones were those about the mythical figure of ‘vedenzi’—the children who were said to have died without being baptised, who, if met at road crossings, would peel the skin off the living children’s flesh; others narrated of the dead people who came back to Earth. Otherwise, she would hear adults recounting the disputes over the borders of the fields, which were very common.

Things changed after her mother passed away at the age of 35 from tuberculosis, following a long period of illness. Giannina was 12 at the time. Her youngest sister, 4-year-old Rosa, went to live with an aunt, as people would look after each other in those circumstances. Giannina was all of a sudden put in charge of the house, and at the age of 15 was sent to Naples (Campania, Italy) by her father to work as a house servant. She had never worked outside the house before and cried at the station when she left. She felt that she knew nothing of the world and was very scared. When I probed her about it, she specified that no one had asked her whether she wanted to go away or not: if given an order, it was her ‘duty’ to comply with it. A duty that she would not even think of questioning: in those days, people, she explained to me, and youth and women especially, would simply do as they were told (by those on whom they were dependent). “Chi aveva il coraggio di ribellarsi?” (“Who would dare to rebel?”), she said. For the vast majority of individuals, not obeying orders was simply not an option, and it seemed to me that she would not even have taken into consideration the possibility of not complying with the norm. Moreover, jobs in the

254 Ibid.
cities were seen as great opportunities for earning wages to be sent home. They were found through personal contacts and “passaparola” (“word of mouth”).

She travelled to Rome (Lazio, Italy) accompanied by a couple whom she had met at the train station in Udine (Friuli, Italy). In Rome, a female figure that she described as a “special lady” helped her catch the connection to Naples. She then continued the journey to southern Italy alone, with just a few coins in her pocket, given to her by her grandfather. She did not have anything with her to drink or to eat, and did not find it “appropriate” to buy something with the change that she was carrying, presumably because she was not used to interacting with strangers, especially outside of her town. She felt like she did not know what was going on and what was going to happen next: she only knew that she was being relocated and went with the flow.

She stayed away from home for five years until the age of 20, without ever visiting her family during that time. Letters were the sole means of communication, as the first public phone was only installed in her village in the 1950s. Although in Naples Giannina was not allowed to attend events by herself—the morning shopping was the only activity that she could conduct independently—the apparently nice and welcoming lady who had employed her mostly for company had taught her about cinema, housework, and opera, which were total novelties to her. Nevertheless, she felt very alone there, and yet had no alternative but to accept her condition. People, she repeatedly stressed during her narration in response to my perplexities, were used to taking what life threw at them, to put up with situations, no matter how uncomfortable. The question “were you happy?”, which I had asked her, “makes no sense” (“non ha senso”), she responded. It was not applicable to that period of her life because she would not have asked it.

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255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid.
258 Ibid.
259 Ibid.
When she finally went back to her village in 1936, she was only supposed to be there on holiday for a month before returning to her work in the city. But she enjoyed herself so much—dancing, singing, and discovering *new things* about life in her *old town*—that she ended up staying. Giannina did not specify how she negotiated the decision with her family members, but remarked that she felt like she had not learnt anything about life yet and that during her absence, she had missed out on great things.

When working in Naples, it had been her duty to save a part of her earnings to buy herself a dowry (for a rich one, a minimum of twelve bed sheets were necessary) and to send the rest to her family. According to her account, all women did this. Her father had meanwhile purchased a “farma”\(^{260}\) in Ucagna (Ukanje, Slovenia, at the time part of the Kingdom of Italy), just across the Judrio River and half an hour’s walk away from their hometown, Codromaz (Friuli, Italy). So she settled there, although Codromaz is the place that has always remained in her heart. Things in Ukanje, where she said to have felt “lost”,\(^{261}\) rapidly changed for her, as in addition to carrying out the household chores, she was expected to help in the fields, which were taking a while to become productive.

At that time, she remembered, she only owned one pair of shoes and desperately needed new ones. But when she looked for her money, she disappointedly learned that the family had been living on her savings and that all of the money that she had asked be put in the bank for her future had actually been already used. She complained to her father about this, until he finally gave her part of the sum that she needed. At first, however, she hesitated taking it: she was unsure whether it was the right thing to do. “Non so se si può capire”, she explained, “... Se non c’era, non c’era!” (literally: “I don’t know if this can be understood... If there wasn’t [any cash and goods available], there wasn’t!\(^{262}\)”) said Giannina to explain how people coped with misery.

\(^{260}\) Ibid.

\(^{261}\) Ibid.

\(^{262}\) Ibid.
in those days. When food ran out, the quality of her cuisine would simply “deplete”, she euphemistically stated. Finally, she decided to accept the money, but she had to borrow part of the amount necessary to cover the cost of the shoes from a friend of hers. She bought the shoes in Cividale (Friuli, Italy), some 20 kilometres away, where she went with her friend by bicycle.

Giannina met her future husband (the uncle of her niece-in-law) at the end of the 1930s. Walter—so he was called—had spent his youth with a childless family that had adopted the ‘excess’ offspring of another nucleus, as was customary. He only had five years of schooling, but he was very well educated. The first time that Giannina saw him he was carrying a manure basket on his back, which was a very common activity amongst farmers in the Natisone Valleys. Then one day they went dancing, and she asked him to walk her home. He agreed, but asked for a kiss in return. They soon adapted to each other and ‘went on’: “così era il destino” (“such was destiny”). They got married in Marijino Celje (nowadays in Slovenia) in 1941. The couple settled in Ukanje (Slovenia), which at the time comprised six families and, as said, was part of the Italian Kingdom. “Now, there are four people”, explained Giannina [a few more according to the census]. Her family of origin only used to own one cow, one veal, one pig, a few chicken, and two sheep, but after marriage she had even less.

Walter was a bricklayer, but used to work in an asbestos factory in Salona (Slovenia), a couple of hours’ walk away. He would hike there in any kind of weather, sleep in a stable, and come home every two days. According to Giannina, chestnut leaves seemed to provide very comfortable bedding. Hay was apparently comfortable, as well. Unfortunately, they did not have blankets, and he could not bring a change of clothes with him because the other workers would steal them. “This was normal”, clarified Giannina, who remembered those as good and happy times. They would laugh for nothing, and apparently, it was healthy laughter.

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263 Ibid.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid.
266 Ibid.
Their first daughter Marisa was born in 1941, and in 1943 her husband was sent to Germany by the government to work in a factory. He came back in 1945. Meanwhile Lorena, their second daughter, was born but died shortly after in the hospital of Cividale (Friuli, Italy), from where Giannina and her sister had to carry the little body home in freezing conditions, walking across the mountains with “kospe” (wooden clogs with nailed soles) on their feet. In 1946, she gave birth to Elisabetta, and in 1947 to second Lorena.

3.6) The Formation and Maintenance of the ‘Italian’ Habitus

I found Giannina’s narration of her pre-departure existence of relevance with respect to the mentality according to which Italian peasant and working-class women lived during the first part of the 20th century, and the habitus that informed their awareness of their rights and freedom. Such habitus was then challenged by the urban, middle-class feminists in the late 1960s and 1970s. In this sense, my analysis of Giannina’s story cannot but first of all point out that from my point of view, her story is filled with a number of omissions, one of which relates to the lack of reference to the management of her emotions. In her narration, Giannina hardly expressed anything about how she felt. As shown above, in certain circumstances she had not even asked this about herself. For instance, she reported the deaths of her mother and her second daughter as mere facts that seemed to have had no effect on her. And when she did spontaneously acknowledge fear and sadness, she did not enter into the details of her sentiments, rather expressing the idea that she did not feel entitled to them. On the other hand, how she felt seemed to have made no real difference: she still had to do what she was told. Love and joyfulness, in particular, were rarely mentioned, and mostly with respect to her return from Naples (Campania, Italy) and her relationship with her late husband.

267 Ibid.
Although she was exposed to it, Giannina expressively indicated no class difference between herself and someone who was enormously more privileged than her, such as the lady who had employed her in Naples. Moreover, she made no explicit reference to politics. And yet, Giannina was born on the very mountains where WWI was being waged by the Italian troops against Austria and Germany, with the Battle of Caporetto being fought in 1917 all around Giannina’s hometown; it is thus difficult to believe that her family had no memory of such a catastrophic event. Also, whilst she was young, Italy had witnessed the rise of Fascism and the establishment of Mussolini as Prime Minister. Not to mention that in 1940 Italy entered WWII and that the Fascist regime was institutionally racist against Slav-language speaking populations living in ‘Italian’ territories. Moreover, as mentioned in the Introduction, the entire area that runs along the current Italo-Slovene border was contended between the Allied troops and Tito’s army right after the war. These events are central to her migration to Australia, as due to them, Giannina and her family members were considered refugees and, as a matter of fact, they entered institutionally run displaced people programmes. Giannina, however, did not linger on the details of the political situation, the consequences of which she decided to run away from.

The story of her escape from Yugoslavia reads as follows:

After the war, Ukanje remained on the Yugoslav side [of what was to become the Iron Curtain]. In spite of the fact that neither Giannina nor her husband were happy to stay there, that they had had the possibility to leave freely, and that he had insisted a lot to convince her to do so, she initially didn’t want to move to Italy, just across the valley, because she was pregnant with their third child and already had two other kids. Life soon became difficult for them, though, as according to her account in Yugoslavia, there was a lot of political espionage; they felt they couldn’t speak freely, and they also became very poor: ‘There was nothing’, she remembered. ‘Only pictures of Tito’,

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268 Purini, Metamorfosi etniche.
269 Giannina, interview with the author, 2011, Brisbane, QLD.
So, after the free relocation period had terminated\textsuperscript{270} they finally decided to leave. But they knew that it wouldn’t be an easy escape: they had to cross the border without being seen, during the change of the guard. Italian customs were complacent with fugitives, whilst the Yugoslavs would shoot at them if spotted. It was the late afternoon of a spring day when the entire family crossed the frontier. Giannina and her husband each carried one child, and led the cow (‘Seuka’)\textsuperscript{271} with a rope. He had managed to smuggle most of the ‘nearly nothing’ that they owned across the border, already, one piece at a time, over several days. One of their daughters fell in the water during the river crossing, but at least the cow didn’t moo, which was one of their main concerns. They needed to be very silent: had the guards heard noises, the family would have been in big trouble. Unfortunately, the pig had to be left behind ‘perché zigava’ (‘because it would grunt’);\textsuperscript{272} as a matter of fact, once in Codromaz (in Italian territory, across the valley), they heard it squealing. They then knew that the town of Ukanje had discovered that they had gone.

Finally, it should be noted from a contemporary perspective that young Giannina was exploited as an under-age worker, allocated no agency on the part of her father, and fundamentally robbed of all her savings. In Angela Davis’s words, throughout her youth she seems to have “exercised no control whatsoever over the external circumstances”.\textsuperscript{273} Giannina, however, did not describe the situation in this way: she instead explained that she was an individual who would unconditionally accept what to her looked like an incontestable ‘destiny’. She would simply do what she was told with little or no elaboration of the motives, as it was inconceivable for her to behave otherwise. For example, she raised no objections about being forced to go to a faraway city to work uninterrupted for five years as a servant for a stranger when she was a teenager. And later, although she did complain, she ultimately accepted that her father had meanwhile used all of her savings without asking her permission.

\textsuperscript{270} For a period of time right after WWII, the Yugoslav government allowed Italian speakers who were resident in its territory to move to Italy, had they wished to do so.
\textsuperscript{271} Giannina, interview with the author, 2011, Brisbane, QLD.
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid.
How is it possible, I then asked myself, that Giannina and I, who were born and brought up in the same part of the world at a distance of only 58 years, a very short period of time in historical terms, now have such a different perspective over her life-story and her perception of herself? Why did she leave out of her narration the facts mentioned above? Or rather, why do I think (it is important to notice that) she left out the facts mentioned above? Especially, what used to impede her from acknowledging her own power? Why would she let others decide for her? According to which habitus, fundamentally, did she construct her narrative of herself? And how is her narrative of herself informative of the habitus according to which she lived?

The answers to be given would be very complex, and in particular, those relative to the management of emotions should include a “psychoanalytically informed” (history of the) of the attachments according to which Italian women were alienated from and eventually reconnected to their rights. As suggested by Svašek, an examination of the way in which the memory of traumatic events is recollected would also be necessary. Such tasks do not unfortunately find space in this thesis. However, for the purpose of trying to respond to at least one part of the questions, in the following paragraphs, I use both my informants’ and other authors’ words to provide an overview of the conditions that 1970s feminists indicated to have contributed to maintaining the dispositions that sustained the understanding of womanhood in Italy until the migrants’ departures. The factors that seem to have had a great influence on the patriarchal narratives that the feminists then tried to overcome were the following: poverty, poor education, lack of financial opportunities, lack of support, lack of independent access to public information, domestic violence, sexual repression promoted by the Catholic doctrine, gendered imbalanced legislation, and parochialism.

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Women studies scholar Luisa Muraro described, for example, the 1970s feminists’ perspective on the matter in the following autobiographical words:

We are those [women] who've left the village to go to the city; those who fought with their violent fathers and brothers, sometimes defended, sometimes not defended by mothers who did not understand us; we stopped going to the church on Sundays to listen to sex-phobic and misogynist homilies; we refused to serve the males of the house; we made ‘free love’, [...] We imparted sexual education to sons, daughters and husbands, [...] We divorced and we explained why to the children.276

What I then aim to highlight in the following sections is the type of access to social, economic, and cultural capital available to the predominantly peasant and working-class women migrants before their departure. My reference to traditional historiography is not always reflected by the content of the narrations of my generation 1 informants, and finds space in only some of the narrations of the women of the generation 1.5. I nonetheless believe that it is necessary to make sense of their life conditions and assess how these conditions eventually changed overseas.

3.6.1) “Men Kept Women a Bit Too Much Like Beasts”

Anna was born in 1935 and grew up in a tiny village in the Slav dialect-speaking Natisone Valleys (Friuli, Italy). She attended school for five years during WWII. As she was a good student, she would have liked to continue her education to become a teacher, but her father, who was in charge of making such decisions for her, was discouraged by the local (male) tutor. Parents, she reported, were owed total respect. Whatever they said was law. Children addressed them with the ‘polite form’ used for


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higher-ranking strangers, conjugating the personal pronoun for the second person plural (‘voi’) when talking directly to either one of them. The father was especially the absolute ruler in the household, although the finances were administered by his mother.

Nobody would dare change anything, explained Anna when I questioned her about it: people would simply accept their condition. They had aspirations, but they only knew the local reality, she specified. In her town, there was no telephone, and the newspaper came only once a week from Cividale (Friuli, Italy), for those who were able to read it. People walked to places, and measured distances in hours of hiking time. Women had particularly harsh existences, she said upon being probed, and specified that they would be given the hardest and nastiest jobs.

She recounted what follows about the daily routine of women in her village:

There was no running water in the house (it came in the 1950s), so women had to go and get it at the well, balancing the buckets on the ‘povierak’, a wooden stick carried between the neck and the shoulders. As girls also had to largely contribute to domestic chores, they would fill the ‘gerla’ [‘shoulder basket’] with manure, carry it on their backs, and empty it in the fields. Women worked on a continuous cycle, seven days out of seven. They were full of responsibilities, and they had to show they were strong: water supplies were their task as well as work in the fields and managing the children, the husband, the elderly, and the house; and the health of the animals was also a burden of theirs. And cows, treated like queens, required a lot of work. They had to be nourished, cleaned, and taken to the well twice a day... Every day, as cows eat and drink also on Sundays, and in all weather conditions. Therefore, whilst the husbands had some free time at least on Sundays, which they would spend at the bar or with friends, for women there was no respite. During the festivities, after mass they would cook lunch, then they would do crochet or repair clothing, then they had to say the rosary, and then there were again the cows, the hens, and the rabbits.

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277 Anna, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
278 Ibid.
Nadia, too, spoke of life in the Friulan mountains as very tough, something one had to be trained to do since birth to be able to handle it. Her husband’s family, a family of woodcutters, was initially not particularly keen on having her marry one of their sons: they needed knowledgeable arms to work the fields and strong backs to carry the huge stacks of hay up and down the mountains, neither of which she had. Having been raised in the shadow of a wealthy noble family and having left her birthplace in Romania during adolescence to study in a prestigious girls college in Bucharest (Romania), she was not used to the hard tasks that women had to perform in Carnia, where she had to return at the age of 18 because of the disastrous aftermath of WWII.

In *La Carnia di Antonelli*, an ethnographic photographic publication about life in the Friulan mountains during the first half of the 20th century, women’s condition is given an account with the following direct witnessing:

> Around three, four in the morning, we used to leave for the mountains in order to get there with the light... We went there to mow, and after mowing and spreading the lawn, piled it up all day, so when night approached [we would have had] a good stack of hay and ran home [...] We would do even three journeys in a day, up and down. They’d give you 25 cents per journey.  

The narrator was someone called Emma, and she was interviewed in the middle of the 1970s. Her storytelling occurred in what Chapter One reported to have been called “italiano popolare” (“popular Italian”), the hybridised structure that my translation tries to be faithful to and reproduce in English. So she continued:

> Men kept women a bit too much like beasts. They didn’t have much consideration [for women], they treated them like donkeys. The woman had to depend on the man, the man commanded the woman, and then she had to transmit the orders to the children... It

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280 Ibid., p. 24. My translation of: “Verso le tre, le quattro del mattino si partiva per la montagna, per arrivare sul prato quando faceva giorno. (...) Si andava a segare e dopo segato, sparsa l’erba falcata, fatto covoni tutto il giorno, quando veniva sera un bel fascio di fieno e via a casa di corsa. [...] Si facevano anche tre viaggi in un giorno, su e giù. ‘Ti davano venticinque centesimi il viaggio’.”

281 Lepschy, ‘How Popular is Italian?’, p. 68.
wasn’t like nowadays, when newly married couples get their own apartment and go and live on their own. There were families where five or six daughters-in-law would live together. They were all full of children, they would eat what they could, and would cope with a poor cup of soup [...] They were hungry, poh! Poor women who were reduced that they couldn’t even drag their legs after themselves!²⁸²

Similar situations are described in Donna Gabaccia’s Italy’s Many Diasporas.²⁸³ And regardless of the fact that women in the countryside would do “even the work of men”,²⁸⁴ carrying up to 50 kilograms on their backs, Anna mentioned in her interview that during meals they would normally be allocated a smaller portion of food than that given to males: men supposedly needed to be nourished more than women—who also bore children—because they were considered to be the breadwinners. This, I believed, must have contributed to making women feel that they were worth less than males. Anna also added that a good wife’s duty was to be able to obtain from every meal, no matter how miserable, the ‘beginning’ of next; this meant that she often ended up taking food off her own already meagre portion to give it to others for a later meal. As it will be further discussed in Chapter Five, Generation 1.5 Virginia also narrated of nearly starving to death by her grandmother when she was a little girl in Friuli, which she believes to have been due to the fact that she was a female.

As indicated by Gelsomina’s words reported at the beginning of this thesis and remarked by Giannina, peasant and working-class women had no financial freedom. Some in the first half of the 20th century in the north of Italy were employed in factories, but, described Holmes, they worked in terrible conditions.²⁸⁵ Gabaccia noted

²⁸³ Gabaccia, Italy’s Many Diasporas, pp. 88-89.
²⁸⁴ Various editors, La Carnia di Antonelli, p. 33. My translation of: “le donne facevano anche il lavoro degli uomini”.
that others, especially in the south, raised “small household animals to eat and sell, and they opened tiny shops, trying to earn a few extra cents, as penny capitalists”. However, women could not dispose of their earnings, which instead had to be added to the family income or saved for the dowry. The family income was fundamentally owned by the patriarch, although it was often the matriarch who administered it on his behalf. The impossibility of managing their own wages signified that women were under the complete control of the family. Marriages were generally based on economic reason and often arranged. Ricker noted that “women were seen almost as property belonging to their fathers and husbands”.

For the majority of southern women, the first chance to earn a fixed salary for themselves without going abroad only came with the so-called ‘miracolo economico’ (‘economic miracle’) beginning in 1958, which boosted industrial production and prompted internal migration from the south to the north of Italy. Gabaccia indicated that the migrants could not foresee it. Ginsborg nevertheless affirmed that even then the work conditions for women continued to be very poor.

It must be noted that Italy in the 1950s and 1960s was an extremely multifaceted country that fostered enormous regional and class differences. This meant that the situation was slightly better for women in formerly Hapsburg Trieste. Trieste, as already stated, had in the past only episodically intertwined its local identity with the cultures of the Republic that was formed after WWII, with the city joining it nearly a decade later. Generation 1.5 Gabriella, who left the then former ‘Free Territory of Trieste’ with her family in 1957, spoke of her urban working-class mother as a “free and emancipated woman”, who had been educated to be a secretary and was used to conducting a glamorous existence involving cultural events and waged work. She

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286 Gabaccia, Italy’s Many Diasporas, p. 89.
288 Ibid., p. 117.
289 Gabaccia, Italy’s Many Diasporas, p. 154.
290 Ginsborg, A History of Contemporary Italy, p. 224.
291 Gabriella, interview with the author, 2010, Melbourne, VIC.
was accustomed to smoking, going out with her friends, and sitting in bars to drink coffee by herself.

In Adriana Nelli’s 1954, Addio Trieste... The Triestine Community of Melbourne, mid-twentieth century Triestine women, including those of the working classes, are described as being able to access pockets of autonomy and independence, also thanks to the fact that they had “some degree of economic opportunity”. As also done by Passerini, the author then analysed the image of Triestine women that transpired from the texts of some local folk songs. In view of what will be reported in the following section on the regulation of women’s sexuality in the Italy that the 1950s migrants left, along with the fact that sexual liberation was one of the central aims of the 1970s Italian feminist movement, it is significant that such songs, for example, promoted the idea that it is the right of a woman to be free to make love after a long day of work, if she wishes to do so.

3.2 (Im)Possible Identity: ‘La Madonna’ as a Role Model for Women

Today as in the 1950s, Catholicism is by far the most widespread faith amongst the inhabitants of the peninsula. Save for a few tens of thousands of Jews and a handful of Protestants, Catholicism has long been the only cult worshipped by the population, although the percentage of believers is not and has not been evenly spread throughout all Italian regions, with the central ones historically less prone to bigotry than the southern or north-eastern regions.

A substantial part of the population now lives—at least at a superficial level—a secular life, but since Mussolini signed an agreement with the Vatican in 1929 (the Patti Lateranensi, or Lateran Agreement), which is yet to be repealed, Catholicism is as a matter of fact the religion of the (supposedly constitutionally secular) state.

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293 Passerini, Fascism in Popular Memory, p. 30.
295 McCarthy, Italy since 1945, p. 133.
Hence crucifixes are hung in public spaces, including in each classroom in public schools, and the Catholic doctrine is part of the curriculum of public education; students have to eventually choose to opt out of it, with the permission of their parents if underage, if they are not interested in taking it. This also applies to the children of the Muslim minorities that have meanwhile gathered in the country as a consequence of the recent waves of migration from north Africa.

Also, due to the conflation between state, society, and religion, baptism traditionally represented a requirement in order to be considered part of the community, and so up to the 1980s, nearly every child was baptised, in most cases even if the parents were atheists or did not attend mass. The first communion and confirmation were also considered 'necessary steps', and as a matter of fact, even generation 1.5 Gabriella, whose family was not religious, did her first communion in Melbourne.

Generation 1 Nadia warned me that, in her opinion, individual religious beliefs are not discussed with others in Australia so as to avoid unnecessary diatribes. Perhaps for this reason my informants generally provided little information about how they live their faith or feel about God. However, there was a tacit understanding between us that we shared some common background in this respect. We took for granted the fact that we 'knew' the doctrine of 'our' faith, and Rachele was even disappointed to discover that I instead took distance from it some three decades ago.

Nadia is nonetheless one of those who did spontaneously disclose her stance towards her (unorthodox way of living her) cult, which I then summarised in the following words:

Nadia's mother was very religious, a devout of Saint Antony, and Nadia was brought up according to a strict Christian-Socialist morality, which entailed that one had first of all to be honest. Her father had stressed to her and her siblings that it was especially wrong to steal: had she ever needed anything, she would have had to ask for it. ‘Se no

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296 Baldassar, Visits Home, p. 133.
veis, domandait, no stei a robâ’ (‘If you don’t have, ask, do not steal’), she recalled was his primary teaching.

Nadia was the first amongst the Italian migrants in her birthplace in Romania to receive both Catholic and Orthodox sacraments. Her mother had thought that two ‘protections’ would be better than one. And when the Orthodox priests knocked at their door to bless the house for the Epiphany, she had been the only Italian in town to welcome them in.

Nadia still believes in God and prays in her house every morning, but she holds the priests in little esteem, because of the fact that, in her opinion, they preach well, but often behave in different ways, like those who have children or are paedophiles.

Generation 1.5 Virginia was perhaps the most eloquent about the content of her faith. A thorough analysis of this issue cannot be carried out in this thesis, due in part to the insufficiency of the data, but it must be noted that the Christian church that she attends contemplates the possibility that God is a female. This represents a major change with respect to the Vatican’s position on the matter. Of the conversations that we had in this respect, she asked me to disclose only what follows:

Virginia is a religious person (her parents were too), but she’s such in her own way. When she can, she attends the services at Saint Mary’s of South Brisbane, a ‘vanguard’ affiliation that addresses both the ‘Mother’ and the ‘Father’ in the skies during prayers. It’s a very open, ‘no frills’ Church, where one can sit on the floor and pray or meditate. In fact, Virginia likes it a lot.

Apart from Nadia and Virginia, only Anna explicitly spoke at length about her faith on her own accord, saying that her family was very religious and that she is too. When she prays, though, she addresses both God and other figures that are of importance only to her. She also feels attached through religion to her Slav mother tongue. Beneciano is in fact the language in which she learned the doctrine. She moreover reported the relation between women and Catholicism in Italy:

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297 Nadia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
298 Virginia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
Dress codes used to be very severe, especially for females. To go to Church, it was compulsory to wear long sleeves, the reason for which people had the so-called ‘finte maniche’ (‘fake sleeves’), which were put on their forearms in summer and attached to their shirt with needles. Women also had to be veiled and wear stockings even if it was hot. The older girls, who in her opinion would not miss the occasion to display themselves, used to draw a line on their calves with pencil to reassure everyone about the fact that they had pantyhose on, which were moreover difficult to get hold of during the war. The priest would in fact place his agents outside the Church’s door to keep an eye on the morality of women.

As a matter of fact, the Catholic Church in Italy used to and, to a certain extent, still does exercise its power by ruling over sexual mores, which it controls through the bodies of women. I did not debate this material with Anna, as I later realised I instead should had done to fully comply with the feminist ethnographic practice; hence, I do not know what she thinks about it. However, in her *Beauty and the Monster*, Luisa Accati outlined how the Church voluntarily demonised female sexuality in order to reinstate the authority of the clergy after the Reform.

The Catholic ethic has not always been the same: it was instead conveniently changed throughout the centuries to respond to the needs of the ruling classes. Celibacy, in particular, started to be an obligation enforced on Catholic priests only after the Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563. It had been a requirement since the 11th century, but before the Council of Trent, its actual implementation had been quite lax. Moreover, the Church in the 1600s strengthened the cult of the Madonna, whose *sinless* motherhood was depicted as the model for women to follow. It is Accati’s belief that both of these moves were political, forming part of an operation functional to the recuperation of the Church’s strength and moral stature after the crisis provoked by the Reform. According to her argument, thanks to a very complex interrelation of imagery (frescos) and teachings from the pulpit, Catholic women, for whom

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299 Anna, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
300 I will not discuss the details of this circumstance in here; however, as mentioned in Chapter Two, making reference to my failure to come out to them as an homosexual, in Chapter Six I will further disentangle the intricacies inherent in debating with the participants information that can potentially give rise to conflict.
301 Accati, *Beauty and the Monster.*
conception is legitimate and required within marriage but cannot possibly be free of what the doctrine considers the source of the original sin (heterosexual intercourse), started to be asked to inhabit an impossible position after the Reform: that of being simultaneously chaste and mothers, and hence inexorably invested with guilt and thus trained to carry the burden of everybody’s responsibilities on top of their own.

Carnality was (and is) considered a ‘dirty thing’ by Catholicism, and sex something shameful that non-religious, ‘carnally fragile’ men were *allured into by the very sinful nature of women*: the Catholic ethic then ultimately blamed women for both the faults of men and their own. Indeed, marriage was considered *remedium concupiscientiae*, a remedial for lust. Within it, men were not expected to resist their ‘natural desires’, whilst women were taught to feel guilty about them and warned by priests not to enjoy them. As a result, humanity could only be ‘saved’ (from sin) by the clergy, who gave itself a morally superior status because of the sexually pristine condition self-referentially provided by chastity. Moreover, priests became the points of reference for women: as they refrained from sexuality, they were the only men who could solve women’s impossible identity crisis by not representing a threat to their ‘natural obligation’ to committing sin. Priests could not legally have children or marry, and as a result, they would not lead women into *having to have* (marital) sex.

Furthermore and most importantly, marriage, spousal relationships, women’s sexuality, and procreation fell under the hegemony of the Church, and have ever since been matters regulated by the clergy, meaning by a group of *celibate men* (who supposedly have no experience of them). Accati finally clarifies that the process of repression of women’s sexuality was intensified with the affirmation of the cult of the Immaculate Conception during the 1600s and reinforced with the transformation of the cult into a proper dogma on 8 December 1854. According to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception—celebrated every year by the Italian State with a public holiday on 8 December—not only was Christ conceived thanks to the intervention of the Holy Spirit, but the Madonna herself did not receive the original sin from her parents upon conception. Mary, the model for all Catholic women, then became both
the only human to have conceived without committing sin and the only human to have been free from the original sin since birth! The explicit message contained in this staging was that sexuality was to be considered the primary source of sin... And therefore of guilt. If unavoidable, then it was not to be enjoyed; and those who were ‘strong enough’ to refrain from it—supposedly, the priests—were morally superior.

In her article, *Explicit Meanings: Catholicism, Matriarchy and the Distinctive Problems of Italian Feminism*, Accati further reiterates this concept by underlining that female saints, as extremely important figures in the Catholic liturgy, also represent models of chastity.\(^302\) “Marriage”, she adds, “was thus portrayed as a place of *saintly suffering* [my Italics].\(^303\) Stefania Bernini moreover confirmed that Pope Pius XII “on various occasions, praised women’s endurance, tolerance, selflessness and predisposition to pain and self-sacrifice”.\(^304\) The same author added that the widespread Catholic magazine *Famiglia Cristiana* used to support the idea that husbands could ‘moderately hit’ their wives.\(^305\)

In conclusion, the religious figure that Catholic women have been implicitly asked to *inhabit* is that of an impossibly chaste mother. As this is an unattainable condition for humans, they have been explicitly required through the doctrine to at least try to refrain from pleasure, and expiate their sins and those of the carnal men that they supposedly induced into sin by neglecting themselves and *repressing their desires*. It was only in the second half of the 1960s, well after the departure of the subjects of this research, that the newly born Italian feminist movement proposed that women should allow themselves to investigate their pleasure, and along with it, the possibility of experiencing a different self.

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\(^303\) Ibid., p. 249.
\(^305\) Ibid.
Italian feminism and the Vatican have been fierce adversaries. “Feminism retains to have found in religion in general and in the clergy that administer it a massive element of oppression for all women”, wrote Magda Simola in an issue of the feminist magazine *effe* that was dedicated to countering the position of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith over matters of sexual ethics. Since the available data in this respect is very limited, it is difficult to state how religion was negotiated on an intimate level by the women who migrated to predominantly Protestant Australia, where being Catholic was moreover seen as a disadvantage. What faith represented for them would probably need a separate study, like the one carried out by Orsi on the role of the Marian Cult amongst the migrants in Harlem (USA).

Given that religious practices produce dispositions and that a system of dispositions—recalled by Bourdieu to be “a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles”—inform and are informed by habitus, during my investigation, I kept in mind that Catholicism was *likely* to affect the women migrants’ notions of the self. The selflessness promoted by Catholicism *could* in my opinion be counted amongst the reasons that made it difficult for Giannina to regain possession of her dowry money or to articulate the pain for her losses. Further, Pallotta-Chiarolli indicated that faith amongst the migrants in Australia was used as “a means of festivals and gatherings”, but the restrictions on sexual mores seem to have been firmly challenged only by the second generation. Of course, not all women lived the faith with the same intensity and sense of submission either in Italy or overseas. Those who had the personal strength, interest, and spaces of freedom to do so privately disregarded its teaching; others only superficially acknowledged them. And

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308 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 82.
310 Ibid., pp. 56, 57, and 59.
although only little has been said during fieldwork in this respect, as a matter of fact orthodoxy seems to have been uncommon even amongst my informants: Nadia, for example, reported to have been critical of the clergy, and Clelia and Anna independently developed their own sets of beliefs. In any case, as will be seen in the following sections, women in the 1950s in Italy were not allowed to publicly live their gender identity and sexuality in the way that they wanted.

3.0.3) The State’s Regulation of Love

“The persistence in Italy of powerful common cultural accounts of mother and their importance has undoubtedly been bolstered by the ideological priorities of organised Catholicism”, wrote Lesley Caldwell. The Catholic Church, however, was not the only institution to contribute to the habitus according to which Italian women had to identify with the parental role. The 1948 Republican Constitution had a progressive character with reference to matters of work and equality amongst citizens, but it also conceived and supported the role of women as equals to the extent that they were reproducers. Due to this, the legislative framework that was used to regulate the intimacy of Italians supported gross gender inequalities, outlawing and punishing certain female behaviours, whilst legalising, ignoring, or rendering acceptable others exclusively for males. The subjects of my research migrated to Australia before the necessary adjustments were made. For this reason, in spite of the fact that I have not discussed this matter with my informants, I believe that it is important to list some of the laws that reflected the habitus that the women migrants were likely to bring with them from overseas.

Regardless of their generalised silence on the matter, the generation 1 participants were all well aware of the social requirements implied in the gender doxa

underscored by (what they nevertheless did not necessarily recognise as) the intertwining of Catholic ethics with the provisions of the penal code. Nadia, for instance, expressed how it would have been unthinkable for her to reach her fiancée in Australia without being legally tied into a marriage with him; hence why she married him in proxy before her departure. Others instead explained that they would have never divorced their husbands, even if the latter had had extramarital relationships, as they were convinced that it is women who allure men into sex.

To make sense of the legal status of Italian women, it is first of all necessary to stress that after the war, Italian society was split between two major spheres of influence: that of the Catholics, politically represented by the Christian Democratic Party (D.C.), and that of the Italian Communist Party (P.C.I.), which, with over 2,145,000 members in 1954, was the largest communist organisation west of the Iron Curtain. In the 1950s, the P.C.I. and its subsidiary U.D.I. (Unione Donne Italiane) were most prominent in addressing the issue of female emancipation at the level of government. Yet Caldwell confirms that even the narratives of both the U.D.I. and P.C.I. predominantly remained within the borders imposed by the idea that women’s natural function was that of reproducers; as a result, the party’s policies would mostly focus on “the introduction of welfare measures” to provide facilities (kindergartens and the like) to support their dual position as mothers and workers. The aim of the P.C.I. was to offer “a different position to women in the family and a new position of the family in society [my Italics]”. Bonfiglioli stressed that the P.C.I. considered the family to be the “potential basis for moral and national reconstruction”.

The P.C.I.’s male members, moreover, were not known to be any less authoritarian than their Catholic or formerly Fascist peers. Women in Communist families were likely to be able to access education, if affordable, and to develop a consciousness of

313 Ibid., p. 180.
314 Ibid., p. 178.
315 Ibid., p. 179.
their working rights, but this did not automatically mean that they had the freedom to choose for themselves or that they could live their sentimental life as they wished.\textsuperscript{317}

Caldwell reports the following about the limits of the secular Italian post-WWII discourse on womanhood:

The uncritical identification of Italian women as mothers, common to fascism and the Catholic Church, forms the basis of discussion in the establishment of the liberal democratic republic. The position offered to women is one that seeks to endorse their rights as citizens while insisting that motherhood is their major contribution to the building of a new collectivity, a nation united. A generalised rhetoric appeal to all women is the norm. Its basis is that of biological sex and the capacity to reproduce, and it is completely taken for granted.\textsuperscript{318}

The post-WWII Italian political debate, mirrored by the legal apparatus of the new nation state, valued women as reproducers, rather than as individual citizens who could eventually have their own independent lives outside of the nuclear family, which was then eventually a possibility only for the super-rich élite. As a result, although the Constitution provided that women had equal rights to men, with some social forces trying to make it easier for them to work outside the house, the Italian Penal code explicitly allocated females to the family scene and penalised them if they tried to leave it sentimentally.

Article 559, for example, used to state the following about adulterous females:

The *wife* is punished by imprisonment up to one year. The same sentence applies to the accomplice of the adulterous woman. The penalty is up to two years’


\textsuperscript{318} Caldwell, ‘Women and the Family’, pp. 171-172.
imprisonment in case of an adulterous relationship. The crime is punishable upon legal action initiated by the husband [my italics].\textsuperscript{319}

The first two parts were declared unconstitutional in 1968—well after the departure of the migrants to the New World—as they contravened the principle of the juridical equality of both spouses. The third and fourth were annulled the following year.

The very same penal code used to be kind to those who committed ‘honour killings’, meaning to those who carried out a homicide to clear with blood the dishonour supposedly brought on the family by ‘illegitimate’ sexual relations. The extramarital relationships of either spouse were by definition illegitimate, but in certain contexts, the premarital sex of women continued to be considered as such as well. Article 587 granted a very short prison sentence (up to as little as three years in jail) to the assassin of “the spouse [of either sex], the daughter or the sister” and/or her/his lover caught in flagrante of an “illicit carnal relation”. The condition was that the homicide had to be carried out ‘on the spot’, triggered by “the state of anger as determined by the offence given [by the ‘illicit’ carnal relation] to his/her honour or to that of the family [my Italics]”.\textsuperscript{320} Such wording, it must be noted, indicates that an adulterous husband and his lover could be the potential victims of a betrayed wife. Other male figures, such as ‘the sons’ or ‘the brothers’, could benefit from a discounted sentence for delivering the supposedly ‘necessary’ revenge, but their (hetero)sexual conduct was instead not considered a carrier of scandal and shame. As a matter of fact, men commonly frequented brothels, which were legal and indeed regulated by the state in Italy until the introduction of the so-called ‘Legge Merlin’ in 1958. Article 587 was abrogated only in 1982.

\textsuperscript{319} Article 559, Penal Code (Italy). My translation of: “La moglie adultera è punita con la reclusione fino a un anno. Con la stessa pena è punito il corredo dell’adultera. La pena è della reclusione fino a due anni nel caso di relazione adulterina. Il delitto è punibile a querela del marito”.

\textsuperscript{320} Article 587, Penal Code (Italy). My translation of: “Chiunque cagiona la morte del coniuge, della figlia o della sorella, nell’atto in cui ne scopre la illegittima relazione carnale e nello stato d’ira determinato dall’offesa recata all’onor suo o della famiglia, è punito con la reclusione da tre a sette anni. Alla stessa pena soggiace chi, nelle dette circostanze, cagiona la morte della persona che sia in illegittima relazione carnale col coniuge, con la figlia o con la sorella”.
Another law that upheld the role of women in the family and underlined the gender imbalances that have for long been endorsed by the Italian State, was Article 544 (abrogated in 1981),\textsuperscript{321} which was inherited from the so-called ‘Codice Rocco’ of the Fascist era. According to Article 544, a man who raped a virgin woman could get his jail sentence waived by offering her a ‘matrimonio riparatore’, a remedial marriage. The law did not force the woman to accept the offer, but the widespread custom preferred that she did, otherwise she would be considered a ‘svergognata’ (a ‘shameless female individual’) by the community. Until 1996, sexual violence was deemed a crime against morality, not against the person, and it did not use to be legally considered an abuse if perpetrated inside of marriage (a final say in this regard was only ruled by the Italian Supreme Court of Cassation in 2004).

The first Italian woman who refused to marry her abuser was Franca Viola in 1966.\textsuperscript{322} Her firm and unconventional stance created a national case that initiated a debate over women’s intimacy, freedom, and position in society, which the subjects of this research missed out on: the most conservative part of the country considered Franca Viola’s refusal to marry her rapist a scandal, but a growing section of the population supported her choice.

As a final note, the approval of the law that legalised divorce was finally confirmed by a referendum in 1974, in spite of the strenuous opposition of the political right and the Catholic Church. Abortion was instead only rendered legal in 1978. The flourishing of the debate that opened these possibilities occurred in Italy over 20 years after the departure of the subjects of this research.

\textsuperscript{321} Article 544, Penal Code (Italy).

3.4) Gossiping the Days Away

“There was a lot of ignorance in town”, said Rachele when she described her youth in Muzzana, her birthplace in the lower plains of Friuli (Italy). In fact, she found it extremely difficult to grow up there. She was a very good student and wanted to continue her education, but had to quit school after five years because “no ‘ndere bès” (“there was no money”). She then started working in the family fields and learnt stitching. Her mother, who had lost her husband during the war, killed by an Allied airstrike whilst at work, was extremely concerned about Rachele’s behaviour. She did not want to make a ‘brutta figura’ (‘to lose face’) with relatives, as she was worried that they would say that she could not educate her daughter ‘properly’. So in addition to being widowed by the war, she felt pressured by the community with respect to the evaluation of her single parenting skills. She therefore enforced gendered restrictions on her daughter by savagely beating her, in the hope of finally subduing Rachele’s vitality, which could have been (seen as) a source of (sexual) scandal.

Rachele said that she is now satisfied with what life has given to her, but that she does not have good memories of her childhood “‘tal bloody país” (“in that bloody town”).

When she thinks about it, she begins to shiver, really. There was no freedom there, according to her, and girls who wanted to go out and have fun were considered “poco di buono” (“women of little good”, meaning “bad women”). “Il predi”, moreover, “... Al comandave dut lui!” (“The priest ... He commanded everything!”). Rachele’s recounting of her youth in Friuli exemplifies the way in which the gender imbalances supported by the legal system and the notions of asexual selfless femininity promoted by the Catholic ethics were sustained in everyday life through the socially accepted practice of gossiping (‘spettegolare’ in Italian).

Gossip is thus described in the Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories:

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323 Rachele, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
324 Ibid.
Malicious gossip is a powerful weapon of personal and political harm: it plants the seeds of destruction. It can make and unmake lives and reputations, undermines settled beliefs. It manipulates and creates power structures within groups; fragments community as readily as it cements it.\(^{325}\)

Its (unspoken) aim was to reinforce the norm by damaging the image of supposedly rule un-abiding individuals. Stigmatization—which according to Goffman’s definition can be referred to as the process of allocating “deeply discrediting” attributes\(^{326}\)—was directed at all sorts of unconventional behaviours, including how people dressed. Gossip, however, especially monitored women’s sexual conduct, with potentially devastating consequences for the targeted individual who could find herself being isolated. Its power was so strong that women like Rachele’s mother (unconsciously?) damaged their own daughters to prevent it. Being described as an adulterer or a prostitute could have meant being cut off from the community. In the best scenario, a woman would have lost the solidarity of her town, which, amongst other things, meant a lack of material support in times of necessity. And, until 1968, had she been found guilty of the *penal crime* of (female) adultery, she would have gone to jail.

In her *Italy’s Many Diasporas*\(^ {327}\) Gabaccia confirms that gossip was one of the tools with which control was exerted by and on the community. The author maintains that during pre-WWII migration waves, both migrated men and their non-migrated women used to fall victims to the transcontinental “social surveillance of the paese”. But, she adds, “whereas gossip about men may have focused on their care in earning and saving wages more than on their sexual propriety, the reverse was true of women”.\(^ {328}\) Gabaccia, however, also noted that peasant women in Sicily still bore ‘illegitimate’ children whilst their husbands were overseas.\(^ {329}\)

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\(^{327}\) Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*.

\(^{328}\) Ibid., p. 87.

\(^{329}\) Ibid., p. 88.
Gossip then greatly contributed to maintaining the ‘structuring structured structure’ of the moral thinking that produced and was produced by the discourses that regulated life in the Italian countryside. The narratives that informed such discourses arranged the most private aspects of a person’s behaviour but specifically women’s, and they were heavily influenced by the state and by the Catholic Church. Women’s lack of financial means, which meant that they were dependent on the family and consequently subjected to the opinion of others, has for long rendered the mechanism inexorable. Indeed, 1970s feminist Simonetta Piccone Stella confirmed that it was only from the late 1950s onwards that “the escape from the countryside liberated from this situation of oppression hundreds of thousands of young women”.³³⁰

Women of Giannina’s generation and social condition, who moreover had very limited access to formal education, could generally only experience environments that recognised women as actors in the family sphere, where their agency was subjected to that of the patriarch. They were taught not to have desires and to sacrifice their personal needs. They at times earned wages, but they were not in control of their choices or even their earned money.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analysed the social, cultural, and economic factors that contributed to creating and maintaining the pre-departure habitus that sustained and was sustained by the mentality against which the 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia could mould their personas. I exposed generation 1 Giannina’s narration, and then juxtaposed that of other informants to the work of scholars, with the intention of bringing to light the conditions that influenced women’s awareness of themselves in pre-feminist Italy and their position with respect to others. I argue that financial dependence, little schooling, and extreme poverty interfaced through social

surveillance with the Catholic ethic and gender-imbalanced legislation of the state, which deprived women of the possibility of detaching themselves from the habitus that confined them to specific gender roles.

With the purpose of examining the emancipatory/liberatory potential that migration had with reference to the above scenario, in Chapter Four, I describe the arrival of the migrants in Australia and their process of adaptation to the local habitus. I will then progressively analyse how the habitus was negotiated by the migrants of generation 1.5.
CHAPTER FOUR

ASSIMILATING AND (NOT) BELONGING
TO (THE PHANTOMS OF) (WHITE) AUSTRALIAN WAYS

In Chapter Three, I reported on the dominant habitus in pre-feminist Italy. In this chapter, I begin to analyse how it reflected on the women migrants’ process of settlement overseas. In the first part, I give voice to the experience of Anna. I then briefly examine the way in which our common background affected the possibility of expression that she was given in this thesis. Afterwards, I intertwine the voices of the migrants with the work of other authors to describe some of the factors that affected the migrants’ early life in Australia. What I aim to highlight is how the ‘mentality’ of the women migrants interfaced with (white) Australia. I finally resort to the voices of other participants to report on some of the (im)possibilities for emancipation and/or liberation from patriarchal rule that were permitted by the conditions that the subjects of this research found in Australia upon their arrival.

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331 F. Battiaito, ‘Chan Son Egocentrique’, in Alice, Azimut, Milan, EMI, 1982: “Who am I, where am I, when I am away from myself, where do I come from, where do I go” [my translation].
4.1 Anna’s Experience of Getting Used to Her New Self

Anna enjoyed the journey to Australia. Windy days still make her think of the breeze that used to blow through the drying clothes at the back of the ship, where she used to hang the laundry, she said to me during one of our long storytelling sessions in her house in Brisbane. She was full of enthusiasm on the journey, not scared, and would not think of the dangers. She narrated how she boarded the ship in Genova in December 1961 with her newly married husband, Giuseppe, who had already migrated to Australia several years before and whom she had met in her hometown in Slav-speaking Benečija (Friuli, Italy) during one of his return visits.

They travelled in third class, which meant that she shared a cabin with other women, whilst her husband was sleeping next door with other men. She stressed that he was seasick throughout the trip, and instead she was not. She was only projecting forward: for her, Australia was “adventure”, not “distance”.332 She had a positive approach towards the unknown. In reality, she was attracted to it! Ultimately, having spent several years of her youth in Milan (Lombardia, Italy) working as a domestic aid for a wealthy Italian family, she had already had a migration experience. In those days—right after the war—pauper villagers would hardly ever go anywhere or know anything other than their hometown and its surroundings, so I imagined that the northern Italian metropolis must have played a major role in making her accustomed to novelties. Indeed, Anna is someone who gave me the impression to know her way around the world very well.

The boat reached Australian shores at the end of January 1962 after stopping in Port Said (Egypt) and Colombo (Sri Lanka). At that point, her enthusiasm suffered a heavy drawback, as the actual physical encounter with the country that would adopt her left her very unimpressed: Melbourne, where they had initially disembarked, was hot, muddy, and smelled of salt. Anna clearly recalled that at first she was caught by fear, and stated that if there had been a ship immediately ready to leave that she would

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332 Anna, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
have boarded it without second thought. Yet that was not a viable option, so she had to stay strong instead, and even endure a very long and uncomfortable train journey from Sydney to Brisbane. At South Brisbane Station, however, where she and Giuseppe were met by Giuseppe’s uncle, whose family they stayed with whilst building the house where they still live, Anna tasted the first milkshake of her life. Anna emphasised this fact as an important moment of reconciliation, almost as if the new flavour had re-nourished her expectations through her body, thus bringing some hope back to her fatigued mind and spirit.

Anna was a passionate storyteller, and her impressions about (herself in) Australia really interested me. So I particularly insisted on learning more about her process of settlement: what did she think of what she saw? What had caught her attention at first? How did she feel? I tried to put myself in her shoes and imagine what it must have been like for a woman of her time and origin to find herself at the antipodes, so far away from ‘the familiar’, so—I assumed—emotionally exposed...? Did she feel trapped in her new life? How did she deal with her sentiments? Where did she find the strength to cope with the situation? Was she lonely? Not to be forgotten, unlike me, she was a married woman: (in which way) could she confide in her husband for protection and support? I probed her on these matters over and over again, as reaching (what I thought was) the emotional core of the issues was not a straightforward operation at all: rather, her narration proceeded at random, skimming over subjects that she would later return to, sometimes by her own intention, other times led in that direction by my questioning. She—like other generation 1 participants—tended, in my view, to downscale the extent of the hardships that she went through by being ironical about them, in order to—I suppose—present a positive image of her migrant experience. Further, as mentioned in Chapter Three, I always had in mind that women in Italy were trained to cope with suffering without filing a complaint.

Anna at first explained to me that on the ship, the priest, whose English classes she had attended, said that in Australia everything was new, but many things actually
looked old to her: she found that (white—although it must be noted that she did not make this specification, almost so as to implicitly indicate that there was no alternative) Australians were “all’inglese”333 (“English”) in their manners and habits. She had also straightaway noticed that people ate lots of sandwiches and sweets. And women wore starched skirts, gloves, and hats, which looked old-fashioned to her. At that time there were no skyscrapers in the city, which I figured must have looked like a ‘suburban village’. Finally, during a tape-recorded session, our conversation proceeded as follows, in an elegant form of ‘italiano popolare’:

Anna: I really saw a country... A different country, completely different from Italy, especially one, eh... I had only been in Milan, I saw what I saw in Milan, what it was and... The villages were the villages, they weren’t very, let’s say ‘advanced’, so to [speak]... We tried to follow the fashion, to know what there was in other... In another part of Italy, but not so much but... Yes, many things were different, there were places, let’s say... You went to the pubs, bars, however you want to call them, and there was the place for the women and the place for the men, you couldn’t be together...

Anita: Which was a strange thing!

Anna: A strange thing, yes, yes... Ah, in church, certainly, the only thing you went to the church, it wasn’t yet the, the English language [had] not [been] introduced into the church yet, it was Latin, and there I felt familiar with it because in Italy mass was still in Latin, but the diction was a totally other thing, let’s say that the pronunciation was different. Eh... Yes, some things were very, very different, different such as for instance... Ah... You went to the city... You went by train, you could see people, all people that did crochet, they all did crochet and knitting...

Anita: Here?

Anna: Yes, on the trains.

Anita: But really?

Anna: Yes, and in Italy you never saw that, you’d never see such a thing. Eh... Yes, and then there are many, many other, other things that don’t...

Anita: Did you have the impression of arriving in a more progressed or a more backwards place?

Anna: I had the impression of entering a backwards place, because you’d go to... Get fish and chips... Which here was... And even [non-comprehensible words] now...334

333 Ibid.
334 Ibid.. My translation of:
At that point the session had to be temporarily interrupted due to her now old husband’s sudden and steep raising of the volume of the television in the living room, which impeded our talk and sounded like a request for attention. Our conversation could only be resumed after she had patiently attended to his needs and kindly asked him to please turn the volume down again. I remember to have immediately found such an event very significant with reference to both the way in which Anna and her loved ones stood with respect to each other, and the difference between us. “E’ arrabbiaito?” (“Is he upset?”), 335 I had in fact cynically, though sympathetically asked her when she returned to the table, trying to dilute the tension in a laugh, but intimately considering that I personally could never cope with similar behaviour on the part of my partner.

Then we continued:

Anna: Yes, ah...
Anita: Yes, you were telling me that you had the impression of arriving in a more backwards country, where there was fish and chips...
Anna: Look: fish and chips, you went to the city... You went... To buy something and they’d give it to you [wrapped] in the newspaper. They’d put it in the newspaper, a

“Anna: Ho visto proprio un paese... Un paese differente, completamente differente dall’Italia, specialmente uno beh... Sono andata solo a Milano, vedeva quel che vedeva a Milano, quel che era e... I paesi erano i paesi non, non erano molto diciamo ‘avanzi’, per così [dire]... Si cercava di stare alla moda, al sapere cosa c’è nell’, nell’altro... Nell’altra parte dell’Italia ma però non tanto ma... Sì, molte cose differenti, erano posti diciamo... Andavi nei pub, osterie, come le puoi chiamare, e c’era il posto per le donne ed il posto per gli uomini, non potevi essere assieme...
Anita: Che era una cosa strana!
Anna: Una cosa strana, sì, sì... Ah, in chiesa, certamente, l’unica cosa andavi in chiesa, non era ancora la, la lingua inglese introdotta nella chiesa, era il latino, e lì mi son trovata familiare con lei perché era ancora in latino la messa in Italia, però era tutta un’altra dizione, diciamo la pronuncia era differente. Eh... Sì, certe cose erano molto molto differenti, differenti come per esempio... Ah... Andavi in città, andavi in treno, vedevi gente che tutti lavoravano l’uncinetto, tutti lavoravano all’uncinetto e a maglia...
Anita: Qui?
Anna: Sì, nei treni
Anita: Ma veramente?
Anna: Sì, e in Italia non vedevi mai quello, non vedevi mai quello li. Eh... Si poi son parecchie parecchie alter, altre cose che non...
Anita: Le è sembrato di arrivare in posto più progredito, o più arretrato?
Anna: Mi sembrava di entrare in un posto arretrato, perché andavi al... Prendere fish and chips... Che qua era... E’ anche [incomprensibile] adesso...”

335 Ibid.
beautiful... Rolled up like a funnel [non-comprehensible words] with these chips inside and the fish, and they liked eating, this [way it] was... Ah... Italian coffee shops or... There was only one I remember when I came here in 1960... 1962, [there] was only 'Il Venezia' in Brisbane and 'Il Cortina', afterwards, in the [New Farm] Valley, that sold...
Anita: And therefore you... What sort of elements... Mmm... What did you find... What new things kept you here?
Anna: Ah... No new things. Possibilities to work and to do things, to earn something, because in Italy there was no possibility, in those times, there was no possibility... Even in the places where I am from, there was no possibility... To earn, and here it seemed that for the future it would have been the best [my emphasis].

Anna and Giuseppe were especially concerned about not having any debts, as she had made clear during a previous non tape-recorded encounter. So they would buy things one at a time and put everything to use. For this reason, he also worked very long hours in a brick factory, whilst she found employment in a plywood plant, where she was luckily put in a team with a woman migrant from Poland, whose native language had the same roots as Beneciano, Anna's Slav mother tongue, a circumstance that had rendered communication a lot easier for her. Anna had immediately enrolled in an English course, but it was hard for her to learn, and she had to wait to have the kids in school to finally become fluent: the need to talk to the teachers and other parents was a big motivation in this respect. Before she would mispronounce words, and for this, she was often picked on or laughed at by the locals... At least until the day when she decided to react and fight back against the grocer's impoliteness towards her linguistic difficulties.

336 Ibid. My translation of:
"Anna: Sì, ah...
Anita: Sì, mi diceva che le è sembrato di arrivare in un paese più arretrato, dove c'era il fish and chips...
Anna: Guarda: fish and chips, andavi in città... Andavi... A comperare qualcosa e te lo davano nella carta di giornale. Ti mettevano i chips nella carta di giornale, un bel... Fatta a imbuto [incomprensibile] con questi chips dentro e il fish, e gli andava di mangiare, così era... Ah... Caffè italiani o... C'era uno solo mi ricordo quando sono venuta qua nel '60... '62, era solo il venezia in Brisbane e il Cortina, dopo, nella [New Farm] Valley, che vendevano...
Anita: Ma... E quindi lei... Che tipo di elementi... Mmm... Cos'ha torvato di... Di nuovo in Australia che l'ha tenuta qua?
Anna: Ah... Di nuovo no. Possibilità di lavoro e di fare qualcosa, di poter guadagnare qualcosa perché in Italia non c'era possibilità, non c'era possibilità in quei tempi... Anche dai posti dove provengo, non c'era possibilità... Di guadagno e qui sembrava che per un futuro sarebbe stato il migliore"
For all these reasons, Anna described the first few years in Australia as “intense”,\textsuperscript{337} She was busy working, raising kids, and learning the language, and had to be self-reliant, whilst everything related to the family was her responsibility and hers alone:

> When you're away from home, you're alone... [...] You have no one to rely on, there isn't that affection... Solidarity is ‘acquired’, one has to give in order to receive... Emigrating is a great experience... But you either adapt or succumb [my emphasis].\textsuperscript{338}

Adapting, however, required both mastering the language and balancing her traditions with the (mainstream) traditions of the locals:

> I in some way assimilated a lot... Ah... I have... Yes, it was difficult for me at the beginning, certainly, because of the language, but afterwards I tried to assimilate, to [...] To do the things that they did, but never forgetting my origin, I always kept my origin, there, where I come from, my culture, my thinking and everything, but I tried in some way to share ['condividere' in the original, which does not mean 'unilaterally absorb'] the things that Australians did [my emphasis].\textsuperscript{339}

Other times, nonetheless, she pointed out that one cannot bring (too many of?) her own habits with her overseas. In any case, “no matter how much you want to integrate”—she stressed in one occasion—“you always remain a bit of a migrant... A small root [of you] always remains there [in the hometown]...”.\textsuperscript{340}

Since she had repeatedly mentioned during our conversations that in Brisbane there was a scarcity of Italian foods, newspapers, and general articles, which initially she could only purchase at a high price at Caruso’s—then the only Italian shop in town—

\textsuperscript{337} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{338} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{339} Ibid. My translation of: “Mi sono in qualche modo assimilata molto... Ah... Ho... Si, mi è stato difficile all'inizio, certamente, per via della lingua, ma dopo ho cercato di assimilarmi, di [...] Di fare le cose che facevano loro, però sempre non dimenticando la mia origine, tenevo sempre la mia origine, li da dove venivo, la mia cultura, il mio pensare e tutto, però cercavo in qualche modo di condividere le cose che facevano gli australiani”
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid.
at a certain point I asked her whether there were any magazines or objects that she had left behind in Italy and that she particularly missed having in Australia. I wanted to better understand the relation between her migration process and her material needs: ultimately, it was financial stability that she was looking for overseas. Her unexpected reply, however, suddenly re-activated a topic that she had mentioned before, but had also dropped, namely the need for warmth and affection:

To tell you the truth, I had little in Italy and I didn't miss that much, only [...] *family affection*, that I missed more, during the first few years, afterwards, I obviously *got used to it* [my emphasis].

Indeed, Anna had previously confessed to have already started to become accustomed to missing her family of origin during her long permanence in Milan that had preceded her migration to Australia. There she was much closer to home—she could visit every year at the time of harvest, and even twice a year if her help was temporarily needed in the paternal fields during other seasons. She was in any case fairly treated by the family that had employed her. Nevertheless, she still missed her loved ones, but felt that she *had to* harden up because she could not afford to give in to sentimentality:

You had to do it. You don’t let yourself be overwhelmed by melancholia... You strike the iron until... It gets hard.

However, settling in Brisbane brought these matters to a whole different level: she could only go back to Italy for a return visit *eleven years* after her departure, and during that long and intense period of her life, the people who were (emotionally?) close to her were *her husband’s* relatives, who lived next door. Her younger sisters and mother were at the other end of the world—at a time when transcontinental travel and communication were luxuries only few could afford. Her father, whom she had

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341 Ibid. My translation of: “Per dirti la verità avevo poco in Italia e non non mi è mancato proprio tanto, solo [...] l’affetto familiare, quello mi è mancato di più, nei primi anni, dopo naturalmente mi sono abituata.”

342 Ibid.
last seen upon departure, had meanwhile died, and of course, she could not make it to the funeral.

I clearly remember how she struggled (but managed) to hold back tears whilst unfolding the telegram still safeguarded in her bedroom that had informed her of his death, some forty years before, and that she had insisted on showing to me. Experiencing the passing of her father from overseas must had been truly significant to her. She had informed me about it at the very early stages of our friendship, in January 2009, not long after we first met (before the start of this PhD), and only days before I myself suffered the loss of my paternal grandmother and actual foster parent from the same distance, perhaps the reason for which I particularly empathised with her in this respect. I then wondered where Anna had found the strength to cope with such an emotionally displacing event, especially considering that she was alone (although married) in a foreign and not always migrant-friendly country. How could she deal with the lack of understanding, the solitude, and the pain? I therefore insisted on further investigating her attachments with her.

She narrated a revealing dream involving her father that she had had near the time of his death, but she never (verbally) disclosed to me the real extent of the anguish that I assumed she must have gone through, which nonetheless seemed to transpire from the discrepancy between her facial expressions (forty years later, she had been on the verge of crying) and her simultaneous minimising of the suffering. I later thought that the following words, even if they do not address the specific issue, perhaps already constitute a considerable intimate revelation for a woman of her generation, willing but not used to (feeling entitled to?) talking about her feelings:

Anita: How did you experience your affection here in Australia with respect to the people that you met here, and also with respect to the people that had remained in Italy?

Anna: Ah, that is... Yes, with [respect to] those that are in Australia... First of all, they all call you ‘darling’ but you are not anybody’s ‘darling’... [laughter]... And that used to irritate me a lot, because it is a superficial thing, [...] a way of saying. But I made many friends, really I actually have a very dear Australian person, we have become friends
with during the school [time] of the kids, they went together, and we still are very, very [close] friends, yes, yes. And with [respect to] those... Well, naturally you don’t lose what you leave in Italy, you don’t lose it, but it progressively fades a bit, you are not left with that... That constant, morbid [visceral] affection that you have when you are there... I don’t say morbid but you get attached in a manner... And instead when...

A little bit at a time, year after year, it fades a little.

Anita: And how do you feel with respect to this fading?

Anna: It’s an adaptation of life. That you adapt and that’s the way it is. You can’t always hold... Hold on to old memories, or let’s say that I care very much, very much for my sister, but there are other things that have more importance, for example, my family that is here. Yeah [my emphasis].

4.6) (White) Australian Ways

Anna’s recounting of her contact with Australia presented elements of interest both in terms of the contents and the way in which she exposed them to me. With respect to the latter, it is important to first highlight that our conversation was heavily influenced by my questioning. Also, due to the fact that we implicitly recognised each other as persons familiar with (the transformation of) habitus being discussed, it was impregnated with a series of unspoken understandings. She explained to me, for example, the views that she thinks that people had in the Friulan countryside before I was born, knowing that I could have no direct experience of them and would perhaps not be familiar with them; however, when talking about family attachments, she took

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343 Ibid. My translation of:

“Anita: Com’è stato per lei vivere gli affetti qui in Australia con le persone che ha incontrato qui in Australia, e anche nei confronti delle persone che sono rimaste in Italia?

Anna: Ah, quello è... Sì, con quelli che sono in Australia... Prima di tutto ti chiamo tutti ‘darling’, e non lo sei ‘darling’, di nessuno [laughter]... E quello mi irritava molto, perché è una cosa superficiale, col modo di dire. Però ho fatto molte amicizie, anzi ho una persona molto cara australiana, che ci siamo fatte amiche durante le scuole dei bambini, che andavamo assieme, e siamo tutt’ora ancora molto molto amiche, sì, sì. È per quelli... Be’, naturalmente non è che si perde quello che lasci in Italia, non si perde, però man mano si affievolisce un pochettino, non non ti rimane quel... Quell’affetto costante, morbosamente che hai quando sei là... Non dico morboso ma ti attacchi in una maniera... E invece quando... Pian piano, anno per anno, si affievolisce un pochettino.

Anita: E lei come si sente rispetto a questo affievolirsi?

Anna: E’ un adattamento della vita. Che ti adatti e così è. Non puoi tenere sempre... Tenersi ai ricordi vecchi, o anche diciamo voglio bene, molto bene a mia sorella, ma ci sono altre cose che hanno più importanza, per esempio la mia famiglia, che è qui. Yeah”
for granted that I knew how intense (‘morbid’) they can be in the ‘Italian’ context...
And as a matter of fact, I did not ask further clarifications, despite this being of
interest: family relationships have implications with respect to hierarchies (and hence
to gender), which Baldassar\textsuperscript{344} described as being kept in place by migrant families
across the continents in spite of the passing of the time.

So Anna lingered on the description of what she knew that I could not know, but
correctly assumed that I was aware of the (as a matter of fact unreported) way in
which family relationships are lived in (what we framed as) ‘our way of living’, and
what that means in terms of responsibilities towards others. This understanding,
however, impeded us from discussing the distances that both her and I have taken
from ‘the norm’—by norm I mean the family structure that follows from the (public)
acknowledgment of the patriarch’s authority, according to which one should accept
being ‘under’ the control of others.\textsuperscript{345}

My fluency with the ‘structuring structured structure’ of traditional ‘Italian’ family
relations therefore prevented me in this case from acquiring knowledge—and
eventually voicing it on her behalf. Anna had spoken on other occasions about her
family members, but even in those cases, we never really entered into the intricacies
of the emotional entanglements inherent to them. A similar discourse applies to the
way in which she described food: she did not need to say—and I did not need to ask—
why she was perplexed to see people eat fish and chips out of a newspaper funnel: it
was implicitly understood between us that people in ‘our’ eating tradition, which
other migrants of both generations reported to continue to keep in place in their
homes, consume (or at least used to consume) meals on plates whilst sitting at the
table. This rule actually used to be applied very strictly in my household, and Anna
had previously told me how her mother used to get the table set for every meal, no
matter how poor.

\textsuperscript{344} Baldassar, Visits Home, pp. 31-37.
\textsuperscript{345} Ibid.
With reference instead to the process of adapting to local ways, which she took for granted that she had to do, Anna clearly expressed feeling that Australia was a very different country from the one that she had left. She was looking for ‘the familiar’, such as Italian shops and cafés, but she could find very little trace of it. Her observations about the local ‘way of living’ are primarily centred on the sensory experiences related to taste—food, clothing, the sound of the language, and the layout of the landscape—which she accompanied with comments on leisurely activities (knitting) and on the sexual segregation in pubs. But to what exactly did Anna and the other post-WWII migrants have to assimilate? And why did she have to do so to start with? What kind of elements influenced the interfacing of her old self with the new habitus? In order to answer these questions, I believe that it is first of all necessary to understand the type of ideology that informed the immigration decade. The element to be brought into question in this sense is the so-called White Australia Policy.

4.b.1) Are Italians White?

The hegemonic belief that prevailed in federated Australia until the 1960s was that—as put by Stratton—a “racially homogeneous population would be culturally homogenous”.\(^{346}\) Thus wrote Jupp in regard to the grounds on which the Australian immigration policies were based:

White Australia cannot be understood simply as a restrictive immigration policy. It was central to building a white British Australia from which all others would be excluded, whether recent Chinese immigrants or the original Aboriginal inhabitants. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, the first major Commonwealth piece of legislation, which remained in force until 1958, was only part of the legislative armoury of White Australia.

Colonial, Commonwealth and state laws relating to immigration, occupations, citizenship and Aborigines must all be seen as part of a consistent campaign to

prevent anyone from contributing to Australian nation-building who was not of
European descent and appearance.\textsuperscript{347}

The Immigration Restriction Act was issued upon federation.\textsuperscript{348} It was supported by
the Trade Unions and the Labour Party in particular,\textsuperscript{349} and was especially aimed at
keeping the Chinese and Japanese out of the country,\textsuperscript{350} which had been a real concern
in the colonies since the mid-1800s. The supposedly immoral behaviour of Chinese
workers was signalled as \textit{culturally incompatible} with that of ‘Europeans’.\textsuperscript{351} Not all
‘Europeans’, however, were considered suitable to fit the \textit{white image} with which the
Australian nation wanted to paint itself: it was believed that a racial (and \textit{therefore}
cultural!) divide supposedly existed between the north and south of the continent, and
the idea was to keep Australia “a British community living under British standards”.\textsuperscript{352}

In spite of such narratives, after WWII government officials became aware that
Australia’s growing economy badly needed work force,\textsuperscript{353} and knew that there was
not enough ‘British stock’ to fill the underpopulated Australian shores. Hence, it was
deemed \textit{necessary} to also import non-Britons. However, in order to pacify public
opinion, preference was initially given to refugees from Eastern Europe, whose fair
skin and hair could easily let them be exchanged for individuals of Nordic origin.\textsuperscript{354} On
the eve of the \textit{migration decade}, Arthur Calwell, the Labour Catholic Minister for
Immigration and the organiser of the post-WWII immigration schemes, had set up a
\textit{Displaced Person} programme, which was aimed at taking labourers from the WWII
refugee camps. It was presumed that those people would be willing to settle in order
to not have to return to their war-torn home countries; they would therefore be likely

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{347} Jupp, \textit{Immigration}, p. 73.
\item \textsuperscript{348} See, for example, A. C. Palfreeman, \textit{The Administration of the White Australia Policy}, Melbourne,
\item \textsuperscript{349} Jupp, \textit{Immigration}, p. 80.
\item \textsuperscript{350} Stratton, \textit{Race Daze}, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{351} Jupp, \textit{Immigration}, p. 103.
\item \textsuperscript{352} R. Appleyard with A. Ray and A. Segal, \textit{The Ten Pound Immigrants}, London, Boxtree Limited, 1988, p. 28.
\item \textsuperscript{353} J. Collins, ‘Immigration and Class: the Australian Experience’, in G. Bottomley and M. de Lepervanche
\item \textsuperscript{354} Jupp, \textit{Immigration}, p. 70.
\end{itemize}
to easily assimilate. Such program ran from 1947 to 1953 reflecting the prescriptions of the White Australia Policy.\textsuperscript{355} “Calwell’s policies”—in the view of Jupp, who finds the support of Stratton\textsuperscript{356}—were in fact “radical and innovative, but were still strongly influenced by consensual views on race, ethnicity and assimilation”.\textsuperscript{357} Jupp also pointed out that for this reason, “the first batches of Displaced Persons admitted in 1947 were deliberately chosen from blond and blue-eyed Balts, Poles and Ukrainians, as a precaution against local protests”.\textsuperscript{358}

At the beginning of the 1950s, migration agreements for assisted passages were set up with several European nations, including Italy.\textsuperscript{359} Italian migrants, whose uncertain Mediterranean (cultural) coloration did not top the list of preferences,\textsuperscript{360} had become a \textit{necessary nuisance} for the Australian government. The migrants perhaps were not even aware of it, but the skin colour and facial features of visa applicants were being assessed by Australian immigration officers at diplomatic posts overseas together with their supposed cultural suitability according to “the 75% rule”.\textsuperscript{361} this was established in 1956 to precisely mean that they had to be euphemistically declared to be at least “of 75% European origin”,\textsuperscript{362} and some Italians did not actually qualify.\textsuperscript{363} Also, they were thoroughly questioned about their political affiliation, and eventually rejected, as corroborated by the experience of generation 1 Nadia.

Although an Italian citizen, because she was born and raised in Romania, Nadia was automatically presumed to be a communist, which Cold War times would have rendered her undesirable in Australia. According to Jupp, the Australian government

\textsuperscript{355} Ibid., p. 104.  
\textsuperscript{357} Jupp, \textit{Immigration}, p. 104.  
\textsuperscript{358} Ibid. p. 65.  
\textsuperscript{359} Ibid. p. 108.  
\textsuperscript{361} Randazzo and Cigler, \textit{The Italians in Australia}, pp. 151-152.  
\textsuperscript{362} Jupp, \textit{Immigration}, pp. 81-82.  
\textsuperscript{363} Randazzo and Cigler, \textit{The Italians in Australia}, pp. 151-152.
apparently preferred to turn a blind eye to the past of Europeans who had had pro-Fascist tendencies during the conflict for the very reason that they were anti-communists. So reads my account of Nadia’s visa interview:

Nadia had to go to the Australian Embassy in Rome to undergo a long interrogation during which several agents asked her the same questions over and over again in the presence of an interpreter. But her father had not been a communist, she would repeatedly answer, and neither was her mother; her brother and sister were not communist, and she wasn’t one either.

Nadia was finally believed and granted permission to enter Australia. However, like the other Italians who passed the tests and made it in, this did not mean that she was going to be automatically accepted in society. She reported to have been treated well overall, but she also had to deal with what she delicately described as the “ignorance and bad manners”\textsuperscript{364} of some of the locals, who were upset about the fact that Italians had settled in Australia.

The absorption of Italians into Australian society was moreover rendered complicated by the fact that Italians had been war enemies only a few years earlier, which explains their exclusion from the Displaced Persons programme\textsuperscript{365} Generation 1.5 Virginia had indeed noticed that this was an issue:

I guess the idea of Italians to the majority of Australians is... Ok: we were their enemy in war, it’s all about that damn second world war [...] That’s where it all stems from. We betrayed the English! Because in the First World War we were with the... We were allies with the English, right? And that to the English is not a good thing to do, you know, ahm... And that’s how we were looked upon, a little bit, we were the traitors! They didn’t really put up with us, not the nuns, not the priests. We, we were accepted as people, but you know, ‘they stay over there and’... But... We weren’t... There might have been a few of genuine hearted people, a few, but not a whole, not a lot of them

\textsuperscript{364} Nadia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
\textsuperscript{365} Jupp, \textit{Immigration}, p. 104.
[...] It was too soon, we all came over too soon after the Second World [War] [my emphasis].

Such circumstances influenced the settling experience of the 1950s Italian women migrants to the extent that for the purpose of keeping Australia white in culture—whatever that meant—if not in appearances, they were required to abandon their traditions of origin and assimilate to ‘(White) Australian ways’.

The government intended to grant the new migrants with equality of access whilst reassuring Anglo-Saxon Australians about the fact that their country would not change: according to Murphy, in the early years, assimilation was “a mission of cultural homogenisation”. For this reason, as reported by Damousi, migrants were required to “disperse and integrate within the community, and become ‘invisible’ [my Italics]”. The arrival of the women was welcomed because families, and in particular children, represented “the cornerstone of state intervention on assimilation”. The adoption of English was especially considered the key step towards embracing the local system of values. Gillian Bottomley confirmed in this sense that language is “crucial to the process of identity formation, and”—as also noted in the Introduction—“habitus is strongly mediated by the assumptions implicit in language”. As indicated by Anna, learning English indeed represented a very important and excruciating step for both generation 1 and 1.5 informants. As will be noted below, for many women, it constituted a barrier that confined them to the domestic sphere, where they were easy targets of the patriarchal ‘Italian way of living’.

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366 Virginia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
367 Murphy, Imagining the Fifties, p. 153.
369 Ibid., p. 16.
370 Ibid., p. 17.
As a consequence of this ideology, the government did fund organisations—such as the Good Neighbourhood Council—supposedly aimed at guiding the assimilation of the migrants, but it did not provide specialised services to support the (unintelligible and undesired) culture-specific needs of the new (female) subjects. In spite of the good will invested, the efficiency of the help offered by government-funded groups was limited by the attitude with which they approached the issues at stake: ‘Old Australians’ didn’t know much about the background of the migrants that they were caringly attempting to integrate. Castles et al. described the situation in the following words:

In the early post-war years immigrants were expected to quickly assimilate into Australian society, and received little additional help in dealing with settlement difficulties, or problems of linguistic or cultural difference.

In spite of the government’s intentions, confusion ruled over what the migrants had to assimilate to. John Murphy noted that this added another challenge to the already complicated processes that they had to endure:

[Assimilation was difficult because the way of life was itself so imprecise; as some migrants complained, nobody could say precisely what it was they were supposed to adopt.

Nadia confirmed that at times she “didn’t know what was happening or how to behave”. Generation 1.5 Maria stressed that the women migrants were left on their own in the process of assimilation to the local habitus:

There was no transition: you arrived in a country... Pick up everything: pick up the laws, pick up the rules, pick up... ehm... Where to find the food... You know, how school

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372 Appleyard with Ray and Segal, The Ten Pound Immigrants, p. 27.
373 Murphy, Imagining the Fifties, p. 153.
374 Ibid., p. 163.
376 Murphy, Imagining the Fifties, p. 75.
377 Nadia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
works, at what age you’ve got to send your kids to school... You just had to pick it up! It seemed like, you know, there wasn’t the support... ahm... For people to... Seamlessly become part of... Even the... Not even the [non-comprehensible word]... Even culture, but even the way of doing things... The way things are run.

[...]
There was no support for changing from one thing to another [...] To have support to take on board the new ways of doing things... But the support to also have come off things... Like... Even back to the food... There wasn’t support for them to be able to have their Grana Padano and the mortadelles and all the stuff, salamis and things and everything... There was no support for them to continue doing that... But there was no support for them to also embrace Australia and what was expected of them in Australia [my emphasis].

Similarly to what had been happening in the United States, before their departure, the migrants were not always aware of the racial discourses that tinted the Australian socio-political scene, and their eventual position within it. According to the content of Anna’s narration, however, they immediately grasped that ‘becoming culturally white’—although they would not word it in this way—was an absolute necessity in order to succeed in the migration process. The extent to which this has actually happened, I argue, depended on individual cases. In the following section and in Chapter Five, I analyse how this instance was reflected in terms of gender relations: (how) was habitus maintained or modified? And what opportunities for emancipation and liberation did assimilation offer to the women migrants?

4.c) Estranged, Isolated Selves

With reference to the investigation of the emancipatory and/or liberatory function that migration had for the subjects of this study, I deem it important that Italian women were considered and often considered themselves other from the ‘imagined community’ to which they were required to assimilate, and so treated as such. This

378 Maria, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
had enormous repercussions on the lives of some of them, although it also paradoxically created some circumstantial and limited conditions for the emancipation of those who had the strength (and the possibility!) to overcome all the obstacles that were posed in front of them. Women migrants, noted Anna earlier in this chapter, could either “adapt or succumb”. In this section, I give voice to the experiences of both generations of informants to describe how the two possibilities related to the Italian habitus.

Generation 1.5 Gabriella, for example, who intertwined the story of her migration with that of her mother, spent a youth of sadness and segregation. For instance, she remembered her sense of disorientation and isolation on her first day of school, six months after her arrival: she did not know where she was and had no idea about what was happening around her. The generalised feeling of discomfort then transformed into what she described as a more clear sensation of being patently ignored, if not ostracised, because she was a migrant. She was not so much disturbed by the fact that she was called “mafia” by the other kids; what rather bothered her was an impalpable feeling of estrangement, predominantly due to an ensemble of practices from which she felt alien: “it was something subtler than patent racism” that made her feel out of place; “it was something engrained in the very system”.

In spite of the fact that she was an excellent student, she felt that the teachers were hostile towards her because she was Italian. Gabriella is convinced that the school actually contributed to letting her develop anger towards the (white) society that gravitated around her. She thinks that the teachers did not behave properly with the migrants and tried “to brainwash them”. no matter how good they were in fact, it seemed already decided that migrant girls would not go to university; they were therefore not encouraged to continue their education. So she decided to excel in everything she did, especially in English. Spurred by such necessity, "you grow up

380 Anna, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
381 Gabriella, interview with the author, 2010, Melbourne, VIC.
382 Ibid.
383 Ibid.
with the mentality that you must know it better than everybody else".\textsuperscript{384} she explained. And for this reason, in her family she has been "all her life the one who knows English",\textsuperscript{385} and—as said of Amanda in Chapter Two—she has from an early age been in charge of all translations and transactions, including banking and insurance, that required a mastery of the local idiom. "In a way, this gives you power", she made it clear: "you learn quicker".\textsuperscript{386} "As a [child] migrant", she furthermore made me aware that "you have to take responsibilities and mature earlier".\textsuperscript{387} Both her father and her Triestine ‘emancipated’ mother were very supportive of her, it must be noted, and encouraged her to go out and integrate.

What she found especially offensive, however, was during a geography lesson when the teacher depicted the inhabitants of the Italian peninsula as "stupidi analfabeti" ("stupid illiterates").\textsuperscript{388} On that day, she decided that she would have to become "more Italian"\textsuperscript{389} ... Which would not otherwise have been her intention: as mentioned in the Introduction, when we first met, she had proudly announced to me that she was "born in the Free Territory of Trieste [her emphasis]".\textsuperscript{390} And generally, Triestine independentists, meaning those who in view of the city’s history wanted Trieste to continue to constitute an autonomous territory, rather desired to \textit{detach} themselves from notions of Italian-ness.\textsuperscript{391}

Significantly, at a time when her feminist age-peers in Italy were beginning to question the power of the clergy, she started attending mass. She was an atheist in a family of atheists, and knew that Catholics were not always welcome in Australia— "No Catholics need apply",\textsuperscript{392} she remembers at times specified in work ads—but her

\textsuperscript{384} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{385} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{386} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{387} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{388} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{389} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{390} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{391} For the history of the Free Territory of Trieste, see, for example, Nelli, 1954, Addio Trieste, pp. 30-35.
\textsuperscript{392} Gabriella, interview with the author, 2010, Melbourne, VIC.
necessity to identify with a tradition, had even brought her to church. She in fact could not belong to what surrounded her. Or rather: she simultaneously did want and did not want to be part of it. She never particularly enjoyed the company of Italian girls from other parts of Italy because due to internal regional differences, they had very different lifestyles: the girls who wanted to be with her would go to the ball organised by the migrant communities accompanied by their mothers, and Gabriella was not used to being supervised. So she would end up going out with Australians, for whom it was a novelty to have an Italian in the group, but then Gabriella was never sure whether it was a good idea to join them or not.

Gabriella also revealed that perhaps her own experience of Australia was influenced by her mother’s disillusionment with what she found ‘down under’. Her mother never completely became accustomed to life in Melbourne: she never became fluent in English and never made peace with the fact that she had to give up the idea of having the vibrant social life, as I reported in Chapter Three, that she was used to have in Trieste. One evening, Gabriella and her mother had felt threatened in a cinema by the presence of the so-called ‘Bodgies and Widgies’—racist and violent groups of working-class youth—\(^{393}\) and henceforth they started avoiding going out at night by themselves. In Trieste, Gabriella’s mother had been employed as a shop assistant, but in Australia, she could only find a job in a factory, which she did not like, but this constituted her only opportunity because her qualifications were not recognised and she did not speak the language. For these reasons, at one point she really wanted to return to Trieste, but this was just not feasible. Overall, Gabriella considered that for her mother, the migration to Australia represented a reduction of her freedom and coincided with an involution of her social status as a woman.

Gabriella’s reporting of feeling degraded by teachers in school is not an isolated case; her narration matches the words pronounced in this sense by other generation 1.5 informants. “Assimilation was brutal, you became Australian, but you were still

\(^{393}\) Murphy, Imagining the Fifties, p. 75.
segregated, teachers were brutal!” 394 said Maria in this respect, who still clearly remembers how she was ignored in class despite being a “bright student”. 395 Virginia, who was instead sent to private Catholic schools, described the Sisters of Mercy as “tyrants” 396 who would deliberately pick on migrant children, who in turn would be wacked and blamed for everything that happened in class, and apparently “could never do anything right!” 397 Virginia had a hard time learning English, and left school during her early teenager years, like many women migrants of generation 1.5. This was also due to the fact that Italian parents would not always encourage the higher education of their female children: Aurora, Gelsomina’s daughter, who adored studying and would have loved to go to university like her brother, instead had to train to become a secretary; her parents considered that higher education “was not necessary” 398 for a girl, since she would then only marry. They hence did not spend money on her education.

The unassisted obligation to assimilate to local ways profoundly affected some of the women of generation 1 too. On the one hand, the requirement to (at least publicly) abandon old traditions and forget the past sometimes coincided with their own needs: Giannina and her husband were eager to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the memories of war; Rachele was very keen to forget the habitus of her hometown; Lidia told me that she did not mind filing away her life in Italy and that she was actually willing to embrace her new one in Australia, where she felt she could conduct her marriage in the way that she wanted, without interferences from the family of origin. Even Anna had peacefully accepted that she had to at least find a balance between the local habits and her own, no matter how difficult this was. On the other hand, the necessity to let go of who they used to be, which due to the distance also included letting go of family attachments, and the contextual lack of support to adhering to (wobbly notions of) ‘Australian ways’ created situations of great

394 Maria, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
395 Ibid.
396 Virginia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
397 Ibid.
398 Aurora, interview with the author, 2011, Cervignano del Friuli, Italy.
emotional distress that not all migrants were in the position to positively overcome. The Australian government wanted migrants to reject the habitus that they had put in their suitcases, and oversaw what migrating meant for many of them in terms of their emotional wellbeing.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the women migrants were used to living in very close communities before their departure, and at times with enlarged families in the same household. They were accustomed to physical proximity. Irrespective of the effects that this circumstance had on their personal freedom—just like a Panopticon,\textsuperscript{399} it contributed to social surveillance and hence making women conform to the patriarchal norm—it also translated into forms of solidarity. Both Anna and Claudia stated that such solidarity was necessary in conditions of extreme poverty and deprivation, like those often described by the migrants of generation 1.

In spite of the fact that she wanted to integrate, Anna did miss her family a lot. She noted that as a migrant she felt alone and that solidarity away from home cannot be taken for granted. As reported earlier in this chapter, the warmth of her family is what she confirmed to have missed the most during her early years in Australia. Similarly, Giannina wanted to start a new life overseas but felt a lot of \textit{nostalgia}, and—as indicated in Chapter Two—cried for twenty years. And according to Virginia (generation 1.5), her mother (generation 1), who had a very hard time integrating, was tremendously homesick in Brisbane, eventually having a breakdown that affected the whole family. The lack of assistance apparently exacerbated the condition of emotional deprivation as well as the ostracism.

So reads the exchange that I had with Virginia about her mother’s condition:

\begin{quote}
Anita: Going back to what we were saying before about this \textit{distance}, like the long distance and [the] many years of distance [...] between Italy and Australia, and the time of departure and the visit home [...] Your mother, from what you told me, really
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{399} Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}. 
suffered from nostalgia […] How did she cope with it? Did it have an effect on the lives of you daughters?

Virginia: Of course! She was ah… Very moody, she was very stressed, she was very ehm… Agitated! All the symptoms… All the symptoms of a nervous breakdown! Now that I am older I can see it, at the time of course, you know, you're ten and twelve and… Who, who knows about that stuff?! And also having lost a child in Australia, right?, 'cause she had, she had a… A miscarriage…

Anita: Yeah, I remember that.

Virginia: Ahm… In '54 I think it was, and losing her beloved father who died while she was here, ahm… Would have been absolutely… I, I don’t know how I would have coped… I… I don’t know how they coped! No assistance. No… What? Niente, nothing!

Anita: No support network.

Virginia: No support network!

Anita: Did they have, like… Friends they related to?

Virginia: They did, they did, but they were the oldest of all their friends, see? […] Everyone else was a lot, like ten years or more, younger […] There wasn’t an older person for her to go and talk to […] Or she never found anyone that she could actually speak to… [my emphasis]400

And thus we continued after Virginia had explained to me at length how her mother and father at least loved and supported one another:

Virginia: She used to take it out on us, she just used to take it out on us, and as I said to you, I was probably the one that got the most, but, you know, now that I’m older I understand that, you know, I really do, and that’s why he [Virginia’s father] sent her back to Italy by ship in ’62, you know, and she stayed with her mother, her mother was in her 90s, ahm… And I think she died the year after, yes, so her mother was still alive when she went back in ’62…

Anita: And that was good.

Virginia: That was very good for her. Yeah.401

Bottomley had pointed out as early as the mid-1980s402 that similar situations were not at all uncommon amongst migrant women. And things could even deteriorate for

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400 Virginia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
401 Ibid.
those women who, alone at the antipodes, were put in a position of having to adapt to the lifestyle of a population that they perceived to be as hostile, whilst they were subjected to the violence of the ‘Italian’ patriarchal habitus in the house. This was the case of generation 1.5 Rosanna and her mother. So reads my account of Rosanna’s storytelling:

The storytelling let the complicatedness of Rosanna’s childhood surface a little bit at a time, together with the strength and pride with which she’s nevertheless been able to transform a life that had commenced with great difficulties into one now full of joy. Apart from the poverty and the encumbrances of domestic work, Rosanna was forced to live her youth in a very strict regime and in a violent domestic environment marked by both physical and psychological abuse: in this scenario, she and her numerous sisters were allowed to have very few contacts outside of the family, they didn’t have friends, and it was therefore very important for them to be tied to each other by good and friendly relationships of mutual support, which, as a matter of fact, remain so even nowadays. Rosanna described that period of her existence as very frustrating: she felt like she was ‘missing out on her life’ and was ‘caught up in a net’, and could only do what was expected of her: endure suffering in silence. ‘Those are situations in which some people go crazy’—clarified Rosanna—‘some turn the other way’.

she was able to react positively and transform the hardships into harmony and affection; but she’s convinced that she didn’t go mad only for the love of her mother, whom she felt duty bound to support and assist.

Even though they were a bit freer than the females, her brothers had also suffered the personality of their ‘padre padrone’ [‘controlling and violent father’]. However, the one who suffered the most was the mother, who found the courage to secretly run away from home only two years prior to her death in the early 1990s. Rosanna does not feel any rancour towards her; rather, she considered her a saint; but she would have preferred that her mother had found the strength to react and escape from her husband sooner that when she did.

Ornella, who as mentioned in the Introduction used to be employed in women migrant-addressed services set up by the Australian government in the 1970s in a late

403 Rosanna, interview with the author, 2010, Gold Coast, QLD.
404 Ibid.
405 Ibid.
attempt to finally respond to their specific problems, provided her professional account of the life conditions of the subjects of this research. This is how our conversation proceeded with reference to the wellbeing of the women migrants, amongst whom addiction to psychopharmacological drugs had apparently become not a rarity:

Anita: You told me that it [the Leichhardt Centre in New South Wales] was funded by the Australian government at the end of the 1970s [...] and specifically addressed the exigencies of women migrants. So: what type of problems did you witness?
Ornella: Well, in particular domestic violence, the use and abuse of drugs, tranquillisers, ehm... Incest, we would then deal with a bit of everything, we did alternative therapies [...] I was particularly [appointed] to... Drugs, alcohol, incest, and domestic violence, and all the problems related to the cohabitation of the sexes, let's say.
Anita: But that also concerned men from Italy?
Ornella: Especially those [men] from Italy! [...] I shouldn't have but I used to be called even at night because these men would get drunk and threaten the wives.
Anita: Ah, but then there were problems with [domestic] violence in the Italian community?
Ornella: A lot of them. Of sexual violence ehm... And not only sexual.
[...]
Anita: And instead this problem related to the use of psychopharmacological drugs [that you told me about]... Was it to contain homesickness?
Ornella: Yes, to contain a bit everything, both the problems of violence, and to overcome the difficult moments of life [...] If they didn't have the tranquillisers next to the bedside table at night, they would feel bad and had therefore become dependent on the use of tranquillisers.
[...]
Anita: In what relationship were the women migrants with Australia?
Ornella: They felt out of the world because they didn't have... Many didn't speak English and were therefore alone. This is why they would come to the centre [...] To vent, to speak with someone about their... Their problems [...] They didn't feel they could openly talk to their children about the things that happened in the house. Wives that... Were abused by their husbands, forced to undergo certain sexual requests [...] They'd come there [to the centre] because they didn't know where to bang their heads anymore.
[...]
Anita: So the women of the Italian community were left to themselves quite a lot?
Ornella: Also because they would not even trust [anyone]: “To whom shall I go [to ask for help]?” [they would wonder].

Ornella then remarked that in her opinion, the visitors to the centre where she worked would have suffered similar treatments in their home country, where they would have moreover been prevented from seeking professional help on account of fear and “honour”. As narrated in Chapters Two and Three, men in Italy likewise abused their power in the family, and the women who opposed it had a good chance of finding themselves isolated from the community. From the late 1950s onwards, however, the ‘economic miracle’ did give some opportunities to Italian women to find a few, limited spaces for (financial) freedom in the country where they spoke the language. Also, before the rise of the feminist movement, the U.D.I., P.C.I., and trade unions did provide forms of protection, although these were limited to the politicisation of the women workers’ struggle. Furthermore, even within patriarchal

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406 Ornella, interview with the author, 2010, Sydney, NSW. My translation of:
“Anita: Mi hai detto che [il centro di Leichhardt] è stato finanziato dal governo Australiano alla fine degli anni 70 [...] specificatamente indirizzato alle esigenze delle migranti. Ecco: che tipo di problematiche affrontate?
Ornella: Dunque, soprattutto la violenza domestica, l’uso e abuso di droghe, tranquillanti, ehm… Incesti, cioè si trattava un po’ di tutto, si faceva medicina alternativa [...] io in particolare ero sulla… Su droga, alcol, incesti e violenza domestica, e tutte le problematiche della convivenza tra i due sessi, diciamo.
Anita: E che riguardavano comunque uomini anche italiani?
Ornella: [...] Soprattutto quelli italiani! [...] Non avrei dovuto ma venivo chiamata anche la notte perché questi uomini si ubriacavano e minacciavano le mogli.
Anita: Ah ma quindi all’interno della comunità italiana c’erano problemi di violenza?
Ornella: Moltissimi. Violenza sessuale ehm… Non solo sessuale.
[...]
Anita: E invece questo problema dell’uso degli psicofarmaci [di cui mi dicevi]… Era per arginare la nostalgia di casa?
Ornella: Sì, per arginare un po’ tutto, sia i problemi di violenze, e per superare i momenti difficili della vita [...] Se la notte non avevano i tranquillanti vicino al comodino si sentivano male e quindi erano diventate [...] dipendenti dall’uso dei tranquillanti.
[...]
Anita: In che rapporto stavano le donne migranti con l’Australia?
Ornella: Si sentivano fuori dal mondo perché non avevano… Molte non parlavano l’inglese e quindi erano sole. Ecco perché venivano al centro [...] Per sfogarsi, per raccontare a qualcuno le proprie… I propri problemi [...] Con i figli non si sentivano di poter parlare apertamente di cose che succedevano in casa. Mogli che… Abusate dal marito obbligate a sottostare a certe richieste sessuali […] Venivano lì perché non sapevano più dove sbattere la testa.
[...]
Anita: Quindi le donne della comunità italiana erano abbastanza lasciate a se stesse?
Ornella: Anche perché loro non si fidavano neanche: ‘Da chi vado?’”

407 Ibid.
family networks, a woman was likely to nonetheless find some support from siblings or cousins, even though it might have not been publicly acknowledged. In Australia, instead, the Italian women migrants were on their own.

Thus continued my conversation with Ornella:

Anita: And how did the migrant condition worsen these problems?  
Ornella: Because they didn't know where to turn to. In fact, this worsened the situation, because their husbands knew where not to... That the wives had no contact with anyone, and therefore they abused their, let's say, power in the family.\(^{408}\)

As opposed to what I had assumed at the eve of this research, life for Italian women seems to have been even more difficult in Australia than in Italy, at least initially, due to the fact that they did not speak the language and were in a country that they perceived as foreign and perceived them to be foreign, if not hostile. The government's late understanding of women migrants' condition and the consequent delay in relative policing, in tandem with the state's actual initial intention to have migrants disperse in Australian society, resulted in a failure to promptly create the support networks on which they could have relied. Moreover, those who might have wanted to do so were offered no institutional opportunities to escape the Italian customs, which often translated into domestic violence. As noted above and to be further discussed in Chapter Six, some support centres were only set up in the mid-1970s, when feminism was already inoculating the seeds of gender revolt into the minds of (middle-class and/or educated) women in Italy.

Notably, some informants reported that the cases of abuse were partly known about and tacitly acknowledged within the gossiping circles of migrant associations. The clubs, however, were predominantly set up as early as the 1950s to make up for the

\(^{408}\) Ibid. My translation of:  
"Anita: E la condizione di migranti come peggiorava questi problemi?  
Ornella: E perché non sapevano dove rivolgersi. Il peggioramento era questo, perché i mariti sapevano dove non... Che le mogli non avevano contatto con nessuno, e quindi loro abusavano del loro, diciamo così, potere nella famiglia"
migrants’ need to create cultural communities that could also provide some of the assistance that the government had not put at their disposal. They were male-dominated structures that were aimed at (im)possibly reproducing the same habitus of the (patriarchal, 1950s) cultures of origin. As said in Chapter Three, such cultures were blind in respect to women’s emotional suffering and fostered a high level of abuse on them (not to be forgotten, whilst women would go to jail for adultery, rape was legally condoned by men who then proposed a remedial marriage and it was not even considered a crime by the Italian legislation if carried out by the husband within the bounds of marriage). Hence, it was unlikely that in such spaces, mistreatments would be allowed to surface or even recognised to start with. Significantly, these stories were narrated to me by the women of generation 1.5, and by a person who had professional experience in the field.

The migrants of generation 1.5 felt the weight of being other(-ed) from the ‘Australian-ness’ that they had to adhere to, especially in schools where they were given few opportunities to enhance their position in society through formal education. Admitting they had the support of the family, which was not always the case, to achieve this they had to excel. Yet sometimes excelling was not sufficient. Migration seems to have allowed them to take responsibilities that they would not have otherwise had in Italy; some managed to turn this into an empowering experience; others succeeded in escalating the patriarchal family hierarchy. But their emancipation was left to their individual qualities and possibilities, and to their circumstances at home. In the next chapter, I will analyse how the migrants of generation 1.5 interfaced with the ‘Italian’ habitus that was upheld within the domestic walls.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I exemplified through the story of Anna the Italian women migrants’ process of settlement in 1950s and 1960s Australia. I described how the women of
generation 1 looked for opportunities to construct a *better future* for themselves and their families, and how they were unsupported in coping with the challenges that migration added to the hardships already allocated to them at birth because of their gender. Estrangement and isolation did not assist in coming to terms with the phantoms that they were required to adhere to, and at times rather aggravated situations of distress and abuse. Distance moreover forcibly detached the generation 1 migrants from their families of origin, no matter how repressive and authoritarian they had been (admitting their recognition of their family relationship as such to start with), thus leaving them without points of reference. Fears of racism restricted the freedoms of those urbanites who, like Gabriella’s mother, had already reached a degree of personal emancipation before departure.

The hostility received on the part of some local communities, favoured by the ideology on which the immigration policies were officially based, hindered the emancipation of the women of generation 1.5, by rendering education a discouraging (and discouraged) activity for example. Some of them, however, changed oppression into a spur to excel in school and, as also noted in Chapter Two with reference to the experience of Amanda, some were empowered by their extra responsibilities because of their very migrant condition within their families.

In the next chapter, I analyse the emancipatory potential that the socio-economic policies of the post-WWII Menzies governments paradoxically had on part of the women migrants of both generations.
CHAPTER FIVE

WORK AND FAMILY IN SUBURBAN AUSTRALIA

In Chapter Four, I analysed how the assimilationist agenda of the Australian government affected the emancipation of the women migrants. In this chapter, I examine the possibilities offered to them by the post-WWII Australian socio-economic policies in terms of emancipation. I then discuss the way in which migration influenced the detachment from the previous generations. To do so, I give voice to generation 1.5 Virginia’s experiences. I then intertwine her stories with those of scholars and other informants: my scope is to indicate the points where the lives of the women migrants tuned in with and/or countered the habitus promoted by the narratives of Robert Menzies’ Australia. In view of the results of the above investigation, I finally conduct an analysis of Virginia’s inter-generational concerns to discuss how migration can act as a liberatory force.

5. a) Virginia’s Homes

Virginia was born in 1946 in Pozzecco, a small Friulan countryside suburb administered by the municipality of Bertiolo and lying on the outskirts of the provincial city of Udine. She was the second of four sisters in a family of land-owning peasants. She has few memories of her childhood in Friuli. Amongst her happy recollections, she reported those related to the times spent on the corn-skins mattress of her auntie Lavinia, a “spinster” whom she remembers as a very cosy and affectionate woman. Amongst the less pleasant ones, she listed her paternal...

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409 Virginia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
grandmother Genoveffa, described as a “bitter” and “very frustrated” old lady, who always dressed in black and seems to have had no mercy for her female granddaughters, whom she did not feed enough and oppressed. According to Virginia, everybody despised her, even her own husband. Genoveffa was the financial administrator of the family assets and was very angry at her son Luca (Virginia’s father) for not having produced any male offspring. For this reason, she would grant him just enough money to get by, in spite of the fact that Luca was the one who actually worked the fields.

Virginia described her father as “very Friulan”, specifying that he was “very strongly opinionated, a hard worker, but humorous”. He was also a man very concerned about fulfilling the material needs of his clan: “he did everything for his family”, although he apparently was a bit “emotionally cut-off”. According to Virginia, he could hardly cope with his mother Genoveffa’s domestic ruling, by which he was completely overrun. So in 1951, tired of the material restrictions enforced on him and his family by his own parent, Luca decided to migrate. He first went to do some seasonal work in the Friulan mountains and then accepted a construction job in Australia, hired by a French contractor. He was already 44, quite an advanced age in those days, especially to start a migration process, but in Virginia’s view, he still “wanted to get away and do something”, which translated into having money in his pocket and managing his own life. He did no longer want to (have to) live anywhere near his oppressive mother. He immediately found what he was looking for: “he said Australia was heaven”, Virginia recalled, and a year later, his wife and daughters joined him in Queensland.

410 Ibid.
411 Ibid.
412 Ibid.
413 Ibid.
414 Ibid.
415 Ibid.
416 Ibid.
Virginia was 6 years old when she first crossed the seas, and she found the journey quite pleasant: her paternal grandfather, who was a relatively wealthy peasant, had paid the family’s fare in a first-class top deck cabin, where they were served plenty of food and could keep separate from the (unappreciated lower-class manners and hygienic standards of the) other passengers. As soon as they arrived, Virginia’s family of origin settled in a rented apartment. Her parents, however, immediately organised themselves to buy their own place: “we arrived in Brisbane [in 1952]”—narrated Virginia—“and they [her parents] wanted a house in a commission home in Zillmere (QLD). But their, ah... Requests were denied. So then dad started working down on the Gold Coast (QLD)”.

When he found ahm... It was so much better down there [at the Gold Coast] because there was a lot more work, he can come and go as he wanted... He, he found the ideal block of land. I think it was for 250 pounds. And of course, shortly after, he needed to build the house. He got my cousin Giacomo to help with the block-work, and they did it all themselves, I don’t think they even had an architect [laugh]... It was all on the paper plan! [...] It must have been the most amazing thing... How they got the dimensions, and how they got... I have no idea how they would have done all of that! [...] I think they must have just metered it out by foot: ‘this is how big the house, this is how big the bedrooms’... One bathroom, three bedrooms, an open lounge and kitchen, which is very modern today, and that’s it! And he built everything himself, the ehm... The ‘mobile’ [in Italian in the original]—what do you call it?—the ‘divider’ between the lounge and the kitchen—because he was a cabinet maker... A kind of a cabinet maker, he liked to think, you know... He was more of a carpenter, and he did the divider himself, with the cupboard in the middle, and the glass cabinet at the top, and the space for the old radio and... ah... He was, he was very ingenious my dad. Very, very ingenious. And to them, you know, having lived in Italy with the family, or with his mother, and of course nothing was theirs, and as I said, you know, for them being here from ’52—well, dad ’51, but ’52—to ’56 in four... Four years or so they had their own house! Admittedly, they had to pay it off, but that was just... Everyone! That was just their dream! They had to have their own place!  

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417 Ibid.
418 Ibid.
And yet, in spite of having fulfilled Virginia's parents' (material) dream, as mentioned in Chapter Four, the migration process severely undermined the family's wellbeing.

According to Virginia, upon departure, her mother Augustina seemed very happy to reach her husband overseas. Augustina was from a richer family and had to fight against the will of her father to marry. That of Virginia's parents was hence "a marriage of total love".\textsuperscript{419} Virginia is actually convinced that her mother was so keen to depart that she did not even bother checking where exactly the boat was heading: Australia or Argentina would have been the same for her, as long as she could be with her very much missed husband again. However, in Australia, she soon found herself "isolated",\textsuperscript{420} thousands of kilometres away from her own beloved parents and relatives.

In Chapter Four, I reported Virginia's words about how she now understands that Augustina was probably taking her emotional struggle out on her daughters. But when she was a child, Virginia could not figure out why her mother—whom she synthetically described as "the hard hand of the law"\textsuperscript{421}—was so tough with her and her sisters, a fact that did not at all leave her unaffected. She was particularly concerned about the insensitivity demonstrated by her mother in letting her know that nonna Genoveffa, Augustina's mother-in-law, had nearly let Virginia die of "malnutrition"\textsuperscript{422} when she was little. Virginia and her sisters would often be under the supervision of their grandmother whilst their parents were working in the fields in Friuli. And based on what Augustina later told Virginia, who at the time was too young to figure out what was happening to her, it was in those occasions that Genoveffa would hardly feed her granddaughters, thus bringing Virginia in particular to the verge of starvation. Apparently, this was due to the fact that they were females, and hence not worthy of nourishment.

\textsuperscript{419} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{420} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{421} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{422} Ibid.
Virginia and I discussed that there was perhaps a hint of sadism in such a non-
necessary release of information: why had her mum wanted her to be aware of the
details of how she had been vilified and humiliated by her own ancestor? Was it to
make her daughter accustomed to the hardships that a woman supposedly had to
cope with in life? To unconsciously convey to her the unspoken, but implicitly
understood and commonly accepted rules related to her gender role? To disillusion
her about affection from a very early age, so that she was prepared for later
disappointments? Or to unconsciously pass on to her daughter the feeling of
worthlessness that a woman of her condition can be assumed to have been likely to
harbour inside of herself? Ultimately, as described in Chapter Three, in Italy, women’s
subordination to (the order of) men was entrenched in the minds of the individuals,
including those of women, via the intertwining of state legislation, social practices,
and religious beliefs. Would Augustina have actually acknowledged her mother-in-
law’s behaviour as vilifying and humiliating at the outset? Or was hers a way of
validating her constrained choice to remain in Australia, away from the woman who
starved her children, although deep down she wanted to repatriate?

Or was that painful disclosure—I later speculated—Augustina’s way, no matter how
twisted, to express her inner discomfort with what she had witnessed and lived
through? Was Augustina’s, I mean, a sort of pre-feminist form of ‘autocosciencia’?
Perhaps Augustina did not consciously recognise as such the emotional violence that
from my point of view had been inflicted on her by both her mother-in-law and her
father, who had long impeded her marriage of love; in order to do so, one must feel
entitled to her emotions, which, as noted in the Preface, may require a process of
detachment from those (the parents) whose silent and/or explicit narratives might
have framed such emotions as ‘non-living’, and hence ‘non-grievable’ to put it in
Butler’s terms.423 However, she might have still subconsciously perceived to have been
treated unfairly, and tried to convey this knowledge to her daughter through the only
means that she had at disposal. These very intimate matters, connected in unclear

423 Butler, Frames of War.
ways to the question of her migrant mother’s emotional distress that was exacerbated by distance, troubled Virginia’s mind throughout the story-telling process.

In any case, not long after their arrival in Australia, Virginia’s parents had the chance to take their family back to Italy. In such a way, they could have eventually re-united with their ‘original selves’ (admitting they really wanted to), and hence supposedly avoided the dramatic isolation by which Augustina, in Virginia’s view, felt surrounded and overwhelmed. Yet they rejected the possibility because they would have found themselves in the same housing condition and financial trap from which they had travelled that far in order to escape. Virginia synthesised the concept in the following way:

Anita: Did they ever think about going back and building a house back in Italy—your parents, I mean?
Virginia: After ... I think I told you in my initial interview: when my paternal grandmother wrote to my father to say ‘Please Luca, come back, I need you to work the farms’... And dad wrote back to her to say, ‘Yes, I will come back, and I will work for you, if I can run the finances’. And she [Genoveffa] said no. So that was the end of the story.424

He needed to be free from the suffocating family ties that would have otherwise continued to result from the domestic power structure, which was a matter strictly entangled with the management of the family finances. So Virginia’s family of origin remained in Australia, in spite of Augustina’s emotional struggle, nostalgia for her family of origin, and enormous difficulties with assimilation.

Both Augustina and Luca earned wages in Queensland—he was employed as a carpenter and she as a factory worker—and they could therefore afford to rely on (and even share the decision-making with!) themselves only. Indeed, a fair amount of money had started to circulate in the house; and although the family rule was that “no

424 Virginia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
biugnave spindi bês”\(^425\) (literally, “money must not be spent”, but it has to be noted that in this case, the Friulan expression is equivalent to “money must not be wasted”)—Virginia was not happy with the senseless restrictions that ensued from it—this allowed the nucleus to live independently and in comfort. This, back home, would have been an absolutely unattainable goal.

Yet, for Virginia, the first few years in Australia were not easy either. As already hinted in Chapter Four, she had difficulties with the nuns in school and with the learning of English, which undermined her confidence. Her older sister became fluent quicker, and for this reason, she was put in charge of all of the family’s translations from the age of 12. Also, Virginia felt “harassed”\(^426\) by the local children, was called “wino”\(^427\) (a racist expression used to denigrate the supposedly wine-drinking Italian migrants), and since she was particularly “cheeky”\(^428\) she would receive the largest share of beatings on the part of her emotionally challenged mother. In general, she said, she was torn between two worlds: what can be described as her distressed mother’s harsh and somehow disdainful ‘wealthy peasant Friulan’ customs in the house, which included tough discipline and minimising contact with outsiders, and the ostracising ‘(white) Australian way of living’ that she was required to adhere to outside of the domestic walls. Augustina, who is reported to have been strongly influenced by the class mentality of her family of origin, seemed to desire to (im)possibly preserve her house environment from external (white Australian and Friulan lower-class) contamination. The process also passed through the seclusion of her daughters, who were prevented from playing with other kids. Was she attempting to retain her ‘Italy’ for herself in the domus? Not surprisingly, Virginia felt she was “not able to fit”.\(^429\)
Virginia left school at the age of 13 to work in a trouser factory. At 16, she was then employed for a few years as a “sartorie”\(^{430}\) (tailor) in a boutique, which she liked much more than the alienating factory environment, and because there she could finally have a rapport with her co-workers, who—she made clear— instructed her on contraception and sexuality. Indeed, I had the impression that it was in the boutique that Virginia has actually started to stitch together the gap between her and the world around her.

In spite of the strict behavioural regulations under which she was put in the house, she and her sisters were free to choose their boyfriends and to marry whom they wanted. So in 1967, Virginia married Silvestro, a generation 1 Friulan migrant who was in the construction industry, and she started her own business as “designer of dresses”.\(^{431}\) They then established themselves in the new house that they built in the Gold Coast, near her parents, and began to have children.

From 1975 until 1979, Virginia ran a boutique with Ada, a dear Triestine friend of hers. It was a beautiful period of life, as the shop represented a very fulfilling experience: the pair had organised themselves in such a way that they could be productive whilst supporting each other in looking after the family and children. In her words, “to be a mother, a business woman, and a house keeper, was hard, but good”.\(^{432}\) Her husband, she stressed, helped with the housework, too. Everything ran relatively smoothly for Virginia and Silvestro until when, in 1980, they discovered that the Italian government had started sponsoring the return of the migrants to the home country. She would not have been particularly interested in moving back to Friuli, but Silvestro was very keen to go back: he owned some land in the small town in the Province of Pordenone where he is from, and thought that he could easily build a house on it. He then convinced her to go.

\(^{430}\) Ibid.
\(^{431}\) Ibid.
\(^{432}\) Ibid.
So in 1981, they packed up their Australian existences and relocated overseas. Silvestro was really happy to be there from the very start, but whether Italy—or rather, a small town in the hybrid Venetian-Friulan speaking Province of Pordenone—could have become home for her, too, remained unclear for a while. Ultimately, she had lived all her life in Australia and had become used to what it offered her. There were definitely some aspects of the Australian lifestyle that she did not like, but others that she tremendously appreciated. One of the latter, she said to me, was the fact that children would be in school well into the afternoon, thus granting some free time to their mothers, whilst in Italy in those days (my school days!), lessons would only take place in the morning, including Saturdays; kids would go home for lunch and play sport or study independently for the rest of the day. When I was a schoolgirl, I told her, I personally enjoyed this timetable, as I could eat at home and have a lot of freedom of movement; but both Virginia and I knew that such a life structure actually meant that an adult had to be there every day to prepare the meals and supervise the children’s activities. Since men traditionally worked outside the house and were not culturally expected to look after the offspring, unless there was a retired grandparent available, in spite of the emancipationist efforts entailed in the left parties’ policies, it was the women who generally had to sacrifice their lives and careers to stay at home. Virginia immediately found this unusual commitment to be very frustrating: as mentioned above, in Australia, she had found it possible and gratifying to conjugate work and family. Such a drastic change in the circumstances meant a great deal to her. I speculated that it implied she would have had to (re-?)become someone else. To re-adjust to a (nevertheless already changing) habitus that had been lost in migration.

Also, Virginia was not happy with the type of employment that Silvestro had found at the NATO Air Base in nearby Aviano (Italy): in Australia, he used to be self-employed, and she preferred it to continue to be this way. But the construction industry had immediately proved to be a lobby extremely difficult to enter, especially for an outsider, like returned migrant Silvestro. Most importantly, however, although they had immediately started the procedure to build their new house, they found that Italian bureaucracy was unbelievably slow for their Australian standards. Ten months
down the line nothing had yet been accomplished in that sense: due to administrative complications completely beyond their control, the building permit was still far from being issued, and they soon understood that the actual construction would have had to be postponed to a later, non-definable date. Virginia did not take the news well. “I’m going home”\(^{433}\) is what she then said to her husband. Her home, she decided, was in Brisbane.

For the second time in less than a year, she packed up their lives and put the whole family on a plane, but this time, one destined for Australia. She was sorry Silvestro had to leave his very much missed family of origin and his very much appreciated Friulan (by then provincial middle-class) lifestyle, but the impossibility of having their own house constructed in a reasonable timeframe constituted an insuperable obstacle to her process of settlement—in a country that was (not) her own. She wanted her space, her way of living. She was accustomed to a different type of womanhood.

In 1982, Virginia and her family were back in Queensland, and immediately built the house where much of her storytelling occurred and where I enjoyed visiting her. During one of our intense sessions, Virginia showed me four photographs that depict her family of origin in the process of building their first house in Australia. Significantly, her choice of images seemed to metaphorically portray the strict relation between the material construction of the house and the process of settlement and integration, which seems to be a recurrent theme of her trans-continental life story.

In the first picture (photograph 1), the sight of which left me quite baffled at first, Virginia stands with a pot in her hands next to her three sisters, her mother, her father and her recently arrived cousin Giacomo outside the tent in which I later learnt the whole nucleus at times lived during that period. They all seemed very poorly dressed. Next to them are piled some bricks, supposedly ready to be laid, but—who knows?—uninformed eyes could assess that they were just placed there for no particular reason. Indeed, had I not known that the photo was taken in 1955 at Mermaid Beach

\(^{433}\) Ibid.
on the Gold Coast, I would have said that it portrayed a family of war refugees, like those that I had seen living on the side of the streets in Khartoum (Sudan) in 2004, senselessly surrounded by garbage and objects of no use, with no real shelter above their heads and no access to any facilities. The photograph, as I soon discovered, does not provide a completely accurate image of how things actually stood for the family: Virginia’s family of origin spent at the worksite, and therefore existed in extremely deprived conditions, most of their weekends and free time, but, as mentioned above, they were meanwhile also renting a proper place in Brisbane, where the girls mostly lived during the school terms. The camping was partly a free choice and partly a necessity related to being near the building site. In any case, the image seems to provide a representation of, and time-wise coincides with, Virginia’s mother emotional displacement, I later considered.

In the second picture of the series (photograph 2), the family is depicted whilst actively laying the bricks of the perimeter. The house structure is being put in place, and everybody seems to be contributing to its development, or at least, to have been given a role in the process. To my European eyes, the site also gives the impression of being located in the middle of the bush: the place could in fact have been hundreds of miles away from any form of civilisation... And really, although the Gold Coast had at that very time started to become the densely inhabited area that it now is, for the standards of an individual brought up in a highly populated territory like Italy, Mermaid Beach in the 1950s must have looked like a desert at the side of a long beach. I then wondered how Virginia’s parents, used to such different landscapes, and especially her mother, had felt about it: he thought Australia was heaven, but isolation was both an emotional and a very physical fact to deal with.

In the third image (photograph 3), taken in 1956, the house is finished and the family stands in front of it wearing their best Sunday dresses, all ready to go to mass. The

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previously unidentifiable edifice that could be glimpsed on the right hand side of the second picture can now be recognised as their neighbour’s house: Virginia and her family of origin were not as isolated as it seemed; other people lived right next to them, whether they could envision and/or have contacts with them or not. A fence had, however, been built in between to trace the border and securely confine the privacy of the property. The car that connected the (post-WWII white Australian) family to the world is sheltered under a carport, linked to the house by a neat concrete path adorned with some pot plants. Significantly, the structure of the house itself represents a real innovation with respect to the family's housing habitus: it looks nothing like the multi-level, predominantly semi-detached buildings with much smaller windows and entrances commonly found in northern, crowded countryside Italy.

In the fourth image (photograph 4), which seems to constitute the perfect portrayal of Robert Menzies’ ideas of *privatised happiness* that I will describe in the following section, the nucleus is finally (and for Friulans of their status, non-orthodoxically!) sitting on the floor inside the premises: guarded by the house cat, they have taken possession of *their* space. The atmosphere looks very relaxed, and the angle from which the photo is taken *frames* the apparently happy family within the geometric layout constituted by the partitions and steps: the house is the cornice, and the family members are the living characters of the picture played within it. As they are sitting at the forefront, they allow very little of the seemingly still bare and mostly empty inside to be seen. From the photographer/outsider’s perspective, it is hard to say what is contained on the premises. Only what I was specifically told to be an owner-built piece of furniture is proudly displayed behind the character’s backs. The inner doors lead instead to other internal, *seemingly* dark spaces, inaccessible to strangers, the actual essence of which can only be imagined by external viewers.

As opposed to what happened in Italy, where, as outlined in Chapter Three, for the sake of preserving morality, gossiping about other people’s *private* affairs was considered a perfectly acceptable (if not even necessary!) activity, and where the
domestic space was not rarely to be shared with and hence regulated by the power structures entailed in the layout of the enlarged family, what happened behind the door of the house built by Virginia’s migrated parents at Mermaid Beach (QLD) was nobody else’s business but their own. They could choose whom to invite into their lives and whom to leave out, without having to abide by the social rules implied in the (well-off peasant) Friulan habitus of the time. Such freedom of choice was given to them by the fact that, having migrated, they could distance themselves from their traditional way of living—had they wished to do so—and earn their own, and in this respect absolutely necessary, financial independence. As seen above, however, Virginia’s mother wanted the domestic space to continue to be ruled according to the customs and morality that she and her husband had brought with them from overseas. As also already noted in Chapter Four, this new condition nonetheless deprived her of the controversial support eventually given by family networks, leading her to live in isolation.

I will further analyse my experience of exploring Virginia and her mother’s relations to their home(s) and how this translated in terms of habitus in the later sections of this chapter. Before doing so, I intend to provide an outline of the 1950s (white) Australian notions of domesticity that are portrayed by Virginia’s photos and show how they applied to and intertwined with the women migrants’ existences. What I intend to underline is how they affected their emancipation into Australian society.

5.6) Privatised Happiness

In spite of the differences of opinion regarding the outcome of that period, there seems to be an agreement amongst traditional historians about the fact that the politics of post-WWII Australia were enormously influenced by the ideology of Robert Menzies, who was Prime Minister from 1949 until 1966.435 The so-called Forgotten

435 See, for example, J. R. Nethercote and J. Warhurst (ed.), The Menzies Era, Maryborough, VIC, Hale and Iremonger, Australian Print Group, 1995; D. Horne, Death of the Lucky Country, Melbourne, Penguin
People speech that he delivered on the radio in 1942 is considered his political manifesto and the roadmap on which his policies were then based. It was specifically addressed to the middle class,\textsuperscript{436} meaning to the supposedly ‘forgotten people’. The values that Menzies attributed to it were those around which the hopes and aspirations of both the Old and New Australians had to be moulded. Such values were those of independence (especially from the state), self-reliance, and individualism.\textsuperscript{437}

Importantly, in Menzies’ view, the middle class was “that class that was no class”,\textsuperscript{438} meaning that it constituted an abstract, overarching, and borderless entity that allowed upward social mobility: one could eventually enter it just by adhering to its (imaginary) standards of lifestyle and behaviour. Migrants could then supposedly access it. Brett pointed out that in Menzies’ speech the middle class was presented as a “moral category”:\textsuperscript{439} that on which the ‘Australian way of living’ leaned economically. Although, as outlined in Chapter Four, what actually constituted the 1950s ‘Australian way of living’ was not always clear, in Menzies’s vision, it appealed to the ‘privatisation of happiness’, meaning the aspiration of expressing the self in suburbia through local (middle-class) forms of “containment” and “enthusiastic domesticity”.\textsuperscript{440} Australian-ness was then ascribed to notions of home-ownership-centred individualism, autonomy from the state, detachment from the public realm, self-sufficiency, and self-regulation.\textsuperscript{441}

The (image of the) home-owning nuclear (heterosexual) family—breadwinning father, dependant mother, and children—was key to the moulding process and hence heavily favoured by the government through substantial, although invisible and therefore stigma-free subsidies conveyed via the taxation system to those willing to abide to the

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Books Australia, 1976; Murphy, Imagining the Fifties; J. Brett, Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People, Sydney, Macmillan, 1992.

\textsuperscript{436} Brett, Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{437} Murphy, Imagining the Fifties, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{438} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{439} Brett, Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{440} Murphy, Imagining the Fifties, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{441} Ibid., p. 66.
model.\footnote{Ibid., p. 87.} Reliance on welfare was instead taken as a sign of weakness and as such discouraged. “Separate but equal”\footnote{Ibid., p. 28.} was according to Murphy the slogan that supposedly regulated family life. Household roles in 1950s Australia were defined along gendered lines: “partnership”, reports the work of the historian, “meant having equal shares but different spheres”.\footnote{Ibid.} Women were the housekeepers, men the breadwinners. Such division found currency in the media and was also endorsed at an official level by the arbitration system that set women’s wages at three-quarters of those of men—because “only male wages needed to be sufficient to support a family”.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 36-37.} Fred Alexander emphasised that the possibility of women working, especially \textit{before marriage}, was not excluded,\footnote{F. Alexander, \textit{Australia since Federation: a Narrative and Critical Analysis}, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson, 1967, p. 323.} as it was believed that it could contribute to letting them reach a greater degree of self-fulfilment, thus enhancing domestic stability; but the primary duty of a good wife was thought to be towards her husband and children.\footnote{Murphy, \textit{Imagining the Fifties}, p. 48.} Indeed, families with two incomes were also penalised by the legislation through heavier taxation.\footnote{Ibid., p. 89.} So in the 1950s and 1960s, it was “unusual for married middle-class women born in Australia to work [my Italics]”.\footnote{Ibid., p. 36.}

Even child endowment, which was paid directly to women because of their supposed better knowledge of the needs of their children compared to men’s, was not supposed to represent a concession towards ‘women’s liberation’, but a reinstatement of women’s identity as mothers and homemakers.\footnote{Ibid., p. 88.} Just like what I described in Chapter Three to be happening at the same time in Italy, post-WWII Australian institutions and mainstream society then conceived of women “as framed within marriage [my Italics]”.\footnote{Ibid., p. 43.} Brett believes that Menzies’ political agenda was accurately
articulated around the position of women in the home, as they contributed to sustaining the political currency that regarded domesticity. The author then proposes that this reinforcement of women’s traditional role had paradoxically “made it easier for the needs of women in the home to be articulated as political demands, for the problems of the private and domestic sphere to become political”. Importantly, in Brett’s opinion, “a generation before the women’s movement, Menzies was politicising the non-political”.

Nonetheless, if this was true for the Anglo middle class, in view of what is reported about them in Chapter Four, this does not necessarily seem to have applied to the case of the struggling-to-assimilate women migrants, who in the 1950s had no means to give voice to their moreover non-English-speaking condition. And, as will be further described in Chapter Six, it must in this respect be additionally noted that the Italian women migrants of generation 1 in particular, had little or no contact with the (white, middle-class) 1970s Australian feminist movement.

5.2.1) The 1950s Italian Women Migrants’ Suburban Domesticy

Irrespective of whether the local trade unions and later the feminist movement had taken notice of it or not, waged employment was frequent amongst post-WWII generation 1 women migrants. Significantly, the middle-class goals of their migrant families but working-class earning capacity actually contributed to putting them in the paradoxical situation of having to fail to assimilate in order to assimilate to the promoted standards of mainstream white middle-class Australia. In Post-WWII Australia, “Italian men and women”, as explained by Pavla Miller, “were recruited to

452 Brett, Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People, p. 56.
453 Ibid.
454 Ibid.
456 Murphy, Imagining the Fifties, p. 36.
fill the menial jobs that native-born Australians and immigrants from Britain vacated”. And thus she continues:

Men's pay was below that required to maintain a family with three children ‘in modest comfort’. But if men took two jobs rather than one, and their wives another, even people who came only with their suitcases could purchase a home—and with it the security and dignity they dreamed of.457

Not all of the Italian women migrants to Australia worked outside the house. However, as confirmed by my informants during fieldwork, it was especially to contribute towards the payment of the first house that those of them who did work initially began earning wages. “When Nadia and her husband decided to buy a house [in Australia]”, reads my account of Nadia’s story, “she had to go to work in order to contribute to the expenses. She had not become fluent in English yet, but she was self-confident and a quick learner, and then immediately found employment at a cannery”.

As hinted at earlier in this chapter, the same had to be done by Virginia’s mother, who also worked at a cannery. And Anna, Rachele, and Gelsomina all worked outside the house for the very same reason. In Chapter Four, I described how Gabriella’s mother was forced to stick to an unsatisfying factory job to make ends meet and help her family live independently; had she refrained from doing so, she and her loved ones would have had to share their house with other people and/or exist in very poor conditions.

Notably, home ownership and independent living were at the core of the Menzies’ agenda, but as emphasised by Baldassar, they were also the driving force behind the generation 1 informants’ migrations, whose aim was to find a “sistemazione”.458 Rachele, for example, migrated in order to be able to buy a luxurious house “cul

campanel” (“with a door bell”),\textsuperscript{459} although her initial intention was to return to Italy. And I explained throughout this chapter that Virginia’s parents moved to Australia to escape their matriarch’s house rules and have their own place. Amanda’s parents, who left their Yugoslav home—shown with Amanda’s grandmother in Photograph 5, taken in Motvun (Croatia) in the early 1940s—due to the political consequences of WWII, were likewise looking for a new home. The same can be said of Giannina and her husband. For those who had resided in refugee camps in Europe or migrants camps in Australia, finding a better place to live was particularly important, if not a matter of urgency.

Amanda (generation 1.5) told me, for example, that the first house in which she lived with her family of origin in Koombooloomba (QLD), where her father had a perilous job at the “damma”\textsuperscript{460} (a word taken from hybridised migrant Italo-English language, used to denote a “dam”), “was made of soil, had no electricity, and the toilets were across the road”.\textsuperscript{461} They had moved there from a migrant camp near Cairns (QLD) where they had initially been accommodated by the Australian government. In the camp the food was terrible—“i boliva tuto” (“they boiled everything”),\textsuperscript{462} she explained to me in Triestine—and the women had therefore to start cooking the fish that their husbands would catch. Since independent cooking was a forbidden activity, though, they had to make sure not to get caught by “quei del campo”, “those of the camp”,\textsuperscript{463} meaning by the Australian officials who ruled the place and who, according to her phrasing, seem to have been perceived by Amanda as the distant others that nonetheless owned the place where she was living.

When it was finally rendered available (see Photograph 6, depicting the dam workers’ housing in northern Queensland), the family moved to a better place in Ravenshoe (QLD), where her mother, who was reported to have been completely subjugated by

\textsuperscript{459} Rachele, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
\textsuperscript{460} Amanda, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
\textsuperscript{461} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{462} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{463} Ibid.
Amanda’s authoritarian father, started washing and ironing the uniforms for the officers of the local police station. The nucleus did not move to Brisbane, where they eventually settled, until Amanda was 13. In the state capital, her father was hired at the port as a stevedore, and her mother found employment as an attendant in a private hospital. As a migrant, she said, “te ciapavi i pezo lavori che jera”\(^{464}\) ("you’d get the worse jobs available"). Martin confirmed that women migrants in Australia got “low-status, low-paid, insecure, unskilled jobs in labour-intensive industries”\(^{465}\).

At the age of 17, Amanda also started working outside the house, first in a café and then in a “fatoria de carton”\(^{466}\) (“cardboard factory”). With three salaries, the family could afford a comfortable life, but hers was nevertheless completely regulated by her father’s patriarchal ruling. Apart for work, she could not go out, nor could she bring anyone home (“no te podevi portar casa nissun”).\(^{467}\) In spite of her will, she and her family members lived “come in una bolla”\(^{468}\) (“like in a bubble”), enclosed within the house walls: in her opinion, “there was no freedom for Italian women” (“no jera libertà per le italiane”).\(^{469}\) It was only by marrying Fernando, a migrant from Veneto whom she met at a ball organised by the Italian community, that at the age of 21 she was finally able to leave the domestic prison in which her father’s “time warp”\(^{470}\) vision of what he considered appropriate (Italian-Croatian?) behaviour had confined her. Waged work, however, had meanwhile given her some opportunities to reach out to the (white) Australian community. As noted in Chapter Two, her linguistic skills helped her fight patriarchal ruling, too.

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\(^{464}\) Ibid.


\(^{466}\) Amanda, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.

\(^{467}\) Ibid.

\(^{468}\) Ibid.

\(^{469}\) Ibid.

\(^{470}\) Ibid.
My account of Giannina’s narration of her journey to and settlement in Australia, which as opposed to Amanda’s tends to more closely reflect the order in which she narrated the facts to me, reads instead as follows:

After having escaped from Yugoslavia, Giannina and her husband sold the little they had in Benečija (Friuli, Italy) and went to Bagnoli, near Naples (Campania, Italy), to a refugee camp to be processed. They remained there for about three months; they had running water and toilet paper, which were real luxuries for Giannina. Then they were sent to Germany, where they embarked on a Swedish ship to Australia. It was cold and on-board she only had a shawl, with which she covered the children. The journey lasted 38 days.

They knew nothing: nothing about where they were going, nothing about what was going to happen next. Not even about how they were feeling.

They arrived in Melbourne on 5 September 1951. At first sight, Australia looked empty and big, and upon touching land, they were immediately sent to the migrant processing camp of Bonegilla (VIC), where they found interpreters, and remained all together for about four weeks. They were allocated one room for the whole family of six. She remembers that there the men would run after the rabbits to hunt them down and eat them; they had to hide such activity from the camp officials, though, as cooking was not allowed. They however had to take the risk, otherwise they would have only eaten mutton; there was an abundance of it, but they were not used to that kind of food.

They knew the men would have had to work but not when and how. They only knew for sure that it was going to be for at least two years. Her husband was, however, eventually assigned to a brick factory in Brisbane (QLD), where he adjusted ovens. It was really hard work. Giannina and the children stayed in Victoria for a few more weeks, and caught up with him at a later stage.

They headed to Queensland by train and settled in a refugee camp in Wacol, as they didn’t know where else to stay: ‘they sent you there and there you went’,\(^ {471}\) is how she saw the situation. At the beginning, they lived in a tent, and then they were given a small room. It was very hot, but apparently she didn’t mind the food: there was not much choice, but they were hungry.

In Wacol, of course, they had to pay for their accommodation: rent was 3.50 pounds [a week]. After paying the rent, the family had only 2 pounds a week left for the rest. Giannina’s husband stayed in another camp for about a month, and would reach the

\(^ {471}\) Giannina, interview with the author, 2011, Brisbane, QLD.
family only on the weekends. Then he 'moved in'\textsuperscript{472} with his wife and daughters, although 'illegally',\textsuperscript{473} as for some reason that Giannina could not explain, he was not supposed to be there.

At first she got very homesick. She cried a lot, to the point that her husband was tired of seeing her crying. She missed her family and her sister in particular. In Australia, everything was new. They knew no one. She missed having someone to talk to about the stories of her town. ‘Non si può spiegare la differenza’, she stated: ‘the difference cannot be explained’\textsuperscript{474}

Giannina and her family stayed in Wacol for two years. She worked as a servant at the camp for a while, as everybody was entitled to at least three months of work. Then she started to work at the shop of a nearby military base, selling cigarettes, goods, and canned food. She was on duty from 2 to 10 pm, and her eldest daughter, who went to school in Wacol, would finish cooking dinner. Initially, her husband didn’t want her to work, but she was given the chance of substituting a woman for six months, and then he accepted it. It ended up being for two years, during which time she was even temporarily put in charge of the shop.

Truly, she herself was scared of going to work, because of the language, but still, she wanted to, because they needed the extra income to build the house. As a matter of fact, they built the ceiling of it with the money that she earned.

**5.b.2) Privatised (Un)Happiness?**

If on the one hand assimilation required the women migrants to conform to the government- and media-promoted (although nonetheless vague) ideas of (white and, as indicated in Chapter Four, preferably ‘British’ middle-class) ‘Australian way of living’, carved around home-ownership and male-breadwinning-fuelled domesticity, on the other hand, material circumstances pushed them to act outside of such standards (and their men/bosses to let them do so) with the very aim of being able to achieve them.

\textsuperscript{472} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{473} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{474} Ibid.
In order to have a house, which meant being *successful and economically assimilated migrants*, both spouses had to work: this transgressed the very standards that the Australian government supposedly wanted them to adopt. The necessity to achieve migrant goals and assimilate implied that on some levels, patriarchal controls had to be loosened in order to allow women to go into extra-domestic paid work. Waged work gave women the opportunity to learn English and *forcibly permitted* them to encounter the outside reality. The assimilationist agenda of the Australian government therefore contributed against its own intentions to letting women migrants *who were allowed* to work outside the house to reach out to Australian society and learn their ways through the Australian habitus. This can be said to have been an empowering experience. Women, however, often remained framed within their marriages or even confined within the household.

At the same time, the much desired independent house represented for some women a jail: a material one for persons like Amanda and, as said in Chapter Four, for Rosanna and her mother; and a sentimental one for women like Augustina, Virginia’s mother, who seemed to have had to trade her emotional wellbeing to satisfy her (husband’s?) need to find a place to live away from (the patriarchal order of) her mother-in-law. The same can be said of Giannina, who felt that she could not but run away from her house in Yugoslavia and find a new home in Australia, although she suffered tremendously from nostalgia for having done so. Also—and not to be forgotten—to allow her family to live in Australia in decent housing conditions, Gabriella’s mother had to paradoxically give up the apparently emancipated life that mid-20th century Trieste had allowed her urbanite female self to develop.

It must finally be remembered that, as noted in Chapters Three and Four, for matters of survival, peasant and working-class women sometimes had to find employment outside the house in Italy, too. Up to the migrants’ departures, women had been dispossessed of their power over their earnings. However, the ‘economic miracle’ had rendered jobs progressively available to women from the late 1950s onwards. Although they were poorly paid, this circumstance had provided some opportunities
for emancipation and liberation to those who wanted to try to escape patriarchal oppression.\textsuperscript{475} This contributed to creating a ‘critical mass’ for the explosion of the workers’, students’, and (predominantly middle-class) feminists’ movements of the late 1960s. As noted, such movements had produced great re-arrangements in the habitus, and, although in controversial ways, in gender relations especially. The migrants, however, were not generally in touch with these narratives.\textsuperscript{476} Because of the complexity of that period of Italian history, it is impossible to firmly assess just how exposed they would have been to feminism if they had not migrated. Its effects were perceived in very different degrees in every part of the country. Interestingly, Virginia had nonetheless found it very difficult to conjugate work and family in early 1980s Italy. And yet amongst some sections of society—predominantly amongst the intellectuals and middle classes, of which she can be said of have meanwhile ‘become a member’ in Australia—the gender habitus was already being changed. And yet, the type of analysis of her gendered self that she conducted during the ethnography closely resembles ‘autocoscienza’, and her questioning of her mother’s customs can be compared to that conducted in Italy during the ‘years of contestation’.

\textbf{5.c) Home, House, and Habitus}

As I browsed over and over again through the images that depicted the Australian house building of Virginia’s Friulan family of origin, I could not but wonder just how (white middle-class—although such adjectives were not spelled out to or by her) Australian the nucleus had become by the end of the process, and how the process of building and owning a new home overseas had contributed to it.

In only a few years, Virginia’s family members had moved from a small and ancient town in densely populated Friuli, where everybody minded everybody else’s business, to a yet-to-be constructed ‘new-town’ in mostly deserted Queensland, where notions

\textsuperscript{475} Piccone Stella, ‘Crescere negli anni ’50’, p. 14; Ginsborg, \textit{A History of Contemporary Italy}, p. 224.

\textsuperscript{476} Bottomley, ‘Women on the Move’, p. 100.
of privacy and independence from others informed community life. They went from having to share the space with and obey the rules of the bitter matriarch reported to be Virginia’s paternal grandmother to having their own secluded and well-organised place. They shifted from having no control over the family income to being able to earn their own money and dispose of it as they so desired.

How had this rearrangement of their way of living—a consequence of migration—affected their perception of their (Friulan) selves? And to what extent had it actually happened? For the scope of examining the emancipatory and/or liberatory potential of migration, it is interesting to analyse how (the change in) habitus reflected on the three generations involved in Virginia’s narration. Importantly, as already mentioned, unlike the informants of her mother’s generation, Virginia questioned the rules according to which she was raised. Virginia and I especially discussed the roles held in her life by the women of her family. As seen earlier in this chapter, she reported to have long been concerned about the harshness of her mothers’ educational manners and her paternal grandmother’s unwillingness to nourish her. Virginia had assumed that the treatment to which she had been subjected was gendered, in the sense that it had to do with the fact that she was a woman—a female daughter rather than a much desired male son.

Virginia reported having little memories of her early childhood in Friuli and being confused about the reason why her mother was so tough and lacked sensitivity. Also, she had no ‘original’ to compare her domestic moral customs against: the rules that she had to follow in the house referred to the habitus of a faraway land that the migration process had made her be (un)familiar with. Ultimately, when she tried to relocate herself in Italy as an adult, she found that she could no longer fit in the country where she was born and that still granted her citizenship... And the country had meanwhile changed with respect to the living conditions of women! As a working mother, she preferred staying in Australia, where she had nevertheless previously felt that she was “not able to fit”.477

477 Virginia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
Controversially, while subjecting her to the terrifying effects of displacement, migration seems to have allowed Virginia to develop her own form of ‘contestazione’. The comparison with the Australian way of living permitted her to dis-embed the gendered morality on which her ancestors’ actions and behaviours were firmly based, from the habitus that maintained it, hence letting the contradictions inherent in both come to surface. Similarly to what I described in the Preface as having been done by Italian feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, thanks to migration, Virginia could scrutinise and at least partially abandon the sexist tradition that previous generations had thus far strictly abided by.

Virginia’s family started living a white middle-class existence in a small villa in suburban Australia, but her mother’s emotional attachments remained anchored to what was fundamentally her Friulan peasant middle-class home, which, as mentioned, she harshly tried to enforce and reproduce within the domestic walls. As seen in the previous sections, the very staging of the privatised (un)happiness displayed in the photographs that Virginia had shown to me is consistent with the ideas of suburban domesticity that were circulating in Australia at the time and with the fulfilment of the migrants’ goals. Nevertheless, although the new house, central to the process of assimilation, allowed Augustina to distance herself from the oppressing practices of her mother-in-law and finally be with her husband and in control of her family, she still missed her previous home and consequent (subjugated?) way of living. Was it the awareness of being trapped between an (emotionally) isolated life in faraway suburban Australia and her mother-in-law’s patriarchal ruling that contributed to making her feel miserable? Why did she want to continue to live according to a habitus that had originated in another part of the world?

Understandably, one does not want to abandon the identity that interfaces with her way of living. The fear that one tries to fight back is that of losing control of who one is, to become a stranger to one’s known self. As a migrant, I can totally comprehend my informants’ need to continue to eat the same foods and organise their daily activities
in the ways that they were accustomed to. Such ways, however, have (had) radical implications on their gendered personas, especially on those of the women of Augustina’s generation. Was Augustina aware of the fact that the perception of the gendered self that she was trying—without completely succeeding—for her daughters to reproduce was the same one that had previously restricted her freedom in Friuli? Did she know that the reason why she had to struggle to marry her beloved husband was due to the fact that according to the very customs onto which she was clinging, her father was culturally put in charge of making such decisions for her because she was female? Was she attached to such customs to start with? Or ‘only’ to the then faraway people that they represented, whom she very much missed? Was hers a way of continuing to pay her respects to her family, to perhaps unconsciously diminish the guilt for having departed? Or was she simply left without points of reference and hence confused about the moral code to abide by, as she tried to hang on to the power allocated to her by her tradition, meaning the control that women had over the domestic sphere along with the care of their husband and offspring?

As Augustina has already died, no answers can be provided to these questions. It can, however, be assumed that if Augustina had at least felt welcomed by the locals, she would have perhaps tried to loosen up and better integrate into her new environment. Also, a greater availability of foods and goods that could have helped her maintain other aspects of her ‘Italian-ness’ would have probably alleviated her sense of displacement. However, as seen in Chapter Four, the government was opposed to the idea of migrants retaining their cultures, and the locals continued to be nasty to her in spite of the fact that her family gave to the outside the impression of having rapidly assimilated to the ‘Australian way of living’. Apart from ‘inducing’ her to earning wages, the Australian government provided her with no institutional opportunity to reflect on her status as a woman. Bottomley noted that many women migrants would not even vote because they never became Australian citizens.\footnote{478 Bottomley, ‘Women on the Move’, p. 99.}
Finally, what would Genoveffa, Virginia’s paternal grandmother and absolute ruler of domesticity, have thought of this all? Her previously subjected relatives had all gone: on whom could she now exercise her role of ‘domestic boss’? How was it for her to lose the power onto which she had so firmly hung? As I outlined in the Preface, Italy was meanwhile radically changing, too. The (at least officially) anti-authoritarian movements of the 1970s rewrote the social lines along which reality was classified: did Genoveffa take any notice of it? And was hers real power, in any case? Or only a reflection of patriarchy, which had allocated to her the task of passing onto her offspring the gender roles and understanding of everyday life that she herself had inherited from her ancestors in spite of her will? Did she firmly exert her stake of authority in the house because that was the only place where women could traditionally do so?

Orsi described the domestic power of Italian matriarchs in the following way:

> Although women were powerful in the domus (and although this power was very real), their power was also a cage. The bars of which were fashioned from the material of the public definition of the good woman. They were compelled to exercise only a certain kind of power in a certain way, as defined and maintained by the community by means of the normative ideal of the ‘good woman’.479

I do not intend to justify her behaviour, which I would have felt oppressed by and never have been able to cope with. But keeping in mind Foucault’s production on self-surveillance,480 I wondered whether Genoveffa—a poorly educated woman born in the Friulian countryside in the 1800s, without any other possibility but to know and stick to what life had given to her—was simply trying to make the best out of a peasant existence, from which she herself had perhaps seen no escape, not realising that in so doing she was re-creating the same dynamics that had repressed her. Was she only trying to hold on to the symbolic capital that she could access through implementing the local patriarchal habitus? Ultimately, feminist ‘autocosceinza’ was also about

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becoming aware of one’s positioning in respect to others: how could a woman of her generation and status, who had never experienced anything different than what was locally visible around her, be in a position to question what she had been taught and disentangle the emotional intricacies in which she was immersed? Would she have behaved in the same way if she had the intellectual and material means available to an educated person nowadays? And how would she have behaved if she had also migrated? Of course, only speculations can be made in such respect. Notably, however, generation 1.5 informant Gisella had told me that her grandmother, who was more or less the same age as Virginia’s and born in a nearby town, had undergone a profound change when she reached the rest of the family overseas.

My account of Gisella’s narration in this respect reads as follows:

Gisella was happy that her grandmother, her mother’s mother-in-law, had come to Australia to live with them: she helped with the house chores and looked after the children. Most of all, she often was in good spirits. Her personality seemed to have highly benefitted from the migration down under. Back home, in Friuli, elderly women in the countryside had the habit of mostly wearing black clothes [as a sign of ‘modesty’ and/or to mourn the death of their husbands if they were widows]; once she got to Australia, she looked as if she had been ‘awakened’: she firstly started adding yellow strips to colour her black skirt, and then to even wear blue flowery dresses. She seemed to have let go of the old tradition quite easily, and actually asked herself why she hadn’t done so before.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reported and analysed generation 1.5 Virginia’s narration. This led me to an analysis of Prime Minister’s Robert Menzies post-WWII Australian socio-economic agenda, which I compared to the goals of the migrants. I argued that the migrants’ need to settle in good housing conditions and be financially successful coincided with the will of the Australian government to shape society around notions of middle-class, suburban domesticity. In order to achieve their goals and assimilate,
the migrants, however, had to counter the standards that the government was sustaining through forms of taxation subsidies: in order to buy a house and/or improve the family's living conditions, women had (to be allowed to) go to work. This circumstance, where applicable, forcibly permitted the women directly and to some degree independently to encounter (white) Australian habitus. In spite of this women often continued to be confined within the domestic walls.

I finally examined the way in which migration impacted on the three generations of women involved in Virginia's storytelling. I argue that migration gave Virginia the opportunity to question and liberate herself from the gender habitus that had been maintained by her ancestors. Such achievement was, however, an effect of the need to negotiate within her young self the terrible effects of the conflicting customs to which she had been exposed.

In the next chapter, I discuss how habitus shapes the interface between the ‘defended’ subject and ethnographer in the context of fieldwork, and how it speaks of the emancipation and liberation of both. I then show how self-reflexivity can help the interpretation of the silences that result from it. In the second part of the chapter, I examine the possibilities of expression that multiculturalism has given to Italian women migrants.
CHAPTER SIX

‘QUELLO CHE LE DONNE NON DICONO’: 481

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

At the beginning of this thesis, I outlined that the main scope of my research is to give voice to the life experiences of the 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia in order to investigate the eventual emancipatory and liberatory function of migration. In the Introduction along with Chapters One and Two, I presented the participants and the methodology, highlighted the epistemological complications inherent in such a process, outlined the (im)possibilities produced by the theoretical ruses that I encountered, and investigated how ethnography can(not) do justice to its subjects. I then proceeded to reporting and analysing the participants’ narratives and showed how they reflect and/or disprove my initial assumptions.

In this chapter, I intend to engage with the unspoken parts of their storytelling and show through the analysis of my interaction with Rachele how habitus also informs and is informed by the silences that riddle the fieldwork. I then outline how the very self-reflexive ethnographic process can, however, be liberating in this sense, as it sheds light on the subconscious dynamics of power that sustain the accepted narratives. Following from this, I will draw a parallel between the framing power of ethnography and that of state institutions to demonstrate how the emancipatory purposes of Australian multiculturalism have been encumbered by the same theoretical (im)possibilities encountered by ethnography, thus having a silencing effect on the voices that it intended to hear (and liberate?).

481 Popular Italian song performed by Fiorella Mannoia, translatable into ‘What women do not say’.
6.a) What Rachele and Anita Do (Not) Say (to Themselves)

Life stories are not only made of utterances. The women migrants narrated themselves to me also through odours, flavours, gestures, and modes of affection, whose sensory nature cannot be fully captured on the written page. I could, for instance, overindulge in the description of the poignancy of the fragrance that evaporated from the frying pan in which Anna had one day thrown some fresh herbs to make a frittata for us, filling the room with an essence that my nostrils welcomed with awe, but as a matter of fact, the heady intensity of those moments cannot be fully translated into words and will hence remain trapped in the closet of my unspeakable ethnographic memories.

Nevertheless, the complications implied in writing about migrants are not just limited to that. Narrations are haunted by silences, pauses, and innuendos that can be as significant as speech: they offer the (im)possibility of being talked about without providing an explicit content to relate to, leaving space for (mis)understandings that implicitly speak on the participants’ behalf with respect to what they do not want or cannot include in their self-portraits. I am referring here to the issues (frequently related to the women migrant condition or gender imbalances) that are skipped over by both the storytellers and myself—the ‘defended subject’482 and the ‘defended ethnographer’ mentioned in Chapter One—but also to the aspects of the informants’ lives that I was at first informed about and then asked not to divulge.

When I first started to become acquainted with Rachele, for instance, a few weeks before the beginning of this PhD, I asked her how she would have presented herself to the world if she had the opportunity to do so in front of a video camera. In January 2009, we actually video-recorded a short episode; the following is thus the transcript of how she introduced herself in English:

My name is Rachele, and I born in Italy on the 25/12/1932. I emigrate to Australia on January 1957. I working hard, me and my husband, we have a... A tobacco plantations, and thanks god we... We got something good for the future.483

On that occasion, Rachele highlighted the points that seemed to be of importance to her: she is a generation 1 post-WWII Italian migrant to Australia who, together with her husband, managed to fulfil her dream of affluence. The short paragraph, however, reflects quite closely the way in which she later narrated her migrant self during the storytelling. In fact, she made no mention of what happened between her departure and her success and, in spite of my later attempts to gather some information about this, during the manifold encounters that followed that initial introduction, she has never fully developed that content. As will be shown below, her narration indeed covered only certain events and (un?)consciously skipped over others.

Compared to the level of detail provided by other informants, her narration of her early Australian years, what exactly she had to trade to convert484 her young Friulan poverty into an adult affluence overseas, has in fact remained particularly vague. Rachele indeed made reference to the fact that she endured hardships and had to overcome several obstacles, but she never spelled out clearly what she had to go through, and moreover, she asked me to not disclose to others most of the little that she did share with me in that respect. I tried at times to gently probe her to speak about certain topics, for instance, to share with me her impressions of Australia when she arrived, but she left me few opportunities to do so. She told me how she arrived in her new country and about her initial experience in Bonegilla, which I will briefly describe below, but extremely little about her process of integration. She was instead very keen on showing me how she is nowadays living her assimilated glamorous lifestyle.

Rachele’s reluctance to tell me about what she thought of and lived through during her early years in Australia was not due to a lack of trust in me, as I soon discovered. As

483 Rachele, interview with the author, 2009, Brisbane, QLD.
mentioned, she did disclose to me a few intimate stories and some of her feelings, which I am not allowed to fully report about here. I had the sensation that she did so because she felt that I could empathise with her. Although I thought it clear that I was not there to judge her, she frequently asked for my approval, as if there were right and wrong things to say and I knew which ones were they. Apparently, it was instead the locals’ opinion of her that she feared: eventually, she explicitly told me that she was scared of rendering her ideas public for fear of retaliation on the part of the Australian government, which is something that other scholars reported migrants to have been concerned about during the course of similar studies. In her *If You Had Your Time Again, Would You Migrate to Australia?*, Ellie Vasta described the issues related to her methodology as follows:

At the beginning we had stated clearly to them [the Italian migrants to Australia] the aims of the research and the confidentiality of their participation and responses. Nonetheless, many were afraid of the interviews to begin with. They did not understand what an interview means and furthermore were afraid that there might be governmental repercussions.

Since I had already explained to Rachele the privacy procedure, there was not much else that I could tell her to convince her that she had nothing to worry about in this respect. Furthermore, the very fact that she feels unprotected by the government of the country that she is a citizen of constitutes in itself a valuable ethnographic datum: other participants, like Amanda and Giannina whose words I recounted in Chapter Five, had described as fearful, authoritative individuals the (white) Australian officials who regimented their lives at the migrant camps accommodating them upon arrival. Perhaps Rachele, who also went through what other authors described as the tremendous experience of the migrant camp of Bonegilla (VIC), has simply never completely recovered from the submissive mental state that she was (put) in when she landed ‘down under’. She was (made to feel) a disempowered ‘other’, and the

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485 Vasta, *If You Had Your Time Again*.
486 Ibid., p. 16.
487 See, for example, G. Sluga, Bonegilla: ‘A Place of No Hope’, Melbourne, University of Melbourne, 1988.
voluntary omissions present in her narration seem to indicate that such a sensation has stayed with her ever since.

The very fear that made Rachele unwilling to express her ideas about Australia is then an important element of her life story: although she is now an elderly and relatively wealthy citizen of the country that had initially ostracised her, someone who in Hage’s terms can be presently said to own a fair share of “national capital” and therefore *supposedly* in a position to *feel entitled* to mastering the (public) space around her, she appears to be prevented from doing so by the stigma entailed in her (woman) (migrant) condition. Social and financial capital did not constitute sufficient assets to emancipate her from the subjugated mental attitude that life had taught her to have.

I decided not to insist any further on asking Rachele to speak about issues that would have made her feel uncomfortable; I limited myself to hearing what she did (not) want to say and observing the long-term outcome of the processes of ‘Australianisation,’ the development of which she was unwilling to openly report. One issue that, not surprisingly, she was not scared to emphasise with respect to (her experience) of Australia is that in spite of not liking the local cuisine, she truly enjoys the peacefulness of her neighbourhood and the Australian way of living, which, she confessed, she is not really prepared (yet) to give up to return to Italy, as planned, to spend her old age near her daughters, who have meanwhile settled there. But she is growing old and in Australia she has no relatives to rely on in case of need. In fact, she would not know what to do in Friuli now, after having been away for so long, or with whom to associate for company. In her opinion, her non-migrated age peers breed hens in the backyard whilst she has had such an exciting transnational existence ever since she left to migrate down under... What could she talk about with people there? Where could she go? Rachele said that she believes that in Friuli she would not be as independent as she feels that she can be in Brisbane, where she enjoys freedom of movement, and her actions and decisions are not under the scrutiny of others—as she

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thinks that they would probably be, based on her experience, in the Italian countryside where her newly bought retirement house is located. Moreover, what would she do with all her stuff? She would need to pack up and ship all of her belongings to Italy, and then there are the memories and valuable items, including friendships and acquaintances, that she would not want to part from because they remind her of the good times spent in Australia; these, she believes, could not possibly go with her. As a matter of fact, her Australian lifestyle could not go with her. And having found it hard (to earn the capital) to inhabit it, she would not want to leave it behind. I then sensed her fear of having to re-adapt to (her original position with respect to) the ‘Italian’ habitus.

In her own terms, Rachele independently recognised that her customs have changed and that she could no longer fit into those that she reckons are followed by her peers overseas. Fundamentally, she did not want to re-become the person that she was and that she feels she would be required to be again in Italy because of her age, gender, and status. Of course, she could choose to ignore the social framing into which she believes she would be squeezed (and I have the impression she probably partly will), but migration does not seem to have completely liberated her from the need to acknowledge the pressures of the community.

Apart from her unwillingness to leave it, with respect to Australia, Rachele also gave me permission to report that she finds the bureaucracy to be much quicker than in Italy and that the administrative life is rendered simple by the system. She also finds that (Anglo-)Australians are not good planners of their finances, whilst Italians “think for tomorrow and even for after tomorrow”.\footnote{Rachele, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.} When asked to outline some differences between ‘Italians’ and ‘Australians’, she also said that she believes that they are “solitary”\footnote{Ibid.} people, specifying with such adjective that she intended to say that they—the members of the national dominion in which, like many other migrants, she does not include herself, despite, as mentioned, being a citizen for decades—are...
‘individualists’, but that in her opinion, some “behave like Europeans”.\textsuperscript{491} Rachele did not want to elaborate the concept any further, but added that in her view, \textit{Australian} women generally have a \textit{different} way (as opposed to the \textit{traditional} ‘Italian’ way, which was implicitly understood to be the term of comparison during our conversations) of managing the family: she said that Italians “are closer to each other”,\textsuperscript{492} but reckons that there are exceptions to this rule.

Irrespective of the quality of the above contents, what I found of relevance with reference to what she has permitted me to give voice to on her behalf is the image of herself that Rachele seemingly wanted to implicitly transpire from her statements, and what they contextually say about her habitus in spite of her intention. On the one hand, she seems to want to give the impression of being a politically correct elderly migrant, who praises the government of the country that adopted her and tries to be fair to the habits of earlier settlers, whom she implicitly acknowledges to be the owners of the public space that she inhabits. On the other, her words unwillingly talk of the intimate sense of \textit{otherness} that she feels in the land where she has spent most of her life and that, importantly, in spite of her ‘stranger-ness’ to it, she would not want to abandon. She described her suburb in Brisbane as “al \textit{me paradis}” (“my paradise”),\textsuperscript{493} but at the same time, she does not recognise herself as a local. In her speech, for which I do not have other tape recordings, the noun ‘Australians’ was in fact consistently associated with the third person pronoun ‘they’, and never with a technically feasible given her double nationality, ‘we’. Australians are always ‘the other’, those who behave differently—from the way that she was taught to behave in the place whose customs she now despises (but also partially selectively upholds!), and where she would not want to return. The ‘different behaviour’ of her other, however, has become her own to a good extent.

At the very beginning of her narration, Rachele patently confessed to me that she \textit{felt} ‘Italian’, whatever that meant, and irrespective of the fact that she has two passports

\textsuperscript{491} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{492} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{493} Ibid.
and prefers to live in her “paradis” in suburban Brisbane rather than in what she repeatedly called the "bloody paîs" ("bloody village") where she comes from. She gave me the impression of being a women torn between the necessities related to her old age, her (despised and yet partially maintained) traditions, and the desire to continue to live her migrant habitus overseas. And significantly, although Rachele did not spell it out in this way, much of what she rejects of her (former?) ‘Italian’ self is related to the cultural restrictions entailed in her gender. Just like the stranger described by Bauman, Rachele seemed to be “sitting astride an embattled barricade [...] blurring a boundary line vital to the construction of a particular social order or a particular life-world”.

Unlike her attitude with respect to the disclosure of the details of her settlement in Australia, Rachele was quite vocal about what she thinks of life in Italy. As shown in Chapter Three, she suffered the social surveillance and normative framework of behaviour of her peasant culture of origin. She repeatedly stressed that she truly disliked how the local mentality, into which the priest’s doctrine and her mother’s disciplining had harshly tried to force her, repressed the liveliness of her youth: for this reason, she misses nothing of the town where she was born. She remembers that she always wanted to go dancing at the regularly held local festival, but the cost of having to lie to her mother to be able to do so secretly was to be paid in domestic beatings once she returned home from what were considered her illicit escapes; and her widowed and emotionally distressed parent would not spare her from hitting her hard on the back with the wooden handle of the broom. During her youth, said Rachele, she received “more strikes than all the donkeys of Muzzana put together” ("ai cipadis plui di ducj i mus di Muzane mitûts insieme"). Importantly, Rachele knows that this was due to the fact that she was a female, and as such, according to the local mentality of the time, someone to be sexually regulated and kept under control; however, she has not (so far) articulated into political claims the (perhaps not fully consciously acknowledged?) anger that she openly expressed to me with respect to

494 Ibid.
496 Rachele, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
such circumstances. Perhaps, I assumed, this was due to the fact that given the repressive nature of the poor and poorly educated environment that *condoned* violence towards women, she felt alone with her *feeling* that the brutality and repression that she was subjected to were wrong, and that she had instead a right to the freedom that she is now experiencing in her old age in Queensland, some 16,000 kilometres south-east of her original self, the phantoms of which she does not want to reunite with. So although she (knows she?) still has much resentment about it, and I expressed my solidarity to her, I am not sure whether she is aware of the fact that she has full right to feel that way.

Migration seems to have allowed Rachele to *physically* distance herself from the patriarchal narratives that repressed her, but it has not given her the opportunity to fully elaborate them. However, since she found in me an understanding listener, ethnography can be said to have been of help to her in this sense. I then considered that if Rachele had had the chance to make direct contact with feminist movements, either in Italy or overseas, or to find the solidarity of others when she was younger, she would perhaps have developed her proto-feminist concerns into a more activist awareness of her condition. I do not think that Rachele considers herself a feminist, and I would not say that she is one—she has never even explicitly mentioned the topic or hinted at the possibility—but her narration repeatedly showed some potential for it along with a broad interest in gender. Apart from the rebellions reported so far, whilst telling me about her journey to Australia, she made some curious comments with respect to marital relations, which, for the reason that I will outline below, I missed the chance to investigate with her any further.
6.a.1) The Psychic Life of Silence

Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original.\textsuperscript{497}

Her narration of her journey started at Udine Station, where in 1956 Rachele, her husband Franco, and their first daughter Annalisa boarded the train that took them to Genova (Liguria, Italy) to board the ship to Australia, where they headed with the hope of making a quick fortune. She liked the boat trip and pointed out that, contrary to her husband, she was never seasick. He was delicate, apparently, and had to be very careful about the things that he ate and drank, whilst, as she proudly remarked with a hint of irony, everything seems to have instead always “done her good” (“a mi mi à simpri fat ben dut”).\textsuperscript{498} In their couple, she was the one with the strength to endure anything, emphasising that for this reason she believes that in their marriage she should have been the man and her husband the woman.

When she said this to me, Rachele sought my approval, as she generally did to make sure that she was saying ‘the right things’, contextually assuming that there was a common understanding between us on this matter, just as there had been on others. Instead of opening up an interesting debate with my informant about gender, I nodded and asked her to go ahead and talk about what happened next, thus missing the great opportunity that she had offered to collect data on a topic of central importance to the thesis. Rachele’s statement had in fact allowed space for the idea that things could have been different from how the tradition that (I believe that) she made reference to wanted them to be, and she was perhaps sincerely interested in knowing what I—someone to whom she attributed intellectual authority—thought about what, in view of her age, can indeed be considered a rather revolutionary affirmation. Yet I later realised that her words had found me unprepared and therefore put me in crisis.

\textsuperscript{497} Butler, ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination’, p. 313.
\textsuperscript{498} Rachele, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
The intimate performativity of gender roles lies at the core of my (homosexual) existence, and hence plays a main part in my own life story. Although I do not like the connotations and assumptions that inevitably come with labels, technically speaking, I am in fact a lesbian, and as such, someone who has a radically different lived experience of gender than that of a heterosexual person—and, as opposed to a straight woman, has frequently had to protect her (queer) desire from impolite questioning. Bodies do in fact matter, and in a lesbian bed, there are indeed two female ones; from a heteronormative perspective, a discussion on the escapability of which does not find much space here, but according to which the couple must comprise the two sexes (necessary to the reproduction of the species), this circumstance renders the ‘(supposedly) male position’ vacant—and exposes same sex desire to the scrutiny and judgement of those who consider it pathological. As finely noted by Judith Butler in her essay  ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination’, heteronormativity can indeed still surreptitiously enter the (psychic) life of a lesbian pair, letting the partners counterintuitively enact the same traditional gender roles that they (believe they) are in the process of displacing through the very (failed) mimesis (of ‘originals’ that Butler indicates to be themselves fantasies). It is however equally possible that a lesbian couple does not need to resort to the binary system of classification that upholds the patriarchal framework of thought: there does not need to be ‘a man and a woman’, or more specifically, illusory forms of masculinity and femininity performed by two ‘women’ that mime and imitate such a (self-referential) binary norm; it can instead be simply made by two individuals with female bodies—and (emotional) histories (of it).

It is not within the scope of this thesis to further disentangle the complexity of the above matter. What is instead relevant is that, as mentioned above, I could have discussed this important content with my informant when she gave me the opportunity, but I did not because I felt that I was not in a position to do so. As I explained in Chapter Two, I carried out a selective disclosure of my sentimental life

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499 See, for example, Butler, ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination’, p. 308.
500 Ibid., p. 312.
with the vast majority of my storytellers, sharing information about my homosexuality only with generation 1.5 Gabriella, Virginia, and Maria, as I reckoned that these three would not be shocked and would have instead easily accepted it. Being familiar with the habitus ‘of origin’, I knew that it could had given rise to issues that I preferred not to have to manage during fieldwork. When Rachele made the comment about the way in which she thought her husband’s frailty had rearranged the roles of their partnership, I then felt intimately called into question over a subject that would have been difficult for me to discuss without making reference to my personal experience, which I was not prepared to do in those circumstances. I did not circumstantially own enough symbolic capital to express my voice about it. And (exposing) my homosexuality, I feared, would have taken more of it away from me. Perhaps it was (the phantoms of) (the historicity of) my own frailty that I was (un)consciously running away from. And admitting that it was possible for me to speak about the intimacy of gender roles in a ‘non-involved’ manner, to do so I would have had to continue to consciously enact the awkward fiction according to which I (mis)led most of my informant(s) to believe that I was heterosexual, which is something that I was not particularly proud of and preferred not to have to think about.

Furthermore, ‘passing’,\(^{501}\) pretending to be someone else, requires planning and is energy consuming, as one has to be careful about what she says to avoid contradictions. In that instance, I was caught by surprise by Rachele’s affirmation. I then reacted to my fear to be dug out of the ‘(un)protective’ silence that I had chosen to lay over my desire, by running away from the peril of being drawn into talking about what it covered. Indeed, if fear had rendered Rachele what Hollway and Jefferson\(^{502}\) described as a ‘defended subject’, I was for the same reason being a ‘defended ethnographer’: an anthropologist who interfaced the (defended) subject of research with a disguised self, admitting that one can never be one to some extent.


\(^{502}\) Hollway and Jefferson, Doing Qualitative Research Differently.
The very fact that my (homo)sexuality has been an issue that I have had to deal with and make choices about is itself a constituent part of this self-reflexive ethnographic research on the emancipatory and liberatory potential of migration through the analysis of (the changes in) habitus: my choice to be silent reflects both the cultural beliefs that I projected on my informants and the relationship that we were in. Yet it also provides me with information about myself via ethnography. Whether the scenarios that I had envisioned would have materialised or not (indeed, regardless of the popular tradition, perhaps none of my informants was individually homophobic), my very concern with being rejected, even in the professional context of the ethnographic environment, speaks of (my lived experience of) the cultural burdens laid on the topic of homosexuality in the context of our culture(s) of origin. By negating my life story, however, I paradoxically disempowered myself whilst attempting to empower my informants: my selective silence intrinsically recognised the self-referential authority of the mainstream heterosexual norm that I (perhaps erroneously) thought that they abided by. Why did I value their (allegedly heteronormativity-accepting) speech more than my own (homosexual) (female) voice? Was this due to the unconscious trace left in me by the same silencing patriarchal power, the effects of which I was trying to study in them? Why did I circumstantially rate the expression (of the experience) of others as more important than my own? Like gays who remain in the closet, I feared (my desire and) losing those who were significant to me. Hence, I tacitly abided by the same oppressive patriarchal rules that (tried to) mute my identity, in the hope of being granted acceptance by those who (so I thought) also abided by them and to whom I was paradoxically trying to give a voice. During the fieldwork that I conducted to investigate women’s liberation, I was thus not as liberated as I thought.
6.a.2) Disclosing (the Direction of) Emancipation

Following from the remarks raised in the previous section, Rachele proceeded with her narration by saying that she and her family disembarked in Fremantle (WA) and continued their journey to the infamous Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training centre by plane and bus, as the boat had broken down. Bonegilla (VIC), like for many other migrants, was an excruciating experience for her: as a matter of fact, Rachele let an opinion slip through the barrier that she had erected between her thoughts and the external world to let me know that “Bonegilla jere nere”\(^{503}\) (literally, “Bonegilla was black”, in the sense that it was terrible). The accommodation—she said when I asked for clarifications—allocated one room to the entire family with shared bathroom and facilities, and according to her hyperbolic description of the situation, they were fed with “sheep whose offspring had [already] died of old age” (“la piore che la só frute e jere muarte di vecjaie”).\(^{504}\) Everything was cooked in mutton grease, even the vegetables, which, no matter how strong she was, she found absolutely disgusting and inedible. She craved for something good to eat.

Overall, she let me understand that they had no control over their lives, that they were submitted to the ruling of the camp officials. Luckily her husband—a skilled migrant—was immediately hired as a mechanic in Wodonga (VIC), where he was paid well, and after three months—the time necessary for administrative processing—they could move to Sydney (NSW), where they went to live in the house of a Sicilian man who rented out rooms to five other families, mostly Triestine migrants. There he continued to work as a mechanic, whilst she found employment in a cotton underwear factory, where her colleagues were not very nice to her because she struggled with the language. She then regretted having skipped the priest’s English classes during the ocean crossing, and had to engage in a non-verbal aggressive exchange with her workmates to stop them from picking on her. Rachele did not want to specify why, but she described this period in Sydney as very hard times for them. However, she

\(^{503}\) Rachele, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.

\(^{504}\) Ibid.
repeatedly stressed that she found relief in the cheerful atmosphere that her housemates would create with “una sunade di fisarmoniche”, meaning with the jovial accordion playing that now represents one of the features labelled overseas as stereotypical Italian-ness, as will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

Two and a half years later, about which Rachele did not report anything else, they moved to the north of Queensland, where they learnt that they could administer ten acres of land to plant tobacco—and later another ten to plant watermelons and another ten for green beans—in a regime of “shared-farma”, meaning that they would keep 75% of the income and give 25% to the owner of the soil. They worked the land for over twenty extremely hard years, during which time they were exposed to all sorts of weather conditions. And on top of the work in the fields, she had to take charge of the family, the responsibility of which lay completely on her shoulders. Nonetheless, whilst she mentioned the strenuous circumstances of the agricultural activity, which is what she also used to do in Friuli during her youth, she acknowledged the great imbalance of workload between her and her husband, but she made no complaint about the fact that he did not do anything in the house, and as I suspect, she did not even expect anything of him. Rather, she spoke of this as if it corresponded to the natural course of affairs. Was his domestic inactivity something to be silently accepted, I later wondered? Or would sharing the household duties have reduced the power allocated to her within the family? Or would she have felt like a failure as a wife if she had questioned it and asked him to take a portion of the responsibilities in the sphere traditionally allocated to women? Would she have found it awkward to share the chores with her men? If this were the case, why did the same not apply to sharing duties in public sphere, traditionally considered the dominion of males?

In 1981, the couple was finally able to settle in Brisbane, where they had meanwhile built nine apartments and could therefore live a substantially more relaxed existence.

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505 Ibid.
506 Ibid.
There he started a business, and she was hired by a luxurious hotel to be—as she said in one of her typical migrant mixings of Friulan and English—“in charge dal catering dai functions” (“in charge of the catering for functions”).\textsuperscript{507} However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, she had already undertaken paid work shortly after arrival, 24 years prior. I outlined in Chapters Three and Five that some Italian women worked outside the house both in Italy and in Australia, but earning wages was traditionally considered a ‘male’ role. The very financial success of the migratory experience had nonetheless rendered it desirable overseas. As also sustained by Parreñas,\textsuperscript{508} it then seems that gender boundaries were not exactly blurred by migration; they could instead be crossed solely in certain directions and under certain conditions: Rachele could (socially) behave like it was thought only men should, when it was deemed necessary for the greater good of the family, such as for the purpose of earning money to allow the nucleus to own a house as quickly as possible. But she—like other migrants—would not ask her man to take on a social role that was thought to pertain to women exclusively.

So it seems that \textit{within the economy of the patriarchal division of the spheres} adopted by my informants of generation 1, women could eventually be publicly ‘masculinised’, but men were not supposed to be equally domestically ‘femininised’. This did not mean that the latter could not have happened at a ‘psychic’ level, and Rachele’s belief that she was stronger than her husband and that he should have inhabited the role (\textit{thought} to be that) of ‘the woman’ is proof that in the intimacy of their personal relationship, he might have also released a certain degree of traditionally conceived masculinity, even though I have no information about whether he would have acknowledged such an instance or not, especially publicly. The ‘masculinisation’ of Rachele (and of the other wage-earning women like her!), which instead happened under everybody’s eyes (and as mentioned in Chapter Three was starting to expand as a phenomenon in Italy, too) can be understood as a form of \textit{emancipation}, if emancipation corresponds to women’s conquest of the roles traditionally allocated

\textsuperscript{507} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{508} Parreñas, \textit{Children of Global Migration}, p. 165.
(by patriarchy) to men in the ‘public sphere’. The acquisition of financial capital, however, did not imply that Rachele was contextually also *liberated* from the various fears of which her silences are the tacit manifestation: had she felt that she shared the ownership of the (public) space inhabited in Australia, she would not have been scared to express her opinions about the difficulties entailed in the process of integration that made her the person that she now is—and that makes her feel like she can no longer fit into the scenery of the Italian countryside.

### 6.b) Multicultural (Silencing of the) Voices

Soon after having first met Rachele in Brisbane, I flew to Melbourne, where on 26 January 2009 I attended the march that celebrates annually ‘the character’ of the Australian nation on the day of the anniversary of the British invasion. I remember it as a pleasantly sunny day in which the streets were full of people from all backgrounds. I enjoyed the show. The colourful and accurately planned street parade was opened by the orderly uniforms of the columned police officers, immediately followed by the more vibrant dresses and less martial performances of the (white) hippies, the Turkish-Australian community, the Italo-Australians, and the members of the various other hyphenated identities who cheered up attendants with (recognisable) manifestations of their ethnic and cultural belonging. As a sign of the nationalistic imprint of the event, everybody carried and waved an abundance of Australian flags along with, where applicable, the ones of their homeland.

The parade was based on the principle of multiculturalism, of which a 1989 publication issued by the Office of Multicultural Affairs provided the following outline:

> In a descriptive sense multicultural is simply a term which describes the cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia. We are, and will remain, a multicultural society.
> As a public policy multiculturalism encompasses government measures designed to respond to that diversity. It plays no part in migrant selection. It is a policy for
managing the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole.\textsuperscript{509}

The policy was started in 1973 by the Labour Whitlam government to replace the White Australia policy\textsuperscript{510} supposedly to give migrants the chance to express their cultures (of origin?), which represented a radical change from the previously implemented narratives of assimilation, the veiled effects of which I reported in Chapters Four and Five.

I was on the eve of my study and, I have to admit, I initially became quite fascinated by the colourful manifestation. It looked very pluralistic and politically correct. But what exactly could the public gather about the (historical becoming of the) identities displayed during the parade, I later asked myself? In view of Sarah Ahmed’s idea that ‘re-cognition’ is about ‘knowing again’\textsuperscript{511}—meaning to know and construct others according to a pre-set understanding of both them and their positioning in respect to the space that the recognisers feel to be the masters of\textsuperscript{512}—how were those identities categorised? Whose ‘diverse’ cultural expression was actually (re-cognised and hence) performed? And diverse from what? And what aspects of it could in any case be portrayed? How was their expression influenced by the way in which the space for it was created? And who was the agent who carried out the recognition to start with?

After I had started engaging with the material provided by the participants of this study during fieldwork, I realised that very little of what I had heard during the storytelling transpired from that and many other public events that I had attended in Australia, which I then thought ran the risk, as Sneja Gunew put it, of rendering the


\textsuperscript{512} Hage, \textit{White Nation}, p. 42.
migrants’ cultures “homogenized as folkloristic spectacle”.513 The debate about the policy has indeed been very vivid in Australia over the past decades. “An inclusive Australian identity”,514 argued Moran for instance, has been supporting a shared sense of belonging, and “contributed to the success of multiculturalism”. Other authors, such as Castles et al., have instead questioned the way in which national identities are defined within it (“shared history, traditions, culture and language?”),515 which is a matter of crucial importance in the case of the plurilingual, multifaceted, and regionally differentiated cultural background that most Italian nationals are the bearers of. “What are the rights of speakers of dialects?”,516 asked for instance Gillian Bottomley in this regard. Low and Pallotta-Chiarolli furthermore emphasise that:

Multicultural policies, programmes and practices must engage with, support, and affirm individuals with multiple identities from multiple lifeworlds, upholding them as sites of confluence and intermixture, rather than expecting them to ‘self-scissor’ and assimilate to one ‘world’ at the expense of another.517

Jon Stratton emphasised that multiculturalism was initiated to deal with the migrants “who had failed to assimilate into the dominant national culture”, and “in the first place, designed to manage a variety of white cultures, all of which were presumed to share the same moral assumptions”.518 For these reasons, he continued:

The policy of multiculturalism is organised according to a metaphorical spatial structure in which migrant, ‘ethnic’ cultures are peripheral to a core culture, named these days as ‘Anglo-Celtic’, which is privileged.519

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516 Bottomley, From Another Place, p. 49.
518 Stratton, Race Daze, p. 10.
519 Ibid.
In Stratton’s view, the *tacit* term of comparison against which ‘ethnic’ minorities are defined (by the embedded agent) is the (development of the) ‘original’ Anglo-Celtic identity of the first European (British) settlers, itself irrevocably (silently) multifaceted and unstable,\(^{520}\) just like those of its self-referentially appointed ‘migrant others’. The fantasy embedded in the historical result of the white Australian discourse, which Hage defined as “a dominant mode of self-perception”,\(^{521}\) is then implicitly reified as the gauge against which diversity is measured. This is important to the extent that in multiculturalism, not all cultures have the same weight. The agent that carries out the recognition of the *others* is not—and in view of what I said in Chapters One and Two cannot theoretically be!—neutral: its nevertheless naturalised identity makes reference to the legacy of the same white British *phantoms* that the (in respect to its narratives, non-white) migrants had previously been asked to assimilate to.

In this view, the (unspoken becoming of the presumably ‘white’) identity of the agent that carries out the recognition is placed (by itself) at the centre of the stage and burdened with an implicit history of power relations that inevitably affects the very efforts to overcome its silencing effects. Then, the (non-white) cultural identities of the Italian migrants were *bleached* by the Australian national narratives in order to emancipate them, but the cultural exchange can be said to have predominantly, although not exclusively, been one-sided, since it does not seem to have changed “the ethnocentric structures which are so entrenched in every area of Australian life”,\(^{522}\) admitting that was ever an aim of the policy.

From the 1970s onwards, Australia started to adopt customs that it recognised as ‘Italian’, but only the (bleachable) ones that could be fit into its historical (white) frame seem to have found visibility in the *public* space. Hence, the streets of Carlton (VIC), Five Docks (NSW), and Leichhardt (NSW) bustle with Italian shops, businesses,


\(^{522}\) Castles, Kalantzis, Cope, and Morrisey, *Mistaken Identity*, p. 5.
and services that cater for the large and now ageing Italian community, and even other ‘ethnicities’ at a superficial level have adopted some ‘Italian’ habits, like that of drinking coffee and eating certain foods. ‘Italian’ film and food festivals are held in various cities too, and the availability of ‘Italian’ foods in particular has been very important for migrants. Yet very little seems to have so far been made available to the public about the life experiences of the migrated individuals who are the bearers of what remains of only “pasta and polka”-style\textsuperscript{523} tokenistic representations of ‘Italian-ness’ (overseas!).

Generation 1.5 Maria, who explained at length that (Anglo-)Australia has not integrated into its (also hyphenated?) identity the (history of the) (food) cultures of migrants, hence failing to discover them, described the practice of 1970s multiculturalism as “words for the sake of words”.\textsuperscript{524} According to her, the culture of the migrants “was included, but the whole thing was left out”.\textsuperscript{525} “They would say, ‘It’s about the food, it’s about this, it’s about that’ and everything”, she added, “but it’s there but it’s not there”.\textsuperscript{526} Gabriella considered that multiculturalism improved the ‘image’ with which ‘Italian-ness’ was perceived, but it provided the possibility to express one’s ‘ethnic’ self only within a ready-made framework in which to identify oneself as ‘Italian’, irrespective of regional affiliations and ‘internal’ cultural differences.

What I intend to highlight is how some important aspects of the Italian (migrant) habitus have remained confined in the (closet of the) ‘private sphere’, and how this was due to the theoretical complications entailed in the process of recognition, which the government policy did not take into account. For example, I mentioned earlier in this chapter that Rachele found comfort in the sound of the accordion. Its cheerfulness helped her to cope with the (for her, unspoken, and for the government, not fully recognised) tremendous difficulties that she, like many others in her condition, was

\textsuperscript{524} Maria, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
\textsuperscript{525} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{526} Ibid.
enduring: it reminded her of the few pleasurable aspects of ‘home’, those that she used to sneak out of the house to experience during her youth, thus incurring her mother’s fury; it alleviated her suffering during strenuous times by nourishing her mind with her need to dance and feel free. And just like Amanda and Giannina, whose stories I reported in Chapter Five, she narrated about taking the considerable risk when in Bonegilla (VIC) to secretly have some food cooked, as what the government provided seriously challenged her overall well-being. The public multicultural manifestations of ‘Italian’ food and music have, however, been (nationalised and) rid of any references to the emotional significations attached to them in the context of the lives of those associated with them, and as a matter of fact, those intended to be represented. So whilst ‘Italian’ foods—or at least their local nationalised understandings and developments—are relatively known in Australia, the ‘Italian’ memories of the hardships carried around by Rachele, which are not detached from food but are also associated with the customs related to her gender and with migration, have instead hardly found any space for expression. Indeed, notwithstanding the theoretical ruses that it is riddled with, this very research has been the first opportunity for my informants to talk about themselves: as indicated by Ornella in Chapter Four, the suffering endured by the women migrants because they were women and migrants was only partially expressed in the non-English-speaking centres specifically set up for that scope in the 1970s. As opposed to that of the Anzac soldiers in the Mediterranean during WWI, the sacrifices made by an entire generation of Mediterranean women in Australia have not become part of the national identity. Hence, as indicated by Damousi, they have not even had the chance to be publicly grieved:

One of the central aspects of an emotional history of Australian cultural life that has been ignored is that of the emotional aspects of migration, and how this has impacted on communities in Australia.\textsuperscript{528}


\textsuperscript{528} Damousi, ‘Ethnicity and Emotions’, p. 9.
Therefore, although the policy did partly ameliorate the migrants’ existences by opening up *some* (patriarchy-determined) spaces of ‘cultural comfort’ in ways that I will further analyse below, it failed to deliver to the (also ‘ethnic’? White Australian) public the meanings that they had been having at the (illusory national) ‘origin’, and the ones that they had been acquiring in Australia as a consequence of the very migration experience—admitting the migrants themselves had been willing to investigate them.

I indeed outlined in Chapter One how, according to the work of Judith Butler, life is produced through “mechanisms of power”:\(^{529}\) in order to carry out the process of recognition, the recognising agent fits its ‘to-be-recognised’ subject into its own normative schemes.\(^{530}\) Although it is not a deterministic process, this means that the former renders visible (to itself) only what it can see of (itself in) the latter through its own grid of intelligibility. I then outlined that with reference to ethnography, this implies that the identity of the anthropologist plays an enormous part in the process of giving voice to the subjects of research; I illustrated earlier in this chapter how this worked with respect to the rapport between Rachele and me. Therefore, in spite of the never totally negotiable ruses entailed in the process, in order to provide data on the silences that it otherwise tacitly produces, the (self-portrayed) identity of the ethnographer should be rendered at least progressively available to the audience.

The (unspoken) identity of the governmental authority that intends to create spaces for the voicing of the migrants’ cultures, no matter how pluralistic and democratically selected, functions like that of the ethnographer, and hence has similar effects on the selection of what is represented in multiculturalism. By responding to specific moral codes that are the product of a determinate historical development of cultures and should therefore not be indiscriminately universalised, it unwillingly projects its ‘shadow areas’—meaning the inevitable effect of its (un)recognised (and hence irretrievably partial) knowledge of itself—on the field, hence *selectively* silencing the

\(^{530}\) Ibid., p. 5.
very subjects to whom it aims to provide a space for expression. Universal representation and inclusiveness are not reachable goals, but it is at least possible to apply frameworks that can progressively lead towards them: the inclusion of the identity of the agent/ethnographer in the research does not impede cultural cancellations, but it can at least provide data that open up space for their evidencing, thus letting silences speak.

The failure to do so on the part of the governmental authority that managed the policy, and hence to disclose its incapacity to understand the dynamics at play within the migrant communities, has, amongst other things, influenced the possibilities of expression—and hence of emancipation and liberation—that the Italian women migrants were given in multiculturalism. According to the authors of Immigration and Australia, multiculturalism aimed to improve “access to a range of services and benefits”, through an “extensive consultation of the ethnic communities”,531 which had been meanwhile discovered to foster “isolation and poverty”.532 It wanted to respond to the needs of what by that time had undeniably become the country’s multi-ethnic population.533 But how, whose, and which were the needs acknowledged?

6.1. Unintelligible Subjectivities

Policy makers have been particularly concerned with the “historic discrimination and prejudice against women, and Aboriginal and Asian people”, who have been recognised as excluded from “effective influence in the major institutions of society”.534 Efforts were then made to enable as many constituencies as possible to express their opinion about the setting up of the framework:

531 Castles, Foster, Iredale, and Withers, Immigration and Australia, p. 104.
532 Ibid., p. 103.
533 See, for example, J. Jupp (ed.), The Challenge of Diversity: Policy Options for a Multicultural Australia, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing, 1989; Castles, Foster, Iredale, and Withers, Immigration and Australia; Castles, Kalantzis, Cope, and Morrisey, Mistaken Identity, Stratton, Race Daze.
534 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet - Office of Multicultural Affairs, National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, p. 9.
The Prime Minister stressed that he placed great importance on obtaining the views of community groups and other organizations in the development of the Agenda. A strategy was therefore developed which sought to reach all sectors of the community: State and local government, community organizations, churches, business groups, trade unions and individuals [my Italicis].\textsuperscript{535}

The consultation of (unproblematically defined) (white) women was probably believed to be possible because, as explained by Sawyer, in Australia “female institution-building has provided the possibility for woman centred political discourses and for pushing social-liberalism towards a more inclusive version of equal opportunities [my italics]”\textsuperscript{536} the scope was that of “prioritising women’s experience” whilst occupying the ethical state’s space.\textsuperscript{537} It is not within the scope of this chapter to theoretically discuss the way in which the emancipatory discourse of the so-called ‘femocrats’\textsuperscript{538} dealt with the male-centred matrix of institutions, and whether democratic governments—which according to Patemen are also the produce of patriarchy\textsuperscript{539}—can actually represent women. It is, however, in my opinion necessary to analyse if the Italian women migrants were actually given the opportunity to enter the above outlined governmental emancipatory trajectory, and eventually in which way. In spite of the government’s nevertheless admirable attempts to reach out to the community through public forums and media,\textsuperscript{540} some of my informants have raised significant doubts over whether it was able to include in the consultation the subjects of this study—meaning the female half of the population of the “largest immigrant group of non-English speaking background”\textsuperscript{541} present in Australia since the 1950s—

\textsuperscript{535} Ibid., p. 57.
\textsuperscript{537} Ibid., p. 110.
\textsuperscript{538} Ibid., p. 111.
\textsuperscript{540} Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet - Office of Multicultural Affairs, National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, p. 9.
and over what it would have in any case eventually been able to gather from them. *Through which channels* would the women migrants have been approached for instance? And which narratives were then being implicitly recognised (through the tacit epistemological projections of the Australian government) as ‘representative’ of their cultures? Did the process contribute to dismantling patriarchal power?

Aboriginal authors have written that some white feminists cooperated with “institutional racism,” lamenting the fact that those feminists often tore “Black children from their mothers’ arms” to place them “in the care of other white women who often abused them.” Murdolo instead indicated that “race and ethnic divisions between women had not been important to the [Australian] ‘women’s movement’ until 1984.” According to the author, in fact, as late as the mid-1990s “published documentation has been mostly produced by anglo women, and is thus partial and mediated by the lived, embodied experiences of anglo women.” Given the lack of communication between (white) Australian feminists and Italian women migrants—an instance confirmed by Bottomley and also silently evidenced by the scarcity of literature on the matter—it then seems unlikely that the women migrants as well as those of the other minorities that multiculturalism was particularly concerned about could be collectively connected to the government through the (white) Australian women movement.

The government, however, consulted *(the representatives of)* (some of) the ethnic communities too (according to Maria, the ones that it could/wanted to recognise as such). Nonetheless, the (few) informants of this study who, when asked, expressed opinions about the matter, unanimously confirmed that since they were sexually

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543 Ibid., p. 74.
544 Murdolo, ‘Warmth and Unity with All Women?’, p. 69.
545 Ibid.
mixed organisations, it was unlikely that women could have a public voice through them.

Even in a leftist migrant workers’ organization like FILEF (Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Emigrati e Famiglie—the Italian Federation of the Emigrated Workers and their Families), for example, which was set up in 1972 in some Australian cities, the presence of women in positions of power was not absent, but minimal. The same can be said of the migrants’ associations: both men and women, for example, now contribute to the material realisation of the events regularly held in Pallara (QLD) by the 1956 founded Brisbane branch of the Fogolâr Furlan, which I tried to attend at least once a year during the fieldwork, but the female presence in the central committee used to be very tiny. Two generation 1.5 women have been in it from the late 1970s and early 1980s, respectively, but before them, there had only been one other woman, who represented an exception to the norm. The Fogolâr Furlan of Brisbane, specified Maria, was not in any case consulted in the context of institutional multiculturalism, and for a number of reasons, it did not even seek to be: the very well-functioning association preferred to maintain a low profile to avoid having to comply with a number of complicated and costly governmental regulations that in the long run have, in her opinion, contributed to the demise of other larger migrant organisations. Indeed, Maria is convinced that the Australian government, which in her view did not wish to deal with the fragmentation of what it preferred to see as homogenous national communities, hardly knew that it existed. The aim of the Fogolâr was nevertheless to provide a space for the Friulan migrants to remember ‘the good old days back home’, not to engage in politics, she said.

In any case, the point is that regardless of what happened in the private sphere and of the (patriarchal) nature of the power that they eventually had in domestic decision-making processes, the first generation of women migrants abided by a habitus of thought that condoned and accepted the public subjugation of women to their men. During the storytelling, some of my informants spoke of themselves with a certain containment when in the presence of their husbands, who tended—predominantly
unimpeded by their wives—to occupy the space and take over the women’s voices, the reason for which, when possible, they were asked to (at least physically) leave the ethnographic field. Their disappearance would generally produce an immediate relief, and we could then continue our conversations in the cosiness of a relaxed, unintruded environment. In the context of the interviews that she conducted amongst the Italian community in Germany, Yvonne Ricker indeed noticed that tensions can build between elderly couples during ethnography,\textsuperscript{547} whilst Ellie Vasta encountered similar issues during her study of the Italo-Australian community that I made reference to earlier in this chapter:

> Often couples would request being interviewed together, in which case we made a point of interviewing the women first in order to avoid the possibility of men influencing their wives’ responses. Even so, the interviewers concurred the women were often more difficult to interview because either they were too afraid to answer questions for fear that they may not answer them ‘correctly’, or they had not much thought of the issues presented to them and so would deliver their repertoire of ready answers.\textsuperscript{548}

In the worst scenarios, as shown in Chapter Four, the Italian women migrants would not be allowed to speak at all, since they would be confined to the house and/or have little or no contact with the exterior, even if they took part in the events of the migrant associations. Paradoxically, this was actually one of the very matters that the multiculturalist policy wanted, and partially managed, to address. Indeed, as also already explained, the services specifically aimed at the non-emancipated (and non-English-speaking) women migrants that were set up in the 1970s seem to have contributed to containing the at times terrifying domestic situation that some women were in. But most users went there for the exact reason that they could not communicate with the Anglo-Australian world around them, and hence their needs and the content of their life stories—admitting that they wanted to share them with others... And that the (white) Australian public wanted to be informed!—continued to

\textsuperscript{547} Y. Ricker, ‘Love Crossing Borders’, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{548} Vasta, \textit{If You Had Your Time Again}, pp. 15-16.
remain within the ‘ethnic’ community itself.\textsuperscript{549} Furthermore, as outlined in earlier sections of this chapter, it must be taken into account that even non-segregated migrants like Rachele have been reported to be reluctant about making their opinions public out of fear of the government.

The 1985-founded Italo-Australian Women Association, whose Sydney meetings I quite regularly attended between 2009 and 2011, was created by Franca Arena for the specific purpose of providing a public (Italian-speaking) space for migrant women and their necessities. The themes treated during the assemblies related to both material and emotional hardships, and the successes entailed in their condition, which unsurprisingly reflected those that I had heard during the storytelling.

As witnessed by the presence of the Italian Consul in Sydney at some of its gatherings, the Association certainly represents Italian women migrants amongst institutions—or at least, with the Italian diplomatic posts overseas. However, its membership reported to have had little space for expression and minimal possibilities for cultural exchange with the Anglo-Australian context, in spite of the fact that they did reach out to it. Indeed, even nowadays, the contents discussed during its meetings remain the dominion of its affiliates or at most of the Italian-speaking community ‘down under’. Some Italo-Australian men now attend the events, which are widely publicised and discussed by the Italian press in Australia (such as the newspaper “La Fiamma” or the Italian section of SBS), but hardly any non-Italian public or non-Italian-speaking media are familiar with what happens there. What pertains to the intimate aspects of the Italo-Australian women’s condition thus remains absent from the mainstream public debate. There is no structure to cater for the diffusion to the wider English-speaking community of what the migrants in such a context (need to) voice in Italian (or in their local languages), even if they are fluent in English, which in view of what I mentioned in Chapter One regarding the ethnographic relevance of language, can reveal important aspects of their habitus.\textsuperscript{550} This very absence silences and (hence)

\textsuperscript{549} Damousi, ‘Ethnicity and Emotions’, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{550} See, for example, A. Duranti, \textit{Etnografia del parlare quotidiano}.  

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contributes to rendering unintelligible the (Italian) voices of the women migrants. It can then be considered of significance with respect to the (scarcity of) possibilities that 1970s multiculturalism has given to the subjectivities treated in this research to emancipate themselves in the (Anglo-)Australian public sphere.

Notably, the National Italo-Australian Women Association has been active in Sydney and in a few other centres, but it does not systematically cover all parts of Australia, the geographical size of which renders participation difficult for those who do not live in the concerned areas. Significantly, Franca Arena herself became the first (and at the time only!) Italo-Australian woman to be elected to the NSW parliament in 1981, a quarter of a century after the arrival of the Italian women ‘down under’! By that time, someone like Rachele had already endured and, unlike others, positively overcome all sorts of sufferings—and made a financial fortune.

It is then likely that those who could be consulted by and therefore speak to the (legacy of the white) Australian government on behalf of the Italian women migrants were the (recognised) migrant élites, meaning the already emancipated and overwhelmingly male individuals who, having succeeded in the process of integration, had rendered their (Italian?) identity intelligible. Such élites were able to (speak on behalf of the less emancipated women in order to) have some essential services set up, like those indicated in Chapter Four by Ornella. The practice of multiculturalism, however, did not affect the (structuring and structured) structure551 of the gender roles that the Italian migrants had brought with them from overseas. Its emancipatory potential was lessened by the silencing effect of the (unspoken) epistemological projections with which the subjects that it was supposed to give voice to were invested. The women migrants were then framed by multiculturalism into (gender) identities that did not respond to and hence could not actively contribute to changing the habitus according to which they lived.

In this sense, Aleksandra Ålund importantly pointed out that:

551 Bourdieu, Distinction, p. 170.
Any classification of people purely in terms of culture—a classification that fails to acknowledge that cultures, identities and ethnicities are hybrid, composite and responsive to structural inequalities and exclusions—will promote a hegemonic social order that legitimises the exclusion of ethnic minorities, not least minority women.552

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I highlighted the silences that pertain to the life stories of the 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia, showing how, if critically listened to, they can provide information about the participants, the ethnographer/agent, and their cultures of reference, in spite of their presences. I disentangled the ethnographic relationship that I had developed with Rachele to show how the (reasons behind the) informants’ and the ethnographer’s unwillingness or incapacity to (publicly) discuss certain matters tacitly speak on their behalf, contextually creating (mis)understandings in the communication process that can have manifold domino effects on interpretation. I also showed how, once recorded as data, the fears and power dynamics that prevent speech can become useful tools to be used to highlight the complications inherent to the research process. I finally applied the same framework to analyse the policy of multiculturalism in order to investigate the way in which it operated to (fail to) give voice to the cultures of the 1950s Italian women migrants.

In the next chapter, I self-reflexively analyse Gelsomina’s recounting of her settlement in Italy to show how the modality of narration of the informants and the contents can provide contradictory data in terms of the emancipatory and liberatory effects of migration.

552 Ålund, ‘Feminism, Multiculturalism, Essentialism’, pp. 157-158.
CHAPTER 7

‘L’ISOLA CHE NON C’È’:553
(A JOURNEY TOWARDS)
A NEW SELF

We judge a book by its cover
and read what we want
between selected lines.554

I started this thesis by reporting a conversation in which I asked generation 1
returned migrant Gelsomina when she had acquired an awareness of her freedom and
independence. The reason for this was that my ethnographic research aimed to study
the effect of migration on women who had left Italy prior to the introduction of the
ideas developed by the 1970s feminist movement: (how) had the move to Australia
put them in touch with their rights and/or liberated them from patriarchy? In the
following chapters, I investigated the theoretical implications related to giving voice to
the subjects of ethnography, examined my role in this process, and questioned my
position in the field. I then described through a selection of the stories told by the
women migrants some of the aspects of their life experiences, both in Italy and
overseas. I finally described the way in which a self-reflexive analysis of the
ethnographic relationship can give voice to the silencing effect of habitus, and applied
the same framework of thought to the questioning of how 1970s multiculturalism
operated in this sense.

553 Title of a popular Italian song by Edoardo Bennato, translatable as ‘The island that does not exist’.
In this chapter, I glean once again from Gelsomina’s storytelling to look at how the entanglements of habitus are tacitly negotiated by informants and in the ethnographic relationship itself. What I wish to show is that migration seems to have produced contradictory results with respect to the emancipation and liberation of women. To do so, I first resort to self-reflexivity to explain how (an habitus that condoned) patriarchal violence moulded the ‘defensive’ modality of narration of ‘Italian’ women (migrants). The ‘defensiveness’ of the informants’ narrations represents in fact a measuring gauge of their level of adherence to traditional notions of womanhood. I then show how the content of the storytelling partly overturns the result of the analysis of the migrants’ positioning with respect to patriarchal modes of narration of the self.

7.a) Reconnecting with One’s (Un)Usual Self

Gelsomina began her narration from ‘the end’. The following are the very first words that she pronounced during our second encounter, but the first actual tape-recorded storytelling session in January 2011:

[On] the 30th of March [2010] I left Australia... Definitely... Indefinitely! [...] After my going and coming, backwards and forwards, ehm... Indefinitely I left Australia [...] Because finally I think ‘this is... This is it... This is the end of, the end of... the road’—how do I say?—The winter of my life. And I think I better end up in here, close to my family and my... Where I were born, you know [my emphasis].555

She then remained silent for a few moments, during which I took the opportunity to ask her why it was important for her to return to her birthplace. We were at the early stages of our relationship and I had not yet understood that Gelsomina does not need much prompting and that her narration is generally very linear: although she does take some detours, she normally goes back to the thread that she was following and makes the point she wanted to make.

555 Gelsomina, interview with the author, 2011, Cervignano del Friuli, Italy.
In her reply, she immediately mentioned facts that had occurred twenty years earlier and nevertheless seemed to have a strong resonance in her present.

Gelsomina: Well, the reason why [is] because my husband has [not] been well, we came back ten... Twenty years ago really, in the 90s, to stay, because he wasn’t well, and he wanted to be here, back home. After all, that’s the only family we have, really. Having a daughter here, for so many years, and all our relatives they were still alive—my mum and dad, my mother and father, and my husband had three brothers and one sister still alive. He thought ‘Right... Well, we done everything, we were in Australia since ’55’—that means 45 years—and once you retire it doesn’t matter where you retired where... Best thing to end our lives was at home. I think everybody likes to go home, in the end.

Anita: So in the 90s, you came back...

Gelsomina: We came back in the 90s. My husband was really dying off [...] And he said ‘Well, if I have a few more years to go, I like to be closer to my brothers, my sisters’, my...’ And myself, my mother and father, and our daughter, that she was here. So we didn’t come back to nothing, we still had roots here, we, we... Had our daughter here. So, we thought ‘Yes, we go back!’, and we stayed! The problem was after my husband passed away [...] And what happened to me? I was in a strange country and I felt like ‘Ah, what am I doing here? If I was back in Australia I had some... I had some life still that I can live on my own, with friends, and I still had my son and my grandchildren there, but rather than live here on my own, because I was on my own at the end [...] And here I felt myself that wasn’t my style of living on my own [my emphasis].556

Her answer, which I soon realised would have taken a much longer and detailed explanation than what I had initially imagined, immediately proved to be in many ways interesting. Her husband, first of all, seemed to have held a pivotal role in her existence: he was the one who, she later said to me, had decided to go to Australia in the 1950s, and the one who wanted to return ‘home’ to Friuli, where they apparently still had roots. And, although there might have been some unreported debating between the two about the matter, she recounted the decision-making process as smooth and untroubled. According to her words, she simply complied with his wishes. At the end of the day, he was dying, and he was also ‘the boss’, as she had stated in the

556 Ibid.
conversation I reported at the beginning of this thesis, and according to the local mentality of their time, he was even supposed to (publicly) be recognised as such.

Secondly, I later noticed that her narration contained some important contradictions, which I did not have the chance to discuss with her any further: Gelsomina initially stated that her and her husband’s relatives in Friuli were the ‘only family’ that they had; shortly after, she said that when her husband died she was on her own, the ‘he’ to whom she had previously given agency inevitably became ‘me’, and the family that she had in Australia—a son and grandchildren—all of a sudden materialised onto the scene. Moreover, her birthplace, previously labelled as the ‘home’ that s/he wanted to re-unite with, turned out to be ‘a strange country’ where she could not conduct ‘her style of living’. Hence, although she stated that it did not matter (to her? Or to him?) where they retired, as a matter of fact, it was not in Friuli where she wanted to be, at least after her husband had died.

Furthermore, it is important to observe the overlapping of the notions of home and family: what transpires from her narration is that there is a strong connection between her rootedness and her affective ties, although her sense of belonging, which seems to change along with her marital status, is influenced by the customs to which she—as a widowed, single individual—wanted to adhere. She then provided further explanation regarding this very matter:

Anita: And what was missing?
Gelsomina: Everything! Absolutely everything! Getting up in the morning when you feel like, go out, no worry that the shops are closing at a particular time, and you stay out, wherever, do your own thing, or visiting friends, or stay with friends, that they were single, too, at the end, because they have lost their husbands—I have three friends, three girlfriends that they were single and I have been friends for the last 40 years, 50 years, I mean we were a family, you see? So here I needed to be, how do I say? There was no way that I could see... That I can get up and go... Where? Where do I go? My daughter used to say to me ‘Mum, at 12:30 the shops are closing, mum. [It is] 11 o’clock if you need to go out to do some shopping, you should...’
Anita: ... Go now!
Gelsomina: ... Keep going, you now? That was not my style of living. My style of living was: I do my own things in the morning, I just leave and stay out all day, we going to a movie, we go for a lunch, we going to play bingo, we go... But we have a little bit of life left after all this, you know? And so I thought ‘Rather than be by myself here, I go back to Australia, to live, there I know what to do with myself, even on my own’. And so that’s why. I pack everything and went back to Australia [...] See I have double nationality by then, so I could come and go as I pleased, I could come and stay here, and I could go back to Australia and be what I used to be [...] So that’s why, at one stage, after my husband passed away [...] I went back there. And I stayed with my son, in my sons’ house, and I had my children... Grandchildren there. And I stayed 10 years in Australia. And I done, whatever.

Anita: Did you come back in those ten years, ever?

Gelsomina: No, no. I didn’t come back in those ten years. Because at my age, I wasn’t going to go backwards and forwards, like, I didn’t have the energy to do it, but I had the energy to stay there and enjoy the rest of my ten years, eh, the way I was used to, because it’s a different thing, you can’t compare this style of living and their style of living. You know that [my emphasis].

At that point, it was clear that Gelsomina had recognised me as someone familiar with her (migrant) culture(s): for example, she knew that I knew that shops in Friuli, like in many parts of Italy, traditionally close at lunchtime for three or three and a half hours, during which time, especially in small towns where large supermarkets are not easily accessible without a car, it is nearly impossible to buy groceries, and that this circumstance contributes to shaping the daily routines. In fact, I finished the sentence for her: given where she lived and the amount of grooming that (she knew) I know is required for a lady like her to comply with the local notions of public presentability, if she wanted to buy food for the day, at 11:00am it was really time to get going. She also made a clear declaration about the fact that, as I am well familiar with the Australian way(s) of living, I was aware of the ‘incomparable’ difference in lifestyle between the two places—and that therefore she did not need to describe it in greater detail. Her narrative was then influenced by the beliefs that she projected onto me: just like Anna, whose words I reported in Chapter Four, Gelsomina did not talk any further about what she thought that I already knew. Her choice has a number of implications with

557 Ibid.
respect to the ethnographic process: did she assume that I was going to explain the situation on her behalf, if necessary? Or was she not concerned about who the final audience was? To whom was she telling her story, and what role did she (un)consciously give to me?

After she had provided a lengthy description of her accommodation and how she organised her daily activities both in Cervignano (Friuli, Italy) and in Sydney, the conversation thus continued, finally getting to the point:

Gelsomina: Until I held that by myself ok, but last year... Two years ago, I said to myself: ‘My 80th birthday, might be the last trip I make and I go to Italy to join the rest of the family, life and death, anybody, and I’ll be there, that’s it.’ Now I’m content. Now I’m really pleased that I... I couldn’t make a better move at a better time.”
Anita: Oh, I’m very happy for you!
Gelsomina: Yes.
Anita: If you feel like that...
Gelsomina: Oh, yes, I did... I do! I do feel like that!
Anita: Did you feel like this before in your life? Like...
Gelsomina: No no no no no... I was happy when we came in the 90s with my husband, but then it, it was five years of—between him and I—I thought [...] ‘We came to enjoy our last days and we are persecuted with problems!’ But this is life, you know. But then when I pulled myself back together again I thought ‘No, no, this is not to be the end for me, no. I, I still have life to, to enjoy, and I’m going back where I come from. That’s the only place I can feel that I’m myself.’ You see, I’ve got two homes: here [in Friuli], by birth, there [in Australia] by—how can you say?—adoption is the right word, indeed. Adoption. And I tell you, I could not be adopted by a better country [my emphasis].\footnote{558}

7.6) Analysing the (Patriarchal Text in the) Migrants’ Narratives

“Narratives”, explained Roseneil, “are expressive of both the conscious concerns of interviewees, and of unconscious personal and socio-cultural assumptions and

\footnote{558 Ibid.}
processes”.

The very way in which one (un)intentionally speaks of herself is to be considered part of her narration just as much as the content that she did (not) disclose through it. I showed above how Gelsomina, for example, calibrated her speech around the tacitly acknowledged notion that there was information that she did not need to convey for the reason that she was reporting it to me, someone whom she implicitly allocated a certain positioning with respect to habitus. In view of such a procedure, which I had also tacitly accepted and reciprocated, I refrained from asking her to clarify or expand on certain matters, because I (like her?) automatically assumed that I could have eventually filled in the gaps for her.

Such assumptions, which are not carried out consciously during communication, can greatly affect interpretation: those ‘shadow areas’ of subconscious exchange of information are in fact the sites on which are exerted the epistemological projections with which the ethnographer interprets the data. They are the potential conveyers of epistemic violence to the extent that they allow the point of view of the person who has more power regarding the outcome of the interpersonal exchange to frame into her own dominion of intelligibility the information provided by the other person, thus silencing a certain amount of the content that the latter more or less intentionally wanted to communicate. The assumptions made during interpersonal exchanges should not therefore be left unacknowledged—admitting it is possible to ever fully account for them—and their (progressive and never fully accomplished?) unearthing should actually become part of the very (feminist) ethnographic process.

The same discourse applies to Gelsomina’s silences with respect to certain topics. For example, she skipped over the pain that can be assumed that she felt for the loss of her husband (as indicated in Chapter Three, the same had been done by Giannina with reference to the deaths of her mother and her daughter). There could be several reasons why she did so, and the ethnographer has no means to release a final statement about them. The subjects’ silences only fall on the ear of the ethnographer who is trained to listen to them as signifiers of a certain type of culture; in this sense,

they are therefore *the product of the ethnographer's interpretation* of the informant's storytelling, and as such they should be treated. However, given that interpretation is at the core of ethnography, a certain degree of risk must inevitably be taken in this respect, and, as seen in Chapters One and Two, self-reflexivity can assist in reducing the epistemic violence that is unavoidably inherent in the process.

In the above extract, Gelsomina also apparently contradicted herself. What I saw as contradictions form part of her way of narrating her life story, and therefore of the data that she provided. They can be considered informative of the inner processes (that she is perhaps trying to protect?). Hollway and Jefferson suggested that they should not be flattened out in the attempt to invest the informant with (*the ethnographer's*) coherence:

> In our view, consistent with a theorisation of the defended subject, it is important for summaries not to iron out inconsistencies, contradictions and puzzles. To grasp a person through the ‘whole’ of what we know about him or her does not have to imply that he or she is consistent, coherent or rational.560

The acknowledgement of the assumptions that the ethnographer makes about the speech of her informants does not completely render them their power—as indicated by Portelli,561 the discourse always remains in the hands of the writer of the stories—but at least it evidences the dis-imbalance of it, thus allowing the reader to better assess the quality of the influence that the overlapping of the ethnographer’s voice had on the storytellers’... And vice-versa! As exemplified in Chapter Six, the ethnographer can (and does!) to different extents (un)consciously submit herself to the power of the narratives that *she* nevertheless inevitably projects on the (other) participants in her research, the difference being that unlike them, she continues to hold the handle of the pot with the final product.

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I argue that the *ethnographic text* is the product of the (progressive undoing of the) tacit relations of domination inherent in the *interfacing* and *intertwining* of the (self-)narratives of the ethnographer and the informant. Such (self-)narratives are constituted by the interrelation between the information that is worded and the information that is ‘assumed’ and/or (un)willingly transmitted through gestures, silences, and/or contradictions. All of these elements, however, inevitably undergo the anthropologist’s interpretation before being given voice. The way in which one negotiates within herself the disclosure of information is affected by factors that are psychological but also connected to habitus: silences and inconsistencies are therefore relevant with respect to an informants’ rapport with it. The analysis of the ethnographic text should then include an investigation of both the modality of narration and its contents.

In the following section, I will deploy self-reflexivity in order to enter the intricacies inherent in the factors that I deem to sustain the *modality of* Gelsomina’s narration of herself from ‘behind the scenes’. Afterwards, I will analyse how the *content* of her and other informants’ storytelling at least partly contradicts the outcome of the analysis of the modality. The image that I want to let emerge from this investigation is that, as previously stated, emancipation and liberation can take very complicated and contradictory paths: what appears at the surface of the narration can be disproved by the analysis of the narratives that (can be assumed to) sustain it.

**7.1.1) Behind the Scenes of ‘Defensiveness’**

An investigation of the factors that could tacitly sustain the women migrants’ way of telling their life stories is particularly important with reference to the theme being investigated in this thesis: as brought to light by 1970s feminism, the narratives of women’s selves have been heavily influenced by the (heteronormative) epistemological projections of patriarchy, which women (as well as men, who, whether they want it or not, are carriers of ‘phallic’ capital, to put in Bourdieu’s terms,
and hence of greater privilege within this dominion of thought) have been internalising as their own. Such internalisation has contributed to maintaining the patriarchal (structuring structured) structure in place. ‘Autocoscienza’ was practised with the very purpose of (im)possibly permitting an autonomous narration of the female self, ‘purified’ from the silencing effect of the male intelligibility of womanhood. Italian 1970s feminists indicated that the appropriation of (the narratives over) their bodies and sexuality was a key step towards liberation. In 1980, American author Adrianne Rich listed sexual and physical violence along with confinement in the house amongst the forms through which women’s perception of their (sexual) selves is shaped. These elements have been indicated by my informants to be, to different extents, relevant to their life stories, together with exploitation of labour, repression of creativity and denial of access to cultural capital, which Rich also indicated to be pertinent to the case.

Patriarchy then influenced women’s self-understanding by framing, in Judith Butler’s sense, the notion of (physical, emotional, and intellectual) violence and hence the possibilities of speech: in order to be grieved, violence must be recognised as such. Unrecognised violence remains unspoken, because it is cut out of the realm of intelligibility, covered under a layer of shame. As indicated in the Introduction, according to Bourdieu, “the ‘unconscious’ is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus”. Unrecognised violence is then ‘embedded’ in habitus and naturalised in the way of living. My interpretation of my informants’ storytelling with respect to the emancipatory and/or liberatory potential of migration has therefore also involved reading their accounts against their eventual adherence to or distancing from the narratives that have been sustaining the muting of ‘Italian’ women’s voices through the violent repression of their freedom to express their personas.

The type of information that is communicated and the very way in which women give
voice to themselves involuntarily tell about the subject’s (and the ethnographer’s!)
positioning in this respect: I have been asking myself just how dissonant the
narrations were with respect to the normative power of patriarchy. And in which way
has migration contributed to the eventual detachment from it? Did it favour women’s
self-intelligibility and expression? Moreover, which contents did the informants
eventually intend to hide with their eventual (unwittingly?) partial and/or
inconsistent (and hence) defensive disclosure of themselves? Conscious of the
limitations inherent in the practice of self-reflexivity, like Hollway and Jefferson, I
have then been using “my own subjectivity to assist the analysis”\textsuperscript{564} of the
ethnographic texts that I constructed with the subjects of this research. I already
highlighted in Chapter Three that although it did not seem to be a problem for her,
Giannina’s storytelling indicated that during her youth she was not in control of her
life. In Chapter Four, I brought to attention the fact that it was difficult for (me to get)
Anna to speak about her emotional state, and that domestic violence was hardly ever
reported by informants of generation 1. In Chapter Five, I showed how generation 1.5
Virginia did instead question the assumptions on which the emotional and physical
violence suffered in her childhood house were based. In Chapter Six, I illustrated how
the subject’s and ethnographer’s silences intertwined, how such intertwining
contributed to maintaining the habitus, and how self-reflexive ethnography can help
to undo them. But how exactly does the shaping power of patriarchal violence work?
And why, unlike their mothers, have the generation 1.5 informants been vocal about it
instead?

In view of my own personal experience of it, during the course of this research, I could
not avoid thinking that at least part of the silences and erasures that riddled
generation 1 informants’ narrations are the result of the domestic beatings that they
have either received or witnessed during the course of their lives. In this thesis, I
cannot enter the psychoanalytical aspects of the matter, but ‘community-supported’
beatings—meaning those caused and sustained by the pressures of the community—

\textsuperscript{564} Hollway and Jefferson, ‘Analysing Data Produced with Defended Subjects’, p. 15.
are very likely to produce processes of ‘repression’ (‘rimozione’), with the alleged cancellation or ‘removal’ of the memories that contrast against mainstream views. As I argue, those memories, however, only superficially disappear from one’s narration of oneself: they remain in it in the form of silences, contradictions, and inconsistencies. And because ‘repression’ acts at a very deep level of the subconscious, even migration in itself can be insufficient to allow them to come to resurface.

In reference to what I reported in Chapter Two with respect to my father’s implementation of his power over me, when I used to describe my family relationships prior to becoming aware (through psychoanalysis) of my right to the pain that they have been a source of, I would say, for example, that my father had violently hit me because I’m a lesbian and that he should have apologised, but that I had forgiven him in any case. Irrespective of where I was in the world, to conjugate my inner discomfort with the public image that I was subconsciously trying to comply with in an effort to still do a ‘bella figura’, I’d only report a part of the story. I would not enter the gruesome details of the circumstances in which the beatings had occurred, or mention the anger that I had experienced or the profound state of trauma in which I consequently found myself. Nor I would report the angst that I had felt when, ten years earlier, I had seen my mother being repeatedly subjected to the same treatment, or when she had then disappeared with my seldom seeing her until I was an adult. I hid those feelings because I would not consciously mention them to myself to start with; and they became unintelligible to me also because they were unintelligible to those around me: no one publicly recognised my father’s behaviour as wrong, and although inside I knew that it was (just like Rachele knew that of her mother), I had no means of expressing my ideas about it. In spite of feminism—and the intellectual environment in which I was brought up—the habitus that translated and was translated by the cultural pressures of the ‘Italian’ community and the emotional attachments that they inform(ed), allocated capital to (the violence silently contained in) my father’s voice, and hence contributed to impeding me from consciously allocating his responsibilities to him. I could not therefore acknowledge

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the contradictions contained in my own (self-inflicting) version of the facts, which was subconsciously aimed at (im)possibly covering the discrepancy between my feelings and those that I could (not) express. I used to actually defend him from my own critique—by not demanding the justice that I intimately felt had to be done. The community’s denial of my female pain, and the circumstantial and consequent impossibility to do legal justice to it, had fundamentally led me to repressing my own voicing of it.

An environment that traditionally devalues the word of (non-conforming) female individuals and discounts their pain, as I have described to be the Italian context—especially when the migrants left in the 1950s—alienates women from their feelings and implicitly requires them to publicly project an image of a strong self and to act along such fantasy as if it were real. In order to maintain the positions of (a lack of autonomous) power allocated to them within the patriarchal hierarchy, women (as well as men) have (had) to unconsciously hide some of their emotions by adapting their narratives of themselves to a net of socially accepted ‘cover-ups’ aimed at upholding the power structure that sustains the invisibility of certain (socially) unwanted feelings by (im)possibly denying their existence. As I showed in Chapter One with reference to the work of Judith Butler, only a part of what pertains to life is framed as living, and therefore grievable. Claiming one’s own socially ungrievable pain implies the counter-hegemonic operation of claiming the privilege to feel it: the unequal distribution of privilege is in fact rendered possible by the support implicitly given to the very imbalance in the community that, more or less heterogeneously, and more or less consciously, traditionally accepts it. Hence, the expression of women’s affliction is (self-)discouraged to the extent that it would render necessary a public revision of responsibilities—and with it, an analysis of the power dynamics that sustained the previous state of denial.

The mechanism, as Butler also noted, is not deterministic,\textsuperscript{566} but the re-arrangement of habitus is not a straightforward operation. As mentioned, generation 1 Rachele did

\textsuperscript{566} Butler, \textit{Frames of War}, p. 4.
evidence her discomfort with respect to the beatings suffered when she was a child. Such beatings were imparted to her by a female figure—her mother—whose aim was to make Rachele fit into the dominant discourse about ‘appropriate’ femininity. Rachele was then implicitly deprived of her right to complain about it, and hardly anybody gave her support. I then argued that Rachele’s very disclosure of such an intimate experience, and the consequent *implicit* questioning of violence, can be considered a proto-feminist act of ‘autocoscienza’. I also showed that generation 1.5 Virginia has instead been very vocal about her difficulties with the ‘Italian’ habitus maintained in the house by her mother overseas, which also included a large amount of beatings. Unlike Rachele, however, who was aware that her suffering was due to her femaleness but did not consciously place her experience in the greater picture of social gender relations, Virginia has moreover distrusted the very system that sustained and was sustained by her mother’s implementation of patriarchy. What Virginia did not question is her father’s role in it: why, I would have asked, did he not stop his wife from beating his daughter? Was his tacit approval condoning the violence as well? In any case, Virginia’s disclosure can be indicated as a sign that she did distance herself from the notions of womanhood that her ancestors wanted her to inhabit. As seen, her migration process can be said to have had a great, though controversial part in putting her in the situation of raising her awareness of her positioning in reference to habitus: it placed her in the condition of comparing her mother’s way of living to that of (white) Australia, and this seems to have subsequently allowed her to recognise physical violence as such. The extent to which this mechanism has liberated her from the legacy of the humiliation that one inherits with the beatings cannot be fully assessed with the data at disposal. As exemplified through my own narration of myself, the consequences of violence can take complicated routes in the subconscious that need a psychoanalytical examinations that this thesis cannot carry out.

What can however be indicated is that whilst stances similar to Virginia’s have been frequently adopted by the women of generation 1.5, some generation 1 informants have instead been very condescending with respect to the domestic violence suffered
during youth, considering it as a form of ‘education’, no matter how harsh. They at times said that they have ‘forgiven’ their mothers and/or fathers on the basis that they regarded the beatings necessary to ‘discipline’ their exuberance, which they deemed was a compulsory act to teach them to do a ‘bella figura’.\textsuperscript{567} This type of forgiving, I argue, defends one’s parents’ from (one’s) judgement, and consequently—although this was not done on purpose—defends from judgement the patriarchal discourse that sustains and is sustained by the violence. In order to, although ‘unwittingly’, defend the patriarchal discourse over womanhood, one has to narrate the self in specific ‘defended’ ways, meaning letting one’s image correspond to that which exudes from habitus.

As I highlighted through my own story, the ‘defence’ of patriarchal narratives can take manifold forms and, for instance, be found in the silences and contradictions contained in one’s speech. In the above extract, Gelsomina also contradicted herself about her family status and her (husband’s?) desires, reporting that after her husband’s death, she felt alone in Friuli—in spite of having family there—and skipping over the potentially anguishing circumstances (like the mourning of her husband) to give an account of only those in which she took affirmative action. Her recounting, importantly, did not mar anybody’s reputation, in spite of the fact that its contradictions could be seen as indicators that her inner discourse also involved additional, undisclosed information about the nature of her family relations. She thus seemed to (want to?) provide an implicitly protective, pain-free, conflict-free, and vigorous image of her persona. Such an image can of course correspond to who Gelsomina really is, but at the same time, it reflects the fantasy that ‘Italian’ women have been traditionally required to inhabit: that of the mother who \textit{selectively} represses her feelings and selflessly endures difficulties for the good of others. Her choice to describe herself in such a way \textit{could} then \textit{also} be read as a sign of her (un)conscious understanding of how it is ‘appropriate’ to narrate one’s female self, and in this sense, she would speak of her allegiance to the habitus of the culture(s) of reference. I hence believe that as opposed to the content, which I will discuss in the

\textsuperscript{567} Baldassar, \textit{Visits Home}, p. 136.
next section, the modality of Gelsomina's narration could indicate that she herself partly condoned the narratives of patriarchy. If this were the case, migration would not have completely freed her from attachments to traditional 'Italian' understandings of womanhood.

It could be argued that as a migrant, she simply wanted to provide a successful image of herself with respect to her life choice, which is why she only projected (what she read as?) the ‘positive’ parts of her life. I am quite sure that this was the case. In my opinion, the matter has to be reported to what is meant by ‘positive’: on which grounds is the (un)conscious selection of facts that contribute to constituting a successful image of one's female migrant self based? Indeed, for Gelsomina as well as Rachele and the other generation 1 informants, financial stability and affluence were the stated goals to be reached through the move overseas. They hence probably evaluated the success of their migration with respect to those terms, and, needless to say, it is not my intention to take away from them the right to compare themselves against such very important targets, especially given the miserable material conditions in which they lived in Italy before departure.

However, the fact that, as mentioned in Chapter Two, for them emancipation or liberation did not even seem to be in the panorama, or at least not consciously, speaks of their initial positioning with respect to the 'Italian' pre-feminist habitus, which framed and was framed by the (self-)framing of their voices within the domain (it) allocated to (poor and deprived, post-WWII peasant and working-class) women. As said, the narrations of the generation 1.5 migrants did not show signs of the same concerns as those of their mothers with respect to the disclosure of conflict and/or suffering. Indeed, not only did they question the dominant discourse over (the violence through which was maintained the traditional notion of) 'Italian (migrant)' womanhood; but as I showed in Chapter Four, it was predominantly through the daughters that I became aware of the difficulties of the mothers. For the migrants of generation 1.5, 'success' was not measured in financial terms alone. Just like the Italian 1970s feminists, nearly all of the generation 1.5 informants appropriated their
rights to their feelings and did not worry about including their sorrows and failures in the narrations of their triumph. Paradoxically, it must be noted, this was also permitted by the fact that their mothers’ selfless endurance of the hardships entailed in the migrant condition contributed to allowing them to live in affluence, and hence free of the suffocating and silencing ties represented by material constraints.

In order to include certain instances in one’s image of success, such instances have to be considered ‘includable’ to start with. Like Gelsomina, the migrants of generation 1 have not generally included in their narrations many details of the sorrows endured. Notwithstanding that a certain level must be accounted for in terms of individual personal differences, the fact that informants decide to present only certain aspects of their experience and omit others constitutes important data with respect to their positioning in the patriarchal habitus: the ‘how’ that one tells of her female self also responds to ‘subterranean’ patriarchal narratives about what can(not) be expressed. The silencing of certain aspects of women’s lives was obtained by what I described as the performative reiteration of hegemonic norms, following Butler’s line of thought: the violence exerted on women was condoned as socially accepted and then replicated until migration and/or major social revolutions started to question it.

I also argue that no ‘final data’ can be provided in this sense without also conducting a psychoanalytical investigation: as exemplified in Chapter Two and above through my own narration, because that habitus acts at a subconscious level, the distancing and/or eventual re-conjunction with the patriarchal narrative can happen at different levels in the same individual and in very contradictory ways. I will show in the next section that there are external circumstances that can (forcibly) favour and/or discourage such distancing, making space for previously non-includable contents.

As a final point, I believe that it must be reitered once more that it is the ethnographer’s grid of (un)conscious epistemology that filters the data provided by the subject, shaping their interpretation into the final product. If the ‘defensiveness’ of

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568 Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 
the so-called ‘defended subjects’\textsuperscript{569} is highly relevant in the context of migration to the assessment of the level of appropriation of and/or distancing from the very patriarchal narratives that have created its basis, so is the ‘defensiveness’ of the ‘defended ethnographer’. In the case of this research, this also means that since I was myself in the process of becoming aware of my own adherence to habitus during the fieldwork, I could only partially discuss my interpretation of their words with the informants.

Not to be forgotten, in order to discuss my analysing with them, I would have had to give away much more of my own story than I was prepared to do. I therefore have no information about what they thought of my elaboration of the concept of ‘defensiveness’. This is in conflict with the practice of feminist ethnography, which, as said in the Introduction\textsuperscript{570} and Chapter One,\textsuperscript{571} requires discussing the material with the subjects of research. To do so, however, I should have returned to Brisbane and Cervignano during the writing up of the thesis and debated with them about this and other matters related to our unconscious involvement in maintaining patriarchal habitus. This included the non-disclosure of my sexuality and the effects that it had on our rapport. Similar debates require time and especially presence given the age of the informants; they are therefore not sustainable by telephone. Due to material restrictions, re-entering fieldwork was not financially practicable. To be faithful to the feminist oral history process and the trust accorded to me by the informants, I was only left with the option of omitting the non-discussed parts of the analysis from the research. Yet this would have meant impeding once again the voicing of the effects of patriarchy: the storytellers’ as well as the ethnographer’s ‘defensiveness’ are very relevant to the thesis, because I believe that they are tacit signifiers of habitus and the distance that both the informants and myself have (not) taken from it with migration. In order to include these debates in the thesis, I therefore decided not to render this study accessible to the public. Although the participants’ identities are protected with

\textsuperscript{569} Hollway and Jefferson, \textit{Doing Qualitative Research Differently.}
\textsuperscript{570} Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{571} Geiger, ‘What’s So Feminist about Doing Women’s Oral History?’, p. 175.
the use of pseudonyms, they would still recognise themselves in their own words if they read them.

Keeping the thesis confidential does not solve the theoretical ruse: not only do I still fail to protect the (other) participants’ right to eventually disagree—I only render it circumstantially ‘not applicable’—but I also silence their already silenced voices once more. Indeed, epistemic violence is never completely avoidable, and the silencing effect of patriarchy seems inescapable from this point of view. However, limiting the potential audience safeguards my right to comment on the material in private and discuss these delicate topics with them in future encounters.

7.2.3) ‘Come in uno Specchio’: Mirroring (Un)Imaginable Selves

If the modality of Gelsomina’s and other generation 1 migrants’ narrations can allow us to think that they have intimately continued to inhabit a culture-specific gender self, their contents seem to complicate the picture. Apart from Rachele, who, although as seen controversially, was openly critical of her mother’s violence and the customs of her hometown, Anna, for example, described herself as “un po’ ribelle” (“a bit of a rebel”),\textsuperscript{572} and did not take much notice of what her co-townies thought of the fact that she wore trousers, which is something women were not supposed to do, to spread chemicals in the fields. Nadia made similar statements about dress codes in the Friulan mountains. Anna moreover expressed her disappointment about not continuing her education; and although she did not place such circumstances in the political perspective of having being deprived such an opportunity because she was poor and female, as I would have done, she said that she had promised herself to give her children the possibility to study; in fact, her daughter has a PhD. Lidia stated that she has distanced herself from the practice of gossiping, which both in Italy and in the migrant communities played a major role in maintaining the habitus. Such distancing was the outcome of migration, as she herself declared.

\textsuperscript{572} Anna, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
My account of her storytelling in this respect makes reference to an event that occurred during a visit home in the 1980s:

One day, during a visit to Laggio (Veneto, Italy), Lidia went to the hairdresser, and while she was getting her perm done, her children urgently needed her to return home; she then walked in the street with the rollers still in her hair. People then asked her if she was crazy. They made her aware that everybody would have looked at her, and they would have talked about her. ‘Ma’ she said, ‘jo vevi za gambiât mentalità’ ('But I had already changed mentality') [my emphasis].

In the context of the fieldwork, some generation 1 informants also voiced what I would deem to be even more radical views in this sense, and at times they called into question the way in which they were treated as women. Yet significantly, only a small part of this content has made it into the public version of events. I was especially required to erase the matters that could mar the reputation of living or deceased family members, or bring to light depression or marital conflicts.

To comply with the informants’ explicit need for privacy in this respect, in this thesis, I did not examine at length the role of the husbands in both the lives and storytelling of the participants. It can, however, be noted that the disappearance of Gelsomina’s husband seems to be crucial in her acknowledgment of her desires: the point that most powerfully emerges from Gelsomina’s narration of her transcontinental relocations is that it was only after she had become a widow, which implicitly meant that she no longer had a male figure to whose authority she had to publicly respond, that she felt free to feel (and fulfill) her own needs and hence decide where she wanted to live. After his death, she all of a sudden became the most prominent actor in her life, and the only person to whom (at least formally) she had to justify her choices. It is in this circumstance that her new self seemed to have come to light, and in spite of the fact that she had not independently thought about the matter before, perhaps it is not by chance that that was the very first event that she recounted.

\[573\] Lidia, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
Her words about the reasons behind her choice to move back to Australia after relocating to Italy are very clear: after her husband died, she left the place ‘where she was born’, meaning where they had previously chosen to be, for the one that, with a significant shift in the use of personal pronouns, she importantly described as the one where she felt she could be herself and live according to her style of living on her own. “I’m going back where I come from”, she said to herself, “to be what I used to be”. These are very eloquent affirmations with reference to her positioning with respect to habitus: unlike most of her equally widowed, non-migrated peers, she felt free from the family hierarchies and relevant (perceived!) duties that often, in spite of feminism, continue to chain ‘Italian’ women of the same age group to their settled lives. Irrespective of whether she was aware of it or not, in Australia she felt free to give full and independent expression to her persona and do what she wanted. Both of these instances represent powerful detachments from some aspects of the habitus of origin. Significantly, in a later part of her storytelling, she described Australia as “a place I didn’t know exists”. ‘l’isola che non c’è’ is the place where she could experience an otherwise unimaginable self.

“So here I needed to be, how do I say? There was no way that I could see... That I can get up and go... Where? Where do I go?” stated Gelsomina with respect to her life in Friuli. Indeed, from Cervignano, where she had previously and has now resettled, she could go to fascinating places (like Venice) on a daily basis with minimum effort and causing little or no disturbance to her family members, which she reported to be of great importance to her. And it would take her the same amount of time to go there than what it used to take her to go from her son’s house in the Sydney suburb of Castle Hill to the Queen Victoria Building in Central Sydney, as she reported that she would frequently do in Australia. But that was not the real point, I believe: her concern rather seemed to be that of being free from the community ties that she perhaps thought would have ended up making her abide by the local lifestyle.

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574 Gelsomina, interview with the author, 2011, Cervignano del Friuli, Italy.
575 Ibid.
576 Ibid.
As noted by generation 1.5 Maria, elderly ‘Italian’ women, especially in the villages, dedicate little time to themselves. Admitting that they can financially afford it, for matters of perceived sense of duty and (hence) of respectability, which is to be translated into adherence to the norm, they tend to look after other family members, and hence have little opportunities to enjoy the leisurely activities that Gelsomina seems to have instead learnt to concede to herself on a daily basis, ‘even on her own’. It is in respect to these habitual notions of womanhood, meaning those related to lifestyle—amongst them could be named the entanglements entailed in the enlarged family hierarchies, which, as noted by many of my informants and also explained by Baldassar,\(^{577}\) imply respecting specific interpersonal matrices and undertaking the related housework—that the women migrants of both generations *explicitly expressed* their contentment to distance themselves from. As said in Chapter Five, generation 1.5 Virginia explained that because of the way in which daily activities have to be organised and the kind of expectations put on her as a woman, in Italy—or at least in the Italy that she experienced—it would not have been as easy for her to work and be a mother. Rosanna instead expressed her discomfort about the routines that she feels she has to abide by, which are set according to hierarchies that *she believes* cannot be disregarded when she visits Italy to pay respect to her relatives.

According to Maria, it was actually through their daughters that the generation 1 women migrants were *forced* to (at least on a superficial level) release a *part* of their allegiance to the power structures of the Italies that they had known. The choices were left to the individual families. This, as reported in the below transcript, is to be translated into how authoritarian the father was. And perhaps also into how determinate the daughters were too. Moreover, as will be seen, according to Maria’s statements, the eventual change meant that women often had to take on even more responsibilities, to be added to their already busy schedules:

\(^{577}\) Baldassar, *Visits Home*, pp. 31-37.
Anita: ... Do you think there’s a moment in which one [Italo-Australian woman] might have felt a bit more emancipated, a bit more empowered, like... Freer from the tradition that would put Italian women in a certain position, covering a certain role, doing certain things?

(Notably, the way in which I had posed my initial question to Maria entailed that the generation 1 migrants had felt the need to emancipate and liberate themselves to start with, which, as seen, did not seem to be the case.)

Maria: Yes, I think one way is the children, because the children... ehm... Lived in both worlds: they understood family, but they also went to school, understood English, understood... So in some ways they became the translators, so in some ways things became easier for the women. Particularly also when the women were also going back to Italy, and seeing that Italy had moved on and changed, it wasn’t as oppressive of its women...

Anita: ...As it was before!

Maria: ...As it was before! So when they sort of came back... Or even though it was fighting with their teenage daughters or things, it brought it to her head, and then it sort of came to: ‘Well, if I don’t accept what she is wanting to do I will lose her... They will leave home, I will lose her’, and things... ‘Leave that!’; you know, ‘Lose part of my sort of family’... So they became, I suppose, a little bit more that they had to look at other things, but through them they were able to be also a little bit more free. But also because the men had to work such long hours, ehm... The women had to go and do some of the other things, had to find out some of the other things, so some of their roles became different... Like mamma had to go and pay the bills and do the things, because if papà was out busy working and doing the things he didn’t have time to do that as well... So some more responsibilities came on to the women... Ehm, to take more charge of those aspects of the family than what had before, ehm...

Anita: So they adapted... To exterior situations?

Maria [overlapping my voice]: So they adapted... Yes, that’s right! They had to take the kids to school: there would be other people there, the teachers at least would speak to them, or others, or, you know, there’d be some interaction... Ehm... Difficult as it was, but then you had the child. So I think I don’t know if there was a moment of time, but there were certain—I think—triggers in time, and certainly children going to school, certainly... Ehm... The situation where the woman had to take on different roles, apart from just being the mother and the cook or whatever, that they also had to find out things... Ehm, because also the system here was that the government
would give the women—and it would be to the women!—the child endowment, so there’d be a little bit of money each month and, you know, to help... And so you had to go and do things, so it was for the mother, and really, for the child... Ehm... Ehm...
As... As the children sort of got older, ehm... As well, and they became more vocal and then became challenging: ‘Hang on a moment, ehm... I want to be able to go and sleep over at my Australian friends’ places’ and things, and the mothers aren’t sure... ‘What is this place, what is this family, what are they gonna be?’ You know, they’ve got to start letting go... So there’s challenges there, ... So in those moments in time as well, I think changes came, and then some women... I think some found it harder, but some women were able to sort of let go and understood: ‘Hang on, it’s ok, to have some of that Australian-ness’ because at the end of the day they understand ‘really what is the Italian-ness? What is it?’ Because they understand Italy is different now, so you can’t say: ‘oh, they’re not going to be Italian anymore, because they’re doing this’... Because what was Italian in the 40s, what constituted Italian-ness in the 50s, or the 60s or the 70s or now in 2010? It’s nothing like what it was sort of then...
‘Cause it always evolves and changes, but there are some core aspects. So each family, each unit whichever way you wanted to do it, had to sort of make a decision about what are the important things that we want to get hold and keep hold of and continue to do and that... [confused words] Made the way we are.
Anita: [interrupting her]: And how do you think the selection was made?
Maria: Again, based on the individual families I think, what... Again what skills, what things... ‘Che teste dure hanno?’ [‘How hard are their heads’—in Italian in the original] Because, you know... How strong was the father? ‘Io sono! Cosa dico io è legge e nient’altro non può essere’ [‘I am! What I say is law and nothing else can be’—in Italian in the original; Maria pronounced the sentence ‘I am!’ banging her fist on the table]. So it depended on the family, but also going to the Fogolàr, or going to other sorts of balli [‘balls’—in Italian in the original] at the Italo-Australian centre... That sort of type of stuff! You all of a sudden saw maybe different ways... ‘Oh, others are doing it, so then it’s ok!’ Because you’re always looking for that as human, you’re always looking come in uno specchio ['like in a mirror’—in Italian in the original]. Is...
Ehm... Am I having what I think reflected back to me, is this... Is this ok?\textsuperscript{578}

\textsuperscript{578} Maria, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.

Maria particularly stressed the role of the Italian communities, both in Italy and in Australia, in the creation of spaces for the emancipation of women: in her opinion, with time, the migrants would eventually influence one another in becoming less
restrictive. As she stated, their assessments were based on the *visibility* of change. Unfortunately, the women migrants had little access to and could hence hardly *mirror themselves* in the production of Italian (middle-class, intellectual, and predominantly urban) feminism,\(^{579}\) which was centred on the liberation from the strings of patriarchy and the re-arrangement along one’s internal lines of one’s own feminine discourse. Carla Lonzi’s main work, which has been extremely influential on Italian feminism and is significantly titled *Let’s Spit on Hegel* (and equally significantly subtitled *The Clitoral Woman and the Vaginal Woman*),\(^{580}\) contained some radical statements with respect to the immanence of women.\(^{581}\) The migrants had little chances of reproducing such a (counter-hegemonic) manifestation of ‘Italian-ness’, but they still seem to have—at least in old age—found their own (counter-hegemonic) ones.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I reported the words of Gelsomina to exemplify the complications entailed in assessing the emancipatory and/or liberatory potential of migration. I showed through self-reflexivity how patriarchal violence as well as epistemic violence can mute the expression of women’s voices, and how the muting is also rendered possible by the structuring structured structure of intelligibility that the community informs and is informed by. I then outlined that if the ‘defensiveness’ inherent in the modality of the narration of generation 1 migrants generally seems to confirm that they have remained attached to traditional notions of womanhood, the contents of their storytelling seem to indicate that they have also taken distance from the Italian habitus.

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\(^{580}\) Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel e La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale*.

The informants of generation 1.5, who have lived on the verge of the ‘Italian’ and ‘Australian’ worlds and have often had the important and excruciating role of zipping them together, further problematize the investigation. Their position adds extra layers of nuance to a picture whose borders are already irrevocably blurred: migration seems to have acted at different levels with respect to the emancipation of the migrants and the liberation from the patriarchal schemes into which they were born. The paths taken appear to have been moulded around the material necessities that the migrants of both generations circumstantially had to face.
CONCLUSION

“ADAPT OR SUCCUMB”: 
AN (IN)ESCAPABLE DICOTOMY?

I conducted this self-reflexive feminist ethnographic research with the aim of assessing the transformative power of migration with respect to the emancipation and liberation of the women who left Italy to move to Australia during the course of the so-called post-WWII ‘migration decade’. I chose to study this group because these women did not directly experience the profound social changes that occurred in Italian society from the late 1960s onwards, brought about in large part by the various groups that constituted the feminist movement. In addition, these Italian migrant women had moved to an apparently even more progressive liberal democracy, which had, for example, granted the right to vote to (white) women in 1901, nearly half a century before their country of origin. Furthermore, the subjectivities of these women have gone predominantly unacknowledged in both Italian and Australian feminist literature as well as in traditional historiography; my aim was thus to contribute to filling this gap.

The conceptual frame through which I examined how change occurred featured Bourdieu’s concept of habitus.\textsuperscript{582} Habitus—the ‘structuring structured structure’ that classifies and is classified by judgements—describes the dynamism of individuals and their relationship to societies, and therefore allows a multi-layered investigation of the entanglements and contrasts of the social forces positioned in the field. In order to put the women’s perspective at the centre of analysis,\textsuperscript{583} I collected the life stories of the informants employing a feminist-informed oral history method. This is because oral history permits the building of the narrative in collaboration with the

\textsuperscript{582} Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction}, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{583} Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 87.
informants\textsuperscript{584} and the investigation of social processes,\textsuperscript{585} rather than focussing on specific topics alone. However, the task of giving voice to the women migrants—noted in Chapter One whilst elaborating on the work of Judith Butler\textsuperscript{586} and the authors of \textit{Writing Culture}\textsuperscript{587}—is complicated by the theoretical (im)possibility of doing justice to the subjects of research: the interpretation of the data that they provide is inevitably immersed in conditions of power, which allow the epistemology of the agent who holds more of it to project its realm of intelligibility on the other. This condition of (im)possibility sets up hurdles to the feminist aim of sharing equal agency with the informants over the outcome,\textsuperscript{588} thus replicating the matrix of the domination of patriarchy.

Self-reflexivity, however, can assist in reducing the “epistemic violence”\textsuperscript{589} inherent in the ‘othering’ of the subjects of research by focussing the analysis on the ethnographer’s rapport with the subjects as well as on how the stories—‘the data’—are a product of their relationship. This approach eschews the idea that ‘data’ is ever objective and can be examined without taking account of the role of the researcher. Self-reflexive ethnography can in this sense also act as solipsistic research on the ethnographer’s self through her (culturally informed) investigation of the self of her informants. The argument flowing from this point is that the voice that the ethnographer provides a space for—through the informants’—is actually her own.

For these reasons, I argue in Chapter Two that the ethnographer/agent should disclose her own (un)conscious narrative of who she (thinks she) is, and in view of this, analyse her role in the field in relation to that of the (other) participants. This also provides information about the perspective from which the findings have been framed, and the audience can hence be aware of the dominion of (un)intelligibility entailed in the researcher’s point of view. In the case of this study, by placing myself in

\textsuperscript{584} Hesse-Biber and Leavy, \textit{The Practice of Qualitative Research}, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{585} Ibid., p. 153.
\textsuperscript{586} Butler, \textit{Frames of War}.
\textsuperscript{587} Clifford and Marcus (ed.), \textit{Writing Culture}.
\textsuperscript{588} Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories’, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{589} Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, p. 280.
the field, I moreover gave examples of the contorted ways in which feminism acted on Italian society, rendering the assessment of emancipation and liberation difficult to evaluate and account for. The (feminist) theoretical necessity of including myself in the research has inevitably taken up some of the space that should have supposedly been dedicated to voicing the stories of the (other) participants.

In Chapter Two, I also outlined how self-reflexive ethnography can help to make sense of the narration of the subjects of research, whilst being ‘familiar’ with the cultures of the informants simultaneously risks confounding the process of explication with reference to those aspects that are taken for granted by both the ethnographer and the informants for the precise reason that they are shared in common. Habitus has been described by Bourdieu as both a structuring and a structured structure with which we are imbued, meaning that the doxa that maintains it and that is maintained by it acts and finds roots at a subconscious level.\textsuperscript{590} Valuable data could hence escape the anthropologist’s attention for the dual reason that the subjects might not willingly express them and that the ethnographer herself might not recognise them as such.

For the purpose of describing (my perspective of) the ‘Italian’ pre-feminist ‘peasant and working-class’ habitus, in Chapter Three, I narrated Giannina’s story. I then intertwined the voices of other participants with the work of historians to outline the factors that framed Italian women in the particular historical and social patriarchal condition that the (middle-class) 1970s feminists were trying to escape. Amongst them I listed poverty, inaccessibility of education, enormous unpaid workloads, financial dependence, the side effects of institutionalised Catholic doctrine, sexual repression, gender-imbalanced legislation that condoned violence, and community pressures. The women who migrated to Australia appear to have often brought with them the framing that followed from these factors.

In Chapter Four, I narrated, through the words of Anna, the process of settlement and assimilation to irretrievably unstable ideas of Australian-ness experienced by the

\textsuperscript{590} P. Bourdieu, \textit{Outline of a Theory of Practice}, pp. 78 and 79
women migrants. The allure of finding a “sistemazione” (setting themselves up)\textsuperscript{591} proved to be a very strong driving force that helped them to overcome the enormous difficulties entailed in assimilating to confusing notions regarding the Australian way of living, in which they often felt alien and were contextually considered other than. One of these difficulties consisted in the mastering of the language. I then showed how processes of assimilation at times aggravated the life condition of the Italian women, leading them to isolation and states of emotional deprivation that allowed patriarchal violence to flourish more easily. The migrants of generation 1.5 also reported to have felt ostracised at school and discouraged from continuing their education, an activity in which they moreover frequently found themselves unsupported even by their parents due to the fact that they were females. At the same time, some—fundamentally those who had the strength—turned marginalisation into empowering experiences. Others, like Amanda, used the skills inherent in the child migrant condition—such as the knowledge of the language, which they would generally learn more quickly than adults—to carve niches of power within the patriarchal hierarchy.

In Chapter Five, I showed that the migrants’ dream of home ownership coincided with the middle-class socio-economic standards that the post-WWII Menzies governments wanted to mould Australia against. In order for migrant families to better assimilate and settle, patriarchal control had to be loosened to allow women to go into paid extra-domestic employment. This ‘forced’ some of the women migrants—not all went into waged work—to autonomously negotiate their relationship with the (white) Australian English-speaking world that lay outside their homes. In the same chapter, I also analysed Virginia’s autonomous questioning of the power (structuring structured) structure imbuing her domestic life, during both her early childhood in Italy and her youth overseas. What emerged is that, in direct opposition to her ancestors but in keeping with the Italian feminist groups with which she has never been in contact, she did not grant validity to the patriarchal mentality that supported and was supported by the ‘Italian (migrant)’ habitus. Migration had, although controversially, ‘helped’ her to be more emancipated by placing her in the position of

\textsuperscript{591} L. Baldassar, Visits Home, p. 13
being able to 'visualise' the difference between what she was living in her own house, and the (white) Australian lifestyle simultaneously required for assimilation. In her case, the migration process facilitated liberatory transformations whilst simultaneously enforcing newfound exclusions and limitations.

I dedicated Chapter Six to the analysis of the silences that have riddled my ethnographic relationship with generation 1 migrant Rachele. I showed through self-reflexivity how the 'non-said' can be as eloquent as words for the reason that it is the product of (the epistemological projections that pertain to) habitus. The culture-specific cancellations that foster and are fostered by habitus have traditionally been framing (self-)intelligibility, thus rendering only some (self-)narratives (im)possible for women. Such cancellations also draw the borders within which I (un)consciously kept my investigation. Matters of gender and sexuality played, in this sense, a major role during fieldwork. For example, my lack of disclosure about my homosexuality, which was due to the negative implications that I assumed my coming out would have on my relationship with my informants, was indicative of the profound power of the gender and sexuality norms that informed the habitus that I shared with the (other) participants. The complexity of this predicament is as much defined by my respect for the 'appropriate behaviour' that would not offend the women who had so generously agreed to share my project, as it was by my own fear of their rejection that was bound up in those very same notions of appropriate and respectful behaviour. My non-disclosure at times moved our discussion away from topics related to the intimacy of gender roles that could have been productively explored precisely because they surface at the intersection of divergent dispositions. It could in this sense be argued that my decision not to disclose my sexuality was a grave oversight in the context of a feminist self-reflexive ethnographic project, even though my motivation for non-disclosure was out of respect for the women and their sensibilities. However, (what I assumed was) our shared habitus is further evidence of the patriarchal constraints under which we labour together: Rachele’s unwillingness to have her husband help with the housework—traditionally a ‘female’ activity—and her refusal to speak about the details of the difficulties that she had to endure during her first two decades in
Australia, can indeed be seen symptomatic of her positioning with respect to the structuring structured structure of accepting and accepted behaviour, and hence of her emancipation.

On this point, I feel it is imperative to note that the time and financial constraints imposed by my international student enrolment made it impossible for me to return to the field site during the writing up of the thesis, ‘come out’ to the women about my sexuality, and incorporate their responses in the findings. Not being able to do this has resulted in my decision to place an embargo on the thesis: the ethical dilemma raised by the circumstantial impossibility of discussing with the (other) participants my analysis of the ‘defensiveness’ inherent in our relationships, has brought to light the thorny question about the contradictions inherent in the feminist project to (not circumstantially be able to) provide a voice for informants that they themselves may not like to have told.

In the second part of Chapter Six, I applied the same theoretical matrix to the analysis of the possibilities of speech that the 1970s multiculturalist policy had allowed to the Italian women migrants. I argued that since the policy makers consulted the communities through the unquestioned validity of the interpretative framework derived from the legacy of White Australia, it was usually the already emancipated migrant élites who were given the chance to speak. Aside from a few exceptions, the Italian women migrants of generation 1 had no contacts with Australian feminists, and the voicing of their condition only really consistently found space in the meetings of the 1985-founded National Italian Australian Women Association.

The investigation of emancipation and liberation through oral history is rendered complicated by the fact that the contents of the narrations of the storytellers can disprove of the modality in which events are exposed. In Chapter Seven, I analysed the storytelling of Gelsomina to exemplify how this happens. Through self-reflexive

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592 Hollway and Jefferson, Doing Qualitative Research Differently.
analysis, I provided an outline of the circumstances that can possibly sustain the silences and the inconsistencies contained in the narration, showing how the self-representation of some generation 1 informants seems to match the image of ‘Italian womanhood’ traditionally portrayed by the patriarchal habitus. I indicated that the narratives of generation 1.5 informants instead take distance from this ‘defensive’ modality. I then showed that the content of the same narrations nevertheless contains several elements that let transpire a distancing from the habitus ‘of origin’. This appears to have happened thanks to the challenges imposed by migration and in spite of the fact that the migrants have had very limited direct contact with feminist movements either in Italy or in Australia.

In their article ‘Mapping Gender and Migration in Sociological Scholarship: Is It Segregation or Integration?’, Curran, Shafer, Donato, and Garip provide an outline of the variety of positions adopted by scholars on matters of gender and migration. The authors indicate that early scholarship considered “that migration would tend to reinforce gender asymmetries”, whilst other works showed that it “created opportunities for reworking gender with possible improvements”. The same authors then concluded the section by adding that “the more recent and rich ethnographic literature extends gender as a constitutive concept within migration theories beyond the realm of family and household to the market, civil society, and state institutions”. I wish to situate this study amongst those that did so. And in view of what I reported in this thesis, I argue that migration did eventually contribute to the re-writing of gender roles, and in this way, it did contribute to both the acquisition of rights and the revision of patriarchal narratives. However, it did so in very contradictory ways, and especially by putting women in very difficult positions.

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595 Ibid. p. 201.
596 Ibid.
597 Ibid. p. 204.
Generation 1 Anna noted that given the consequences of the constraints imposed by the migrant condition, the migrants could either “adapt or succumb”.\textsuperscript{598}

Anna’s significant words echoed ideas of social Darwinism, and the analysis of the data highlights that, especially at the early stages of the migration process, only those who could endure the hardships entailed in distance and in the narratives of assimilation in an ostracising society managed to achieve a greater degree of emancipation in later stages of their lives. Those who were already ‘caged’ in their marriages or in the household by more violently authoritative patriarchs had to face even greater difficulties, which were aggravated rather than alleviated by migration. Even the necessity to work in order to settle more quickly, or that outlined by Maria in Chapter Seven to take on ‘male roles’, produced controversial results: on the one hand, these circumstances gave spaces of freedom to women, and on the other, they added responsibilities to their already burdened backs. If migration allowed some to leave poverty behind, it did not necessarily render education more accessible. It did not diminish workloads, and only partially solved women’s financial dependence. If Augustina, Virginia’s mother, could finally manage her finances with her husband rather than being under the control of her mother-in-law, she was still framed within marriage. For many women, such framing entailed great amounts of domestic violence, which was reported by Ornella to have been both physical and sexual. Migration in some cases also alleviated community pressures, but the migrant communities did in this sense tend to replicate the habitus of the ‘paese’.

In any case, the point that I wish to make is that migration seems to have forced women (and men?) to abandon (some selected features of) their old self. Those women who went into work and could hence experience a different self and propose a different ‘mother role’ did so because they were poor and needed to earn more money. They also did so because they needed to adapt to the standards of (white) Australia, as seen in Chapter Five, whilst paradoxically contradicting them at the same time. They also did so because they had the opportunity to work, since in 1950s Australia, apart

\textsuperscript{598} Anna, interview with the author, 2010, Brisbane, QLD.
from short periods of recession, there was abundance of low-paid jobs. Habitus was then partly re-arranged to adhere to ‘exterior circumstances’. But would it have been the same for them if they had migrated to a different country, or were from different class and social positions? Gabriella had indicated that her urbanite mother lost ground in terms of emancipation by migrating overseas. In this sense, it would be interesting to apply the same methodology to conduct a similar comparative study with the women who migrated to predominantly Catholic and Latin-language-speaking South America during the same period.

Bottomley reported that in 1980, female members of FILEF (which I mentioned in Chapter Six to be the migrant workers’ organization in Australia), during one of the rare encounters with Australian left-wing political organisations, noted that “it was the class position of Italian women workers that impeded their political activism in Australia, rather than their macho men or the dead weight of patriarchal traditions”.599 I do not agree with the second part of the statement, which I think overlooks important aspects of the Italian women (migrant) condition, and can be ascribed to the fact that, as noted, violence against women was not recognised in the Italian context. It can hence be the product of the very ‘defensiveness’ that I examined in Chapter Seven. However, I definitely agree with the idea that the class position of the Italian women migrants did shape both their understanding of themselves, and as a consequence, their possibilities for struggle. Whilst in Italy, as workers, they would have found the support of trade unions and left political parties and social movements, in Australia they were predominantly left on their own until the mid-1970s. And even then, multiculturalism failed to give them a voice.

Bottomley also noted that “even where people remain firmly in one place, customs and beliefs handed down from generation to generation do not remain unchanged”.600 Italy did indeed change significantly during the course of the migrants’ absence, also thanks to social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. Migration, however, also

600 Bottomley, From Another Place, p. 51.
allowed both generations of informants to compare, although from different positionings, their habitus with the habitus of the country of origin. Yet the habitus against which the migrants have compared themselves has often been the product of the fossilisation of customs that many have tried to firmly hold on to in response to the challenges posed by the narratives of assimilation. The rebellions of the younger generation, the age peers of the 1970s (middle-class) feminists, have actually played a major role in bridging the ‘Australian’ and ‘Italian’ worlds together for their families, helping their parents to ‘loosen up’, and their mothers to inhabit a new, previously unimaginable gendered self. In the long run, these mothers also took significant intellectual and emotional distances from the customs of their traditions of origin.

Migration, I moreover argue, was not sufficient per se to liberate women from positions of psychological subjugation. I highlighted throughout this thesis how generation 1 informants have predominantly maintained a habitus of ‘disguise’ of their emotions when they narrated about themselves, and I showed in Chapter Seven how this can be related to the violence to which they used to be subjected. Some, like Rachele, did not even feel free to express their ideas for fear of retaliation against them on the part of the government—the Australian one—that issues their passports. And, although I have not discussed this matter at length, it must be also noted that many—Anna is one case—have never even become citizens, and hence could never exercise voting rights in Australia, which, as I outlined at the beginning of this thesis, is the instance that had led me to assume that the migrants would have been exposed to greater levels of emancipation. Truly, even those who did become citizens—like Rachele or the migrants of generation 1.5—during the course of the storytelling did not speak about the necessity to take part in the ballot: the right to vote, which had been granted to their ‘already (white) Australian’ female peers five decades before, is something that did not improve their gender condition upon arrival—because they could not even access it—whilst it was not even reported as a tool for emancipation when they finally acquired it.
The research process, and in particular the interviews themselves, instead at times acted as a consciousness-raising practice for both the informants and the ethnographer. This is because, as noted, it allowed the participants to be at the ‘centre of the stage’ and narrate reality from their own point of view, although their words are irretrievably filtered through the perspective of the person who writes them. One of the points on which I did not reflect in this thesis is the nature of memory with reference to narrating a life from the vantage point of old age: is what a woman recounts in 2010 about what happened in the 1960s also a commentary about the present moment? And does it also relate to who the listener and the intended audience are?

In this thesis, I only skimmed over one important aspect of Italian women’s post-WWII migration: proxy marriage.\textsuperscript{601} Nadia is indeed the only informant who proxy married her husband before reaching him ‘down under’. She had nonetheless been his fiancée in Italy before he left, and hence their ‘distance wedding’ was simply the ‘natural’ legal consequence of decisions that they had already made.\textsuperscript{602} During the course of the fieldwork, I was often put in front of the reality that many other less fortunate women entered into arranged marriages with Italian men whom they did not even know.\textsuperscript{603} They only met upon arrival in Australia the men whom they had married by post, and the encounter was not always pleasant. Indeed, these women were legally tied to having sex with a stranger—often for the rest of their lives. In this sense, migration cannot be read as either an emancipatory or liberatory practice.

I wish to conclude this dissertation by stating that what I tried to do was raise questions rather than provide final answers: this is fundamentally because the matters investigated are extremely complex and the amount of ‘eloquent silence’ with which the narrations are imbued renders it difficult to affirm how things have actually

\textsuperscript{601} Juliano, ‘Donne e Buoi Dai Paesi Tuoì’, pp. 319-335.
\textsuperscript{602} Scarparo, ‘Italian Proxy Brides in Australia’, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{603} Ibid.
gone. Also, studies of migration have frequently been affected by “male bias”;\textsuperscript{604} in view of my queer feminist approach, I deemed it necessary to provide spaces for the raising of questions that can instead complicate and nuance the discussion of reality.

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\textsuperscript{604} Curran, Shafer, Donato, and Garip, ‘Mapping Gender and Migration in Sociological Scholarship’, p. 201.
POST SCRIPTUM

WALKING OUT OF THE SHADOW

In Chapters Two and Six I explained how (not exposing) my homosexuality affected the fieldwork. I outlined how, on one hand, coming out to the informants posed the risk of losing them both as friends and as participants in my study; and how, on the other, not coming out to them rendered difficult the debate of topics such as gender identity, that are central to this research. As already noted, I ended up opting to carry out a selective disclosure of information about myself, in which I shared the details of my sentimental life only with some of the storytellers of generation 1.5, according to whether or not I felt the disclosure would impact negatively on the research process. During the writing up of this thesis, however, I realised that this was an issue of crucial importance. It became especially obvious that I could not leave it to the written thesis to inform the rest of the participants about my (to them concealed) concerns over the matter, leaving them to discover these issues through reading it. For this reason I decided it was appropriate to place an embargo on the thesis until it was possible for me to meet again in person with the participants of the older generation, come out to them, and share with them the reasons for my previous decision to retain some of my personal information. Luckily I did not have to wait long: the right opportunity arrived soon after the submission of the original manuscript. In January 2015 I was in fact able to go to Brisbane for a few days, and see Rachele, Nadia, Anna and Giannina.

The post-submission encounters with the women migrants immediately proved to be quite different from the ones that had preceded them. We were relatively free of the tension of ‘having to do the job’: we were no longer primarily defined by the roles of
‘interviewer’ and ‘interviewees’. We met more as simply friends, who were seeing each other again after many years, and we felt freer to speak about the things we wanted, without the shadow of the thesis hanging over us. This moreover meant that the power dynamics in place amongst us – which, as stated in the text, have been my concern throughout the research – substantially changed. We were not bound to ‘deep acting’, as Hochschild would say, to fit the institutional roles inherent in the positions we had thus far been in; and, although as indicated below we were not completely rid of them, we didn’t need to fulfil any expectations in that sense. This was particularly important to me, as I did not have to worry as much as before about showing (more of) myself to them. Secondly, in view of these changes in dynamics, and of the fact that I was on a very tight budget, I finally accepted Rachele’s invitation to stay with her at her place. Sharing the domestic space for a week implied that many privacy barriers inevitably collapsed, leaving our intimacies exposed to each other’s gaze. Being someone very fond of my privacy and independence, I found this challenge particularly demanding, and not always comfortable or easy to deal with. I will not be able to go into great detail in this respect, as such a discussion would require a separate chapter, but sharing the house with Rachele was an important experience, for the very reason that we could not escape each other’s company—and hence, unavoidably, surveillance.

For example, I arrived at Rachele’s unit in Brisbane on the morning of January 19th, 2015, after a sleepless overnight flight from Perth. Of course, I could not say I just wanted to go to bed and rest, as I would had done if I had my own room in a hotel. Regardless of the fact that I no longer was there for academic purposes, I was still her guest, and she was an elderly woman who had been waiting to hug me again since December 2011. She was excited to see me, and I assumed she expected me to stay up and talk, and so we kept chatting for several hours until the two of us finally collapsed in a long afternoon nap. At many other times during my stay, I found it complicated to carve out some necessary mental space for myself, or to stick to my own life habits, as doing so posed the risk of causing offence to Rachele’s generous hospitality. Then,

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even if officially I was not there to do ethnography, I was still caught in the net of customs and cultural projections.

It was a very pleasant surprise, in any case, to discover that at least some of the first generation 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia that I interviewed for this research are very tolerant of homosexuality, once I at last succeeded in discussing mine with them. Really, their reactions positively staggered me.

The first person I came out to is Nadia, whom I visited on January 20th 2015. I arrived at her place in the morning, as usual, and spent the whole day with her. She gave me a chance to mention the topic before lunch, when she asked me how things had gone with a boyfriend I had in Sydney at the end of 2011 that she knew about; but I missed the opportunity for fear of speaking my true feelings. Really, I was still very frightened at that point. Not only had I not told her I am gay, but I had pretended to pass as heterosexual with her for several years, which added an extra layer of difficulty to an already embarrassing situation. I only found the necessary courage in the afternoon, when Nadia asked me about my father: how was he? At that point I could not lie to her about the terms of my relationship with him, which had deteriorated since the last time Nadia and I had seen each other. But explaining to her why this had happened meant entering into the details of the consequences that my homosexuality has been having on my relations with my family of origin. So, I took a deep breath and narrated the story, starting from the very beginning. I told her how I had fallen in love with my first girlfriend Fiorella, and about how much we used to look after each other. And about how my father had tried to end the affair by every possible means, thus preparing the ground for a conflict that had immediately resulted in me being thrown out of the house, and, in the longer term, in my more recent decision to finally end my rapport with him.

I knew it wasn’t easy for Nadia to listen to these kinds of sad stories, just as it wasn’t easy for me to confess both my long hidden homosexual desire, and the complete

606 Kroeger, ‘Passing’. 
failure of my family of origin at the same time. The latter is as much of a heavy burden to share, as is the former. And yet, aware of the complications that I had created for myself during fieldwork by not speaking my uncomfortable truth earlier on, at that point I had to let it all out. I found Nadia’s reaction, however, incredibly supportive.

Nadia explained to me that she believes that homosexuality is and used to be very common, even if often not spoken about, and that it is unthinkable to consider it a disease, as many people in her opinion do. She then narrated to me the story of a woman whose sister worked at the girl’s college she attended in Bucharest (Romania) when she was a teenager, saying that she was believed to have left her fiancée at the altar on the day of their marriage, to run away with the woman she loved. She added that in those days people could not render their feelings public, as it is instead possible to do nowadays. Finally, she genuinely wanted to know more about Fiorella and I, and even asked why we are no longer together, given that we loved each other so tenderly.

I was elated to hear Nadia saying these things. When I left her house, I felt like we had removed a massive obstacle between us, and was ready to do the same with Anna on the following day.

Anna was equally welcoming with respect to my coming out. I believe that Anna has a remarkable capacity to articulate her thoughts and feelings, and to consequently say the appropriate things at the right time. So, she first thanked me for trusting her enough to be true to her, and reassured me about the fact that she wouldn’t have shared my confession with anyone else. She then added that she knows that, as reported in the literature, many Italian mothers, even in Australia, find it very difficult to acknowledge their children’s homosexuality, but believes that parents must accept their children’s choices. I then explained that I felt that I owed her an apology for having hidden for so long, considering that I had openly been gay for

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607 Pallotta-Chiarolli, 'From Coercion to Choice'; Pallotta-Chiarolli, Perri, Guglielmo and Luciano, ‘You Can’t be Gay, you’re Italian’.
twenty years already with others, and that this was due to the fact that I was worried that it could have affected our relationship. I finally told her about my love stories, and found that – like Nadia – Anna was concerned about me being single rather than about me being gay.

On the very same day I also met Anna’s aunt Giannina, who, aged 98, had just had some minor surgery. Because of her condition, which implied that I could only spend a very short time with her, I chose not to come out to her, and to employ those few minutes to assess her health and ask her a couple of clarifications about her previous storytelling instead.608

Finally, Rachele was not surprised to hear I am gay, either, and wanted to know all the details, which I was then not stingy with. We did not pick up again the conversation about the way she lived her gender roles in her marriage, as reported in Chapter Six. However, just like Anna and Nadia, she said she believes that parents mustn’t interfere with their children’s affairs, and thinks that people should be able to openly live their sentimental lives. She then interrogated me about the reasons why I was not in a relationship. Importantly, none of the women appeared to feel betrayed or angry that I had not come out to them from the start of our relationship. They all understood my fears, and could appreciate that I had hidden my homosexuality from them as much out of respect for them, as out of concern for the research process.

During the few days I spent in Brisbane in January 2015 I did not have the opportunity to encounter any other of the storytellers. I am however very satisfied with the results of the meetings I managed to carry out. I agree with Petronio who, in her article ‘Communication Boundary Management’, sustains that “revealing private information is risky because there is a potential vulnerability when revealing aspects of the

608 In Chapter Three I reported that Giannina was born on the very mountains where important battles of WWI were fought by the Italian troops, and that I was surprised that she did not recount anything about it. She then confirmed that her parents did use to tell her stories about the war, but at the time she was not interested in them, and therefore forgot everything. She also confirmed that, upon returning there for holidays, after having worked in Naples for five years as a teenager, she took the decision to remain in Benečija in agreement with her father, who needed her in the fields.
As noted, I had indeed felt uncomfortable about sharing my sexuality with the generation 1 informants, primarily because of the risks involved in having to do it in the delicate setting constituted by the ethnographic field. Yet, once it finally happened, coming out to my (by now former) research participants felt liberating, and their reactions to my disclosure have not only alleviated me from the burdens related to the aforementioned fears, but have also reinforced the findings of my research.

In consideration of the fact that they themselves are aware that many Italian families in Australia firmly oppose their gay children’s choices, I do not think that their position about my homosexuality should be generalised as illustrative of the narratives sustained within the Italian communities ‘down under’. I could not even state if their openness is the product of their migration, or should be ascribed to the wisdom of old age: I didn’t ask them this question. In view of the self-reflexive nature of this ethnographic study about the potential for emancipation and liberation provided to the 1950s Italian women migrants to Australia by the move overseas, what I think should instead be emphasised, is that the tacit projections with which the ethnographer inevitably invests the participants inform the results of the research. Had I not allocated potential for vulnerability to my coming out in the context of fieldwork, I would have probably created more opportunities to discuss with the women migrants of generation 1 matters of gender and sexuality, which are central to this research, as in fact only started to happen once I finally disclosed the information to them.

In her article ‘Marias and Marriage’ Baldassar provides an outline of the ideas of masculinity and femininity circulating within the Italian communities in Australia during the 1980s, and underlines how these were performed and thus reinforced through the highly-gendered rituals carried out at wedding ceremonies. According to such ideas, young second generation Italo-Australian males were allowed a certain amount of pre-marital sexual freedom that was instead at least formally denied to

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609 Petronio, ‘Communication Boundary Management’, p. 311.
610 Baldassar, ‘Marias and marriage’, p. 10.
their female and supposedly virgin peers. Both social and sexual gender roles were strictly codified, and, as also noted by generation 1.5 Maria in Chapter Seven, it was often the daughters of the post-WWII migrants who progressively challenged the boundaries of such framings. Although we did not explicitly discuss these specific matters, it can be assumed that the generation 1 migrants I interviewed were very familiar with the above mentioned ways of thinking and acting: ultimately, no matter how ‘culturally hybrid,’611 those categorizations were the product of the development of shared migrant habitus. As said in Chapter Three, Nadia had for example made a point about having to get married before reaching her fiancée overseas. Therefore, it would have been for example interesting to know more about how the generation 1 storytellers felt about the fact that gay persons cannot not possibly fit into that grid. And what would have happened if one of their children were gay? How would they have negotiated the fact with the community, a few decades ago? One thing is accepting homosexuality (in theory), another is actually dealing with it (in practice)! Also, did they feel comfortable with the gender roles assigned to them by birth? As mentioned in Chapter Six with reference to the case of Rachele, there are reasons to believe that at least some had thought about it. Finally, the possibility that they themselves or someone very close to them might at some stage have been secretly attracted by someone of their own sex should not be discounted. Did it happen? Failing to disclose my sexuality at the time of fieldwork, unfortunately impeded the discussion of these and many other important matters.

As stated in Chapter Two, I think it is therefore very important that the ethnographer lets her readers know who s/he (thinks s/he) is, and investigates where and how her persona can have interfered with the process of collection and interpretation of the data. This said, however, it is also important to recognise that I did not have the courage to come out during the research process for significant reasons that are equally pertinent to that process. My fear was partly due to the constraints of that process with respect to the normative expectations both around appropriate conduct of the ‘researcher,’ as well as ‘an Italian woman’. My reasons for non-disclosure were

611 Ibid., p. 15.
not simply about protecting myself or my research, but also about being respectful to my informants. Ironically, this involved hiding the truth from them, which seems a disrespectful act in itself. Here I refer again to Baldassar’s\(^{612}\) discussion of the negotiation of sexual freedom among second generation Italian Australian women, who employed secrecy, as well as secret conspiracy, with their mothers, hiding certain truths that they felt their mothers were actually aware of (for example, the use of contraceptives); in this way their mothers could avoid having to disapprove. Like these young women, I was protecting my informants from having to disapprove of me, had they wanted to do so or indeed, considered that they were supposed to.

As a final note, I wish to state that I feel that one of the major complications entailed in the feminist approach to ethnography, consists in the very process of progressively disclosing the self to the informants, which importantly contributes to releasing one’s power over the (subconscious) narratives, and therefore to negotiating the outcome of the fieldwork with the storytellers. And yet, disclosure can be a very rewarding process, as in this case, both in terms of the informants’ responses, and of the possibilities it provides to the anthropologist with respect to investigating the content of her/his own (silenced) ‘shadow’ via self-reflexive ethnographic fieldwork.

\(^{612}\) Ibid.
## APPENDIX

### INFORMANT SUMMARY CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>YEAR OF BIRTH</th>
<th>GENERATION</th>
<th>PLACE OF BIRTH</th>
<th>YEAR OF MIGRATION</th>
<th>CURRENT LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Nadia</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Claudia</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Anna</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Giannina</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
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<td>5) Rachele</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Lidia</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Gelsomina</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Aurora</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Virginia</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>QLD</td>
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<td>10) Maria</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Friuli</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>QLD</td>
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<td>11) Rosanna</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Lazio</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>QLD</td>
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<td>12) Gabriella</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Trieste</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>VIC</td>
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<td>13) Amanda</td>
<td>1943</td>
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<td>Croatia</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>QLD</td>
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<td>14) Gisella</td>
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<td>1946</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Lazio</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>NSW</td>
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MAPS

1) Location of Slav-Speaking Benečija/Natisone Valleys in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region

![Map of Slav-Speaking Benečija/Natisone Valleys in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region](image)

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![Map of Friulan-Speaking Carnia Geocultural Area in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region](image)
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