

# COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF RECENT ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA

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## Abstract

This paper reports on research that contributes to a broader understanding of the construction of the “e-nation”. Many highly skilled immigrants use modern communication technologies to maintain links with their home culture while at the same time engaging with the cultural milieu in their country of adoption. This is an example of cultural syncretism, where such immigrants occupy a transnational social space which includes both the emigrant and immigrant countries as foci for national identity formation. This paper applies theories of cultural syncretism<sup>1</sup> and postmodern interpretations of solidarity, state loyalty and identity to two recent studies of contemporary Italian immigrants in Australia. It asks: 1. What are the specific relationships between an immigrant's access to modern communication technologies and their degree of loyalty towards either the emigrant or immigrant state? 2. How does this impact on their sense of national socio-cultural identity? 3. How is the notion of transnational space<sup>2</sup> realised/negotiated by a new generation of well-educated Italian immigrants living in a country alongside an older generation of their less well-educated countrymen and women? 4. How can the hybrid and syncretic cultural identities of members of this immigrant “group” better inform our concepts of “citizenship”, especially those forms of citizenship most appropriate to the transnational citizen increasingly likely to populate modern states?

## 1. Introduction

*The massive assisted migration programs [such as those in Australia] ...were seen as entailing—sooner or later—a transfer of allegiance from the place of birth to the new country, and the gradual adoption of a new national identity, especially for the children of the migrants, but also for the migrants themselves. This expectation followed from the fact that this was a world of nation-states... (Castles & Davidson, 2000, pp. 157-8).*

<sup>1</sup> Cultural syncretism may be defined as a state of cultural identity in which voices from both the emigrant and immigrant state are allowed to speak with equal facility.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper, “transnational space” is defined (for example by Faist, 2000 ) as a social space immigrants might occupy which comprises their experiences in both the emigrant and the immigrant state.

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The concept of the “citizen” is being challenged by a range of important changes to cultures, societies and economies in contemporary democratic states, chiefly globalisation with its concomitant technological advances in communication and increased transnational migration. Increasing globalisation has led to a break-down of the nineteenth century notion of the “nation-state”, and to an attempt to replace this political entity with international and supranational forms of governance, economic practices, forms of regulation, and concepts of the citizen.

Technological advances in the area of communications mean that migrants no longer need

to be cut off from their home countries and cultures, but can remain in daily contact for as little as the cost of an internet connection, or access to satellite news and other television broadcasts. Cheaper transport costs ensure regular visits can be made, in many cases, from the country of residence to the country of birth.

Changes in communication and information technologies (ICTs) have also challenged the traditional notion of the public sphere, in which citizens belonging to a single polity communicated with each other about issues affecting their governance. The term “e-democracy” has been coined to describe the impact of these new ICTs on a range of democratic processes. E-democracy has been defined as “opportunities available through the use of new technologies to improve public access to, and participation in, the processes of parliament and government” (Victorian Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, 2002, p. v), and may include such practices as the net-casting of parliamentary proceedings, interactive online approaches to policy formulation and electronic voting at elections. Such changes potentially affect everyone, and are of themselves providing challenges to what it means to be a citizen in a democracy.

In the context of transnational migration, however, these changes provide us with the potential for further levels of complexity in the working out of identity and citizenship for those of recent immigrant background. As well as providing novel forms of communication between citizen and the state, new ICTs, which enable immigrants to maintain links at both an interpersonal and a mass communication level with their country of origin, provide the potential for many immigrants and their children to belong to more than one public sphere. Dual citizenship may enable membership of two public spheres, perhaps with different levels of access to each. From mere day to day observation of what is happening in both one’s home country and country of adoption, to full voting rights in two countries. Under such conditions, migration (both permanent and temporary and for both political and economic reasons,) has therefore led to a further questioning of what it means to be a “citizen” of a particular country, or, indeed, to be a citizen of the “world” with whatever rights and responsibilities those classifications confer.

A 2001 survey of 365 Italo-Australians from the major state capital cities<sup>3</sup>, together with a smaller qualitative study focussed on Brisbane in 2003, found that many Italo-Australians are using modern communication technologies to keep in touch with family, friends and events in Italy, and are making frequent visits to Italy to maintain links with their home culture, while

<sup>3</sup>This survey was carried out jointly by the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, La Trobe University, Melbourne, and CERFE in Rome.

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at the same time engaging with the cultural milieu in their country of adoption. Faist (2000) calls this an example of cultural syncretism<sup>4</sup>, where such immigrants occupy a transnational social space which includes both the emigrant and immigrant countries as foci for national identity formation. Also exploring this idea of transnational identity, Matthews (2000) posits the idea of a “global supermarket” from which individuals choose their beliefs, foods etc that go to form their hybrid globalised identities. He attributes much of this to contemporary information and communication technologies (ICTs). Preston (1997) stresses that personal identity is not fixed as a “single homogeneous stock of traits, images and habits”, but is best understood in terms of “locale, network and memory” (p. 4).

Turner (2000) asserts that “new postmodern or cosmopolitan citizenship will be characterised by cool loyalties [after McLuhan’s notions of hot and cool communication

media] and thin patterns of solidarity” [after Rorty’s notions of thin and thick solidarity]. Turner lists (among many features of such a citizenship) “geographic and social mobility” and “multiple citizenships” both of which were features of the studies described in this paper. In empirical support of Turner’s concept, a 2002 Australian study commissioned by the Special Broadcasting Service (Ang, Brand, Noble & Wilding, 2002) found that of their national sample of almost 1500, comprising five groups of Australians of non-English speaking background (NESB), fewer than 10% called themselves “Australian” (p. 7), compared with 60% of a sample taken from the general Australian population. Appardurai (1996) comments that “patriotism is an unstable sentiment, which thrives only at the level of the nation-state. Below that level it is easily supplanted by more intimate loyalties; above that level it gives way to empty slogans rarely backed by the will to sacrifice or kill” (p. 160).

An understanding of the sentiments of “patriotism”, or “loyalty”, or “national identity” of the “transnational citizen” with access to modern ICTs has obvious implications for how the contemporary “e-nation” is constructed. The next part of this paper therefore examines literature on the nature of contemporary migration to Australia, the impact of new ICTs on our ideas about citizenship and the public sphere in the “e-nation”, what theories might help us explain the changing notions of citizenship brought about by the combination of transnational migration and access to new ICTs. It will also summarise specific trends in Italian immigration to Australia, since this is the particular context for the current study.

## **2. Setting the Scene for the Study**

### ***(a) Australian Migration and Citizenship***

The quotation from Castles and Davidson at the start of this paper describes the kind of relationship migrants might have been expected to have to “citizenship” until the oil crisis of the early 1970s led to a need for settler countries like Australia to source migrants from a larger range of countries. No longer were the majority from the British Isles, and thus the “merging of values” that might be expected of migrants from Britain occurred less often: “this added up to waves of ethnically different and diverse newcomers, who did not intend to transfer their allegiance exclusively to their new homeland by giving up their old cultural identity” (Castles & Davidson, 2000, p. 159).

<sup>4</sup>Cultural syncretism may be defined as a state of cultural identity in which voices from both the emigrant and immigrant state are allowed to speak with equal facility.

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The post 1970s “poly-ethnic” reality in Australia resulted in the development of policies of “multiculturalism” designed to recognise the different source cultures. Quoting from the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989), Castles and Davidson define multiculturalism as “a policy for managing the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole” (2000, p. 166). The *National Agenda* addresses multiculturalism in terms of cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency. However, it is also firmly entrenched within a belief in the primacy of the nation-state. Loyalty to the Australian state and a commitment to the “basic structures and principles of Australian society” are clear expectations of the document. These structures and principles include “the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as a national language, and equality of the sexes” (2000, p. 166).

Castles and Davidson go on to say that the very democratic practices that seemingly enshrine the rights of multiculturalism also work against it, since because a constitutional

democracy can only enforce rights through the court system, which is based on precedent, the Anglo-Celtic “majority” therefore has always had, and is able to maintain, dominance. The problems and inadequacies of multicultural policy in a nation-state context lead us to examine alternative forms of citizenship and alternative concepts of loyalty.

***(b) New Communication Technologies and the “E-nation”***

Much has been written in recent years about the concept of an “e-nation” in which electronic forms of communication (such as moderated or un-moderated online discussion groups on current political issues, direct emailing of parliamentarians, and voting online or via mobile telephone text messages) replace or complement more traditional forms such as visits to electoral offices, writing letters to parliamentarians, live community political debates, and paper voting) with the aim of enhancing public participation in democratic processes at various levels of government.

In 2002 a delegation from the Victorian government compiled a report on their study of several western European nations who had been using various forms of “e-democracy”, largely in local level or pilot type projects. The delegation’s brief was to look at such things as technological options for improving democratic processes, promoting access to e-democracy, online interactive approaches to policy discussions, legal and regulatory issues, and educational and social barriers to e-democracy (Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, 2002, p. v). Among the findings of their study were that many MPs feared that electronic forms of communication would “presage a move from representative democracy to direct democracy” (p. 22). The immediacy of online communication and the potential of voters to communicate directly and vote instantly on issues may well be a threat to the entrenched representative systems in place in most democracies today.

But this imagined future also raises questions of equity of access to the means of such communication, technical issues such as guarantees of privacy and anonymity in voting, real fears of “debate hijacking” by powerful groups, and greater possibilities of technical failure and electoral fraud. Certainly technology has the potential to change radically the way in

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which citizens interact with the processes of governance, but the extent to which this may lead to inequity or abuse is yet to be tested.

New communication technologies were also the subject of an investigation by Elizabeth van Acker into new roles which may be played by the media in the contemporary public sphere (2000). Van Acker (p. 185) examines the traditional purported functions of the media in respect of citizenship—informing citizens of what is happening, providing debate from a variety of viewpoints, covering elections, performing the roles of public (and private) watchdog, publicising human rights abuses and turning public opinion into political pressure. She argues that just as commercial constraints have meant that the traditional media have not performed these functions adequately, the same commercial constraints mean that it is unlikely that new communications media will perform these citizenship functions either.

Van Acker (pp. 188-195) posits an “ideal/real” dichotomy for the role of the new media in the modern public sphere.

|              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| <b>IDEAL</b> | <b>REALITY</b> |
|--------------|----------------|

|  |  |
|--|--|
| More people can publish their own ideas, news and views on the Internet or intranets             | New media have even more centralised ownership control patterns than “old” media                       |
| More people can respond directly to all kinds of media   | There is inequality of access to new media   |
| Politicians can gauge public opinion more quickly and directly                                   | Danger of intruding into private lives—people fear increasing government control                       |
| Politicians become more accountable through web-based Q & As, for example                        | Most political messages are low quality (eg Clinton-Lewinski scandal was very popular on the Internet) |
| Groups geographically remote from one another can mobilise via discussion lists and the Internet | New media can foster new apolitical identities, rather than forming political communities              |
| Greater potential audience for political pressure groups   | New media have a questionable impact on politics most sites are commercial (including sex sites)       |
| More information leads to a more informed and effectively mobilised public                       | Information is more aimed at selling products than informing debate and provoking thought              |

Von Acker further suggests that as media become more fragmented and individualised, so collective notions of citizenship may break down. However, she admits that it is still too early to tell whether these “ideal” scenarios will have any substance.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2000), “the influence of the Internet has spread considerably throughout Australian households over the three years for which information was collected. In February 1998, the first quarter of the survey, roughly one in every eight households had home Internet access compared to one in every three by November 2000. Before the end of the year 2001 it is expected that every second household in Australia will have home Internet access. . . In November 2000 over half (56%) of the households in Australia, or 4.0 million households, had access to a computer at home. The

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number of households with home Internet access rose to 2.7 million, or 37% of all Australian households”. The 2001 census revealed that 7,881,983 people (representing 42.0% of all Australians) used a computer in the week before the census.) 6,966,687 people had used the Internet in that same week (ABS, 2002a). Although comparisons here with the 1996 census are not possible, previous ABS surveys of Australian Internet usage suggest that this usage has increased and will continue to increase.

***(c) Citizenship in the Context of Globalisation***

Carter (2001) provides a useful overview of the concept of “global citizenship” from the perspective of dominant political positions. She examines the “global citizen” notion from neo-liberal, liberal, cosmopolitan liberal, Kantian, Habermasian, social democracy and republican citizenship perspectives. Most useful to the current study are the neo-liberal and Habermasian perspectives.

Neo-liberal models of citizenship are derived from the theories of Hobbes, Friedrich Hayek, Schumpeter and Herman Gunsteren. This tradition has always had a “world” rather than

merely a “state” view, and favours economic globalisation, since belief in a free market has always transcended state boundaries. The idea of a “global citizen” fits well with this view, with the citizen viewed as consumer and economic actor, rather than in terms of her/his cultural or national identity. This concept of citizenship encompasses no sense of mutual obligations, no sense of belonging to a common society based on common citizenship, no sense of social justice and sees no active role for the state. A focus on individual interests and the freedom of movement of labour as well as capital, replaces the traditional notion of collective interests limited by state boundaries for these citizens of the neo-liberal world. Habermasian perspectives on the global citizen, however, focus on the idea of “dialogic communities” (p. 159) at different levels of politics. Since we cannot assume a universal set of values and moral beliefs, these are best negotiated in communication with others. Communication therefore potentially provides social cohesion where values are not necessarily shared. Although this concept is said to work at state and supranational levels, this paper is interested in how it might work at the level of the state. Habermas talks about an idealist notion of “deliberative democracy” which “allows for compromise of interests based on fair bargaining” (Carter, 2001, p. 159). This sense of citizenship is posited as “voluntary membership of a political community” (Carter, p. 160). However, for this kind of citizenship to work, it requires not only the conscious participation of citizens, but a commitment by the state to such a form of citizenship over one based on ethnicity or birth. The role of the state in facilitating such a concept of the citizen is to provide civil, political, welfare and cultural rights which promote equality of citizens within society. It is increasingly difficult for states to provide these rights, when state economies are being undermined by the global economy. However, in the context of this paper, it is reasonable to ask whether immigrant uses of communication technologies enhance their ability to engage in a Habermasian negotiation of identities and values as participants in a modern state, or whether the use of communication technologies lead to or reinforce an apolitical consciousness more characteristic of the neo-liberal citizen.

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The concept of the “citizen” is being challenged by a range of important changes to cultures, societies and economies in contemporary democratic states, including the immediate and global reach of modern communication technologies (affecting interpersonal and mass communication), increasing levels of transnational employment and a global financial market. Increasing globalisation has led to a break-down of the nineteenth century notion of the “nation-state”, and to an attempt to replace this political entity with international and supranational forms of governance, economic practices, forms of regulation, and concepts of the citizen.

#### ***(d) Italian Migration to Australia***

Italian migration to Australia has a history almost as long as European settlement itself. The first significant wave of Italian immigrants to settle in Queensland were the north Queensland settlements of the early 1920s. However, the largest wave of migrants from Italy arrived in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s. This latter group has been termed the “historical first generation”. They had often been poor, unskilled and unemployed in Italy, and came to Australia (and other settler countries) to seek work and an improvement in their economic and social well-being.

The 2001 census showed that Italy was still a main country of birth for the 22% of Australians born overseas. 1.2% of Australians were born in Italy (the third highest number after the UK 5.5% and New Zealand 1.9%) (ABS, 2002b).

This represents 238,246 people, an actual drop of around 15,000 people since the 1996 census. Italian is also the third most common language spoken at home by Australians

(1.9%), after English (80%) and Chinese (2.1%). Thus in 2001 353,605 Australians reported speaking Italian at home. This comprises more than 110,000 people who were not born in Italy, implying a strong linguistic cultural association with Italy on the part of at least some second generation Italians, although there was a drop of about 12,000 people speaking Italian at home since 1996.

The smaller numbers of Italians who have migrated to Australia since 1981, which McDonald (1999, p. 10) describes as “very few” (only 7,400 up until 1996), are part of a new kind of well-educated immigrant who migrates for work, study-related reasons, or even for “adventure” and does not necessarily intend to stay permanently. Castles (2000) describes this kind of immigrant as having higher levels of education and cultural capital than previous generations of immigrants. Although speaking of migration within Europe, the following statement by Salt (1993, p. 15) is relevant also to the Australian situation:

*Highly skilled workers are a major element in current European migrations, their relatively small numbers belying their economic importance...It is difficult to see anything but a general increase in the migration of high level skills as all modern economies engage in brain exchanges.*

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Australia does not contain any of the global cities which are magnets for such highly skilled but essentially short-term (five years or less) migrations<sup>5</sup>. However, this nonetheless skilled group, more independent of company transfers than the “global cities” group, who come to Australia out of choice rather than necessity, perhaps seeking adventure in a still largely unknown “frontier”, and to a country which encourages young skilled migrants<sup>6</sup>, can be seen as a distinct group of immigrants.

Our 2001 survey of 365 Italo-Australians termed these “the contemporary first generation” of Italian immigrants to Australia. “These are skilled, rather than unskilled, people who emigrated to Australia not out of economic necessity but for various reasons such as personal interests, a desire to upgrade their vocational training, or to do jobs connected with Australia. These people, perhaps, were also attracted by a new Australian head-hunting policy designed to find skilled immigrants...” (CERFE et al, 2001, p. 10). This “contemporary first generation” was in some contrast to the “historical first generation” of Italian immigrants who migrated in the 1950s and 1960s.

Italo-Australians are an appropriate group to study for use of ICTs and links to Italy, since not only are they a proportionally large immigrant group in Australia, they also have a high level of maintenance of Italian family culture, enduring into the second generation. This is supported by relatively high levels of in-marriage. McDonald (1999) states that, “in 1991, only 5.8% of married persons born in Italy had a spouse born in Australia...[leading to the fact that] a very large majority of the second generation have both parents born in Italy and have grown up in families with a strong attachment to Italian culture” (pp. 2-3).

Furthermore, their educational levels are above the national average

### **3. Specific Questions to be Addressed**

This paper applies the above-mentioned theories of cultural syncretism and postmodern interpretations of solidarity, state loyalty and national identity and political theories of global citizenship to two studies of contemporary Italian immigrants in Australia. In doing so, it asks four key questions:

a. What are the specific *relationships* between an immigrant's access to modern transport and communication technologies and their degree of identification with either the emigrant or immigrant state?

b. How is the notion of transnational space *realised/negotiated* by this new generation of well-educated Italian immigrants?

<sup>5</sup>Jonathan Beaverstock and James Boardwell, for example, identify these global cities as London, Frankfurt, New York, Hong Kong, Singapore and Tokyo, which are magnets for transient migration especially in the financial sector (Beaverstock and Boardwell, 2000).

<sup>6</sup>Current Australian government policy on skilled migration states: "The skill stream of Australia's migration program targets people who are highly skilled, are under 45 and who will quickly make a contribution to the Australian economy" (DIMIA, 2003).

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c. What are the theoretical implications of the above? For example, how can the hybrid and syncretic cultural identities of members of this immigrant "group" better inform our concepts of "citizenship", and especially those forms of citizenship most appropriate to the transnational citizen who is increasingly likely to populate modern states? Are these contemporary forms of national cultural identity better explained by neo-liberal or Habermasian ideas of the global citizen?

#### **4. The Study**

To answer these questions I will refer to two components of a study of Italo-Australians, ICT use, citizenship and national identity: the first part was carried out in 2001 as part of a broader study of 365 Italo-Australians. As a result of some of the findings of this survey, follow-up qualitative interviews are being carried out in Brisbane with a much smaller number of Italo-Australians in 2003 to obtain more detailed responses on some of the survey questions, and to explore more fully the relationship between electronic communications, migration, identity and citizenship.

##### ***(a) Quantitative Survey***

###### *Background to the Survey*

This research was carried out during 2001 on a sample of 365 Italian immigrants to Australia and second generation Italo-Australians aged between 18 and 55 by way of a face-to-face administered survey that took about one hour to complete. The 2001 survey was accompanied by 30 key informant interviews (also carried out in 2001 in the major state capitals), with experts in each of the five sectors, and with Italian community leaders. The research was partly funded by the Italian Ministry of Labour in response to recent Italian government policies of providing greater recognition of overseas Italians. The main aim of the overall project was to identify (and then provide) appropriate forms of training for overseas Italians in five identified economic sectors:

- *Cultural heritage* (defined as work involving preservation of, teaching about, furtherance of Italian culture in Australia).
- *Environmental protection and urban development*
- *International development and co-operation*
- *Scientific and technical co-operation with Italy*, and
- *Welfare and family services*.

Although the survey and key informant interviews had a broader agenda than identifying communication links with Italy, uses of ICTs, and feelings of national identity, the questions within the survey relating to these issues are what the current paper focuses upon.

###### *Research Design*

Because of the difficulty of obtaining statistical sample, due to the criteria of interest in the five sectors, the sampling methodology used was snowball sampling. The weakness of this

kind of sampling is that it is possible to get a very skewed sample that is not representative of the general Italo-Australian population. However, this is not seen as important in the context of the current paper, since it is the use of ICTs (common in the sample) and the relationship

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between this and reporting of national identity and citizenship status that is important. The generalisability of the findings is of less importance than the exploration of correlations between variables, and the later qualitative follow-up which sought possible explanations for these correlations.

The survey was conducted by Italian-speaking Australians in the language in which the respondent felt more comfortable.

The key questions from the broader study which were relevant to this paper were as follows:

- Place of birth and/or date of arrival in Australia
- Citizenship held
- Whether participants felt mostly Italian, mostly Australian or both
- Whether they felt their Italian origins gave them strong links to Italy and the nature of these links
- Frequency of travel to Italy; and
- Whether they had email, internet access and watched Italian TV

#### *The Sample*

In addition to the snowball nature of sample selection, some important characteristics of the sample should be noted.

Firstly, the distribution of first to second generation in the survey was 43.3% to 52.6%, whereas in the general population (1996 census) the proportion was 41% to 58%, with the gap widening in favour of the second generation with each new census (McDonald, 1999, p.5).

Secondly, the first generation immigrants were relatively recent immigrants (considering the age range of the participants) and most (62.1% had immigrated since 1970, with 70.4% of these immigrating after 1980). 80.4% were under 18 when they came to Australia.

Thirdly, there were differences between the first and second generation Italians in some areas, but not in others. The main differences occurred in the areas of:

- *Qualification levels:* The first generation was more highly qualified than the second, but both were above the Australian average in this variable. (57% had higher education qualifications). This makes the sample quite different from the general Italo-Australian population (first generation) of whom only 4.8% have higher qualifications (based on 1996 census, McDonald, 1999, p. 16). The reason for this difference is explained by the fact that the general Italo-Australian population is still dominated by the largely unskilled “historical first generation”.

- *Preponderance of intellectual, professional or creative occupations:* 68.4% of the first generation and 61.5% of the second were engaged in such occupations. Again this is a much greater percentage than the general population (first generation) Italo-Australians with 30.4% engaged in such occupations (based on 1996 census, McDonald, 1999, p. 20).

These lower levels of qualifications and professional

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employment in the general population of first generation Italo-Australians reflects the low skill levels of the majority of the “historical first generation” who migrated in the 1950s and 1960s, many of whom were excluded from the study because of their age (over 55).

And of course the census figures do not reflect the “upward mobility” of the second generation.

- *Understanding of written Italian:* 70.2% of the first generation understood written Italian “very well”, compared with only 27% of the second generation.

- *Speaking Italian, English and one other language:* 34.8% of the first generation, and 22.4% of the second spoke three languages with reasonable fluency.

Finally, there were other important findings which have an obvious impact on the themes discussed in this paper. Below is a summary of the most important data that show these findings in relation to the sample overall, not differentiated according to generation:

- *High education levels among the sample*

- *High level of representation in intellectual or professional jobs*

- *High level of understanding of written Italian*

- *Most spoke Italian at home but also had high levels of spoken English proficiency:* 13.2% spoke mainly or only Italian at home, 39.1% spoke mainly or only English at home, and the remainder, 42.7% spoke both Italian and English at home. 82.5% said they spoke English “very well”. Only 0.3% did not speak English at all.

- *High use of communication and information technologies among the group:* Over 80% had their own email address, and 50.7% logged on daily to the Internet, and 76.1% logged on at least once a week, and 78.3% watched Italian television.

- *High level of interest in Italy:* Most demonstrated a strong interest in Italy, agreeing that their Italian language (84.1%), links with Italian friends and relatives (69.5%), ideas about family (75.3%) and eating habits (82%) were important reasons for feeling these links with Italy.

- *High level of dual Italian-Australian citizenship:* (64.9%)

- *Frequent travel to Italy:* 89.8% of the respondents travelled to Italy at least every 2-3 years

### **(b) Qualitative Interviews**

The aim of the qualitative interviews was to encourage participants, all based in Brisbane to date, to elaborate on the survey answers, and to explore reasons for using the ICTs, feelings about citizenship and feelings and beliefs about the two countries, and their sense of “feeling mostly” Italian or Australian, or whether they felt more or less equally Italian and Australian. In examining these feelings and beliefs, focussing on Preston’s notions of “locale, network and memory”, it was hoped that some notion of participants’ sense of their national identity could be communicated. The participants in this part of the study were all aged between 25 and 55, and were all first generation Italians, most having migrated less than 20 years ago. This part of the research is ongoing.

In these interviews, which lasted from 30-45 minutes each, participants were asked in more detail about their usage of email, cheap international telephone calls, their reasons for

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migration, why they did or did not take out Australian citizenship, why they retain Italian citizenship, the meaning of citizenship to them, how they feel about Australia, how they feel about Italy, and the nationalities of their friends in Australia.

## **5. The Findings and Discussion**

### **a. Modern Transport and Communication Technologies and Immigrants’ Identification with Original and Immigrant State**

Based on simple cross-tabulation of data relating to citizenship (Australian/Italian) and access to technology, and frequency of travel to Italy, and feelings for Italy/Australia, the

following data are interesting.

**(a) Feeling Italian, Australian or Both and Having Email and the Internet**

Of those who had an email address, 34.8% said they felt “both Italian AND Australian”, but a much larger number, 51.7% of those with an email address, said they “felt Italian” only. Only 12.4% of those with an email address said they “felt Australian”. Similar patterns were found in relation to Internet usage and feeling oneself to be Italian or Australian or both. 27.1% of those who used the Internet at least once a week felt “both Italian AND Australian”, 39.4% felt Italian, and only 9.8% felt Australian. 82.1% of those who *felt mainly Italian* had an email address.

These findings suggest that the possibility of regular email contact with Italy may enhance one’s feeling of “being Italian” as it has the potential to put one in close and regular contact with friends and relations in Italy. Qualitative interviewees often tended to use email more for work purposes (within Australia) than to keep in touch with relatives and friends back in Italy. One important reason for this was the increasing availability of cheap telephone calls since the deregulation of the Australian telecommunications industry in 1997.

Interviewees made great use of the telephone, mainly to call close relations, and sometimes friends, in Italy. Some commented that, with calls so cheap, one could ring more frequently (once a week or more), and talk for longer. Talk was therefore more natural, as you weren’t saving up important news to communicate at the expense of day to day gossip and talk, as had been the case in the past. It may be that using the more “direct” form of communication for maintaining personal relationships is something which may be more important for Italians than, say, the general Australian population.

Some interviewees with children had made particular use of computer video camera attachments to encourage ongoing relationships between Australian-born children and their Italian-resident grandparents. One commented that the use of the video camera was important, as the children didn’t speak Italian well, and the cameras enabled the two generations to “see” each other regularly. This was seen as invaluable, in spite of imperfect images.

**(b) Access to Italian Media**

78.3% of **all respondents** watched Italian television.

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85.4% of those who felt *mostly Italian* watched Italian television.

82.3% of those who felt *both Italian and Australian* watched Italian television.

51.1% of those who felt *mostly Australian* watched Italian television.

Here the qualitative interviews have not yet supported these statistics from the survey.

People interviewed did not value watching Italian television, to the same extent they valued using other ICTs. Comments on why this was the case varied from, “I only watch it because my (Australian) girlfriend is watching it to improve her Italian”, to “we only got Italian satellite TV when my mother was visiting, for her to keep in touch with events back home, and to watch her favourite programs, but the times were all wrong. All her favourite programs were on in the middle of the night, and during the day there were sleazy movies, which would have been on at night back home.”

Awkward time schedules were also given as the reason for not watching Italian news on SBS, as it is shown early in the morning on week-days.

**(c) Visits to Italy**

89.8% of **all respondents** travel to Italy at least every 2-3 years.

96.1% of those who *felt mostly Italian* travel to Italy at least every 2-3 years.  
85.9% of those who *felt both Italian and Australian* travel to Italy at least every 2-3 years.  
82.1% of those who *felt mostly Australian* travel to Italy at least every 2-3 years.

Evidence from the qualitative interviews suggests that increased costs and the still unfavourable exchange rate between the Australian dollar and the Euro have led to a tapering off of frequency of visits to Italy, although the desire to visit more frequently is still strong. Work commitments in Australia often make extended holidays of one month or more in Italy a luxury that time and work commitments do not permit.

When questioned about whether they would consider moving back to Italy permanently, most said they would not, because the way things work in Italy was not as “easy” as it is in Australia. Many valued the fact that Australia was young and not yet “corrupted”, but felt that in time, Australia too would become corrupted. (Some had already had their view of Australia as an “innocent country” challenged by policies such as immigrant detention centres.) They valued the physical environment, the climate and the “freedom” they felt in Australia (in spite of some complaining of the level of bureaucracy), even though culturally they saw Australia as a much more “naïve” and “less sophisticated” country. Many felt their professional lives were advantaged by living in Australia, rather than in Italy where there is less employment mobility, and more social and economic controls over “freedom”. One even mentioned the partisanship of the Italian police as a good reason for not returning to live in Italy.

They had often come for adventure, intending to return to Italy. Some had even kept their Italian jobs open for such a return, at least for the first year or two. Many had chosen Australian to live in because of friends or relatives already here.

## **b. Negotiation of Transnational Space**

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The quantitative survey had shown that “family” was a very important “Italian” value for the participants. This was born out also in the interviews, with interviewees largely stating “family” as the reason for needing to keep in touch with Italy. For some it was the only reason. The fact that it is more “real” to talk to family via telephone or computer voice and image equipment than by less “contact” forms of communication such as email, was given as the reason these technologies are used more than email for family contacts. This emphasis on the importance of the family is also reflected in data about the “historical first generation” and their children (McDonald, 1999, p. 2).

Electronic forms such as email and the web tended to be more used for information (such as Italian news), or for communicating with business associates, and sometimes friends.

The web was a more useful source of Italian news than television because it was more current, and could be accessed any time of the day or night, at the person’s own convenience.

This kind of information suggests that national/cultural identity is negotiated in the context of prior and continuing family-based ties and loyalties to Italy. It is these links that largely make one “Italian”, and provide the lens through which the Italian immigrants in the study view other possible loyalties and identifications. Lacking a strong politically-based loyalty to Italy, the participants were less inclined to become involved in the political sphere of the adoptive country.

## **c. Implications of Immigrants’ Experiences for Theories of Contemporary Citizenship**

### **(a) Dual Citizenship**

64.9% of **all respondents** had both *Australian and Italian* citizenship. (This is not as high as the general Italo-Australian population of first generation (from 1996 census) of whom

78.7% of Italian born persons had Australian nationality (McDonald, 1999, p. 13).

7.1% had *Italian but not Australian* citizenship.

23.6% had *Australian but not Italian* citizenship.

The extent of dual citizenship will probably only increase as, since April 2002, Australia has allowed its citizens to take up citizenship of another country concurrently. The Italian government has permitted this for about 10 years now. Interviewees reported various reasons for taking out Australian citizenship, from wanting to have the same citizenship/s as their Australian-born children, to mere administrative convenience (compared to the need to renew permanent residency visas, for example). The need to feel a sense of “community belonging” by being able to vote in elections in Australia were important to some, but completely irrelevant to others. Few thought they would vote in Italian elections when this is made available.

**(b) Citizenship and Having Email and the Internet**

66.7% of *Italian citizens* had an email address.

67.2% of *Italian citizens* used the Internet at least once a week.

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79.9% of *Australian citizens* had an email address.

75.9% of *Australian citizens* used the Internet at least once a week.

It is doubtful that the high correlation between these two variables is important, given the high rate of internet access and computer ownership in the general Australian population, the fact that internet access and computer ownership increases with education levels (ABS, 2000), and fact that the survey participants had above-average educational qualifications.

**(c) Citizenship and Feeling Italian or Australian or Both**

78.6% of those who felt *mostly Italian* had Italian citizenship.

65% of those who felt *both Italian and Australian* had Italian citizenship.

25.9% of those who felt *mostly Australian* had Italian citizenship.

77.7% of those who felt *mostly Italian* had Australian citizenship.

95.4% of those who felt *both Italian and Australian* had Australian citizenship.

100% of those who felt *mostly Australian* had Australian citizenship.

Since there is no legal reason to abandon one’s citizenship of birth when signing up for citizenship in Australia, increasing numbers of Italo-Australians are becoming dual citizens. Increasing numbers of second-generation Italo-Australians are taking up the opportunity of Italian citizenship, as are the non-Italian spouses of first generation Italo-Australians. This appears to be mainly for the possibilities of working in either Italy or other EU countries which such a passport would enable.

The data suggests that there are mixed views about reasons for taking up Australian citizenship among this group of first generation Italo-Australians. Administrative convenience and mobility, freedom to work in Australia or Europe, mix with deeper feelings related to family loyalties, rather than a sense of loyalty to any particular state or polity.

Another finding from both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study was the lack of interest of many younger Italo-Australians in joining Italian cultural and social clubs. Such clubs had been quite a feature of the Brisbane Italian immigrants and their families who migrated during the immediate post-war years (Palmieri, 1988). This may be explained by the greater ties with Italy brought about by the use of modern ICTs, and the greater frequency of travel home, on the part of the “contemporary first generation”, compared

with what was available during the 1950s and 1960s.

#### *General Implications for Citizenship*

It is interesting to note that our quantitative study showed that political identification of participants with Italy was very low, compared with cultural identifications. This, together with the fact that almost half the survey participants felt “both Italian and Australian” would seem to support Turner’s (2000) assertion that “new postmodern or cosmopolitan citizenship will be characterized by cool loyalties and thin patterns of solidarity” (p.19). Turner’s postmodern citizens with their “geographic and social mobility” and “multiple citizenships” (p.28), were very much in evidence in the current study.

### **6. Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research**

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#### *Conclusions*

In terms of Carter’s discussion of Habermasian versus neo-liberal concepts of global citizenship, the current study would appear to confirm more the neo-liberal concept. Lacking strong political loyalties to either Italy or Australia, but selecting from what they see as the “best” of both countries, citizenship becomes more a product available in the global supermarket than a valued ticket into full participation in the public sphere. From the current study, it would seem that one thing is clear. The high level of usage of communication technologies to make contact with Italy at both a personal level and a broader public sphere level cannot be seen to imply continuing (or even a new) participation in an Italian public sphere as such. The ICT use reflects strong loyalties at the highly personal level of family and friends, but much weaker levels of loyalty (to either country) at the level of the public sphere. Likewise there is weak participation in any Australian public sphere. Engagement with the Australian public sphere occurs mainly through employment activities, but public engagement of any kind reflects Rorty’s notion of “thin patterns of solidarity”. There is a tentativeness about getting involved in either country’s public sphere, beyond being an interested spectator. This is also how many Australians of their generation have been described, and so this lack of engagement is not restricted to Italian immigrants.

#### *Further Research*

The current research has been restricted to a younger age-group of both first and second-generation Italians. However, interesting questions arise as to differences between the younger (under 55) age group and the “historical first generation”. For example, the current research did not seek to find out *comparisons* between how a new generation of well-educated Italian immigrants negotiates of the notion of transnational space compared with the older generation of their less well-educated countrymen and women. Although the research did not specifically address this question, something may be extrapolated from some of the data. Evidence from the key informant interviews with Italo-Australians working in the five sectors mentioned at the start of this paper suggests that there have been changes in the kinds of social groupings of Italian immigrants over the years. Probably because of the size of the post-war cohort, this group tended to create large welfare organisations focussing on the needs of their immigrant members. Today, such organisations have less support from the younger Italo-Australians, who are either more integrated into mainstream Australia (in the case of the second generation) or are less “committed” to notions of an Italo-Australian community (in the case of the new first generation). It may also be that the “historical first generation” regards citizenship

differently from the “contemporary first generation”. This is another reason for expanding the study into a comparison of the two first generations.

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