

## **Fantasy upon Fantasy and the Love for Nostalgia: New Forms of Connection in Young Generation Italian Diaspora in Perth, Australia**

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*This paper presents and discusses some of the findings of my research conducted in Perth as part of the fieldwork for my PhD thesis “We are both Italians of the opposite sides of the world, a comparative analysis of diaspora and distance”. My work is focused on emigration from my home village, S. Angelo di Brolo, in Sicily, a phenomenon that started at the end of the 19th century and has never stopped, bringing people to different destinations. The key element of my project is that it is based on the trans-national emigration of a micro-community that has never been investigated before but that has largely contributed to the Sicilian diaspora. The subtitle, “a comparative analysis of diaspora and distance”, highlights the concept of distance that is not only used to refer to geographical spaces, as I have studied a trans-national community and the research was conducted in five sites (New York-USA, Perth-Australia, Canton Zurich-Switzerland, Velbert-Germany, Busto Arsizio-Northern Italy) but also to time distance, as the different destinations correspond mainly to different waves of migration. In dealing with the reasons that brought people to leave, it’s also taken into consideration that the distance in time from the event allows a different perception of the event itself and sometimes allows to reveal the true reason why, that is too hurtful in the present or impossible to admit because of the present circumstances. We need also to be aware that in the distance of time, memory, in its selection work, can mythologize the meaning of events. Moreover, I also take into account generational distance: in the experience of migration, the generational distance is particularly evident as there is a gap in the perception of self-identity. As part of a bigger project, this paper will discuss new forms of connection to the homeland used by young generation Italian migrants, born in Perth, Australia.*

**Keywords:** *belonging, ethnic friends, imaginary, identity, tattoo*

### **Introduction**

Fantasy upon fantasy and the love for nostalgia is a paper about new forms of connection used by young diaspora generations to show their identity and their sense of belonging. In particular, this aspect has been contemplated among the young Sicilians in Perth, Western Australia, where the distance from the home-village, together with shared memories, feelings and experiences plays an important role in the creation of the mythology of the abandoned village. This imaginary has been transmitted to the younger generations, who find different avenues of connection to the homeland. One of these is through tattoos, which symbolize the

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same sense of attachment shown by the previous generation, while transformed into different forms. Due to the generational gap, that is made deeper in the diaspora environment, the attitude of young people can be perceived as disinterested, but it could also be understood as a different way to show their feeling of belonging. In fact, in examining the recurrent themes of their tattoos, it becomes clear that they are related to religion, family, lineage, ancestors, some of them all mixed together in the same one. Of course, in the choice of getting a tattoo, together with the influence of a global trend, a form of rite of passage can be seen, that introduces the subject to the tribe of the ethnic friends.

Moreover, in this need to connect to a land most of them have never been to, an important contribution is played by the imaginary created through the stories they have listened to and through the movies they have watched. A central role, especially for the males' perception of belonging, is played by movies such as *The Godfather* and *The Sopranos*, whose protagonists belong to Mafia<sup>1</sup> families that, according to Gambetta's (1993) definition is "a specific economic enterprise, an industry that produces, promotes and sells private protection". Some Italians identify themselves with these characters, for the sense of honor and pride they embody, to the point that they are understood to represent the quintessence of being Italian/Sicilian, creating in this way, a fantasy upon fantasy.

## Literature Review and Background

1860<sup>2</sup> is the year that officially opens the era of Italian diaspora. The first destination was the USA and so it was for decades. During the Colonialist period<sup>3</sup>, the government tried to convince people to find an alternative in the colonial land of Libya, but the propaganda was never successful. The USA at that time was the promise land for many families and so it was till the fifties, although it stopped for a period when the fascist government opposed migration abroad. For Italy, there have been two great waves of migration abroad: The Great Migration between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th and that of the second postwar period (Pugliese 2002). Anyway, the Italian exodus was generated by an individual choice. All emigrants from Italy, included those who exiled for political reasons, had a great freedom in choosing the moment of departure and the destination

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<sup>1</sup>There are various theories about the origin of Mafia. One of these traces it back to the anti-Risorgimento reaction that led some brigands to organize a violent rebellion against the northern occupation of southern Italy. The brigand's war continued for 20 years and its repression coincided with a wave of mass migration to the USA. In fact, the Prime Minister Nitti's phrase "Either migrant or brigand" summarized the options available to starving peasants in Southern Italy (Lupo 2018).

<sup>2</sup>This year is also a turning point in Italian history as Garibaldi's 'One thousand expedition' that started from Sicily in 1860 is considered one of the main events that brought to Italian unification in 1861. In fact, Garibaldi was the charismatic leader who was able to gain the Sicilian peasants' support against the Bourbon government, so Sicily was declared independent. Unfortunately, this did not bring to the fulfillment of peasants' claims: to get rid of taxes and own lands.

<sup>3</sup>During the Fascist Period, under Mussolini's leadership, Italy was involved in attempts of extending Italian power on colonies in Africa that were depicted by the Fascist propaganda as a solution for Italian lack of labor, especially in the South.

where to go. “Their experience wasn’t an unwilling or sudden dispersion in an infinite exile. The Italian diasporas resemble more that of the ancient Greek navigators and <<business owners>> (merchant diasporas) than that of slave Africans or persecuted Jews” (Gabaccia 2000).

The phenomenon of emigration has been a continuum for Italy: not only abroad there are many Italian communities that refer to themselves as emigrants, but there are still waves between Italy and other countries mainly European (Pugliese, 2002). However, since the beginning, the bitterness of leaving the home-country was always vivid: “they moved in a sadder wilderness, where the language was strange, where their children became members of a different race. It was a price that must be paid” (Puzo 1964, p. 7). And of course mourning is inextricably linked with exodus as a “human being is like a tree, it suffers when it’s transplanted. Everyone has their own landscape” (Ferraro 2015). In this new environment, the Italian community worked as a means of mutual support but at the same time it showed some differences. “Because of their strong regional affiliations (North vs. South) they were treated differently in different places, but overall integration was never easy, not even in places where the Italian community, or colony as it was called back then, was large and mixed. On the contrary, their substantial numerical presence prompted more rooted prejudices that were only somewhat surmounted over time in some countries such as the United States, for example” (Fiore 2017, p. 4). It’s obvious that with time the situation changed, as interactions in the host country increased. “Safe from the depredations of their home states, diaspora communities become doubly loyal to their nations of origin and thus ambivalent about their loyalties to America” (Appadurai 1996, p. 172).

A relevant part of migration literature has been dedicated to the migrants’ *nostalgia*, as many emigrants don’t feel comfortable in any of the two places (the place where they come from and the place where they live) and consequently continue travelling between the two looking for the true home, the hearth. For them the hearth is always moving. It’s in travelling, in the transit between one place and the other that they find the feeling of being home (Baldassar 2001). As mobility becomes an inner part of the exodus experience, identity results to be affected, as “diasporic identities stay mobile and grow more protean” (Appadurai 1996, p. 173). For Second Generation migrants, “their ties to home have developed through the transnational imaginary of shared familial and community ideals about the ancestral homeland” (Sala and Baldassar 2017, p. 387).

From this point of view what is of major interest for me, for the purpose of this paper, is the symbols and the avenues migrants use in everyday life to reconnect to their past, to their ancestors’ land so as they build their own identity. In order to do so, a socio-psychological and ethno-psychiatric perspective will be taken into consideration to investigate more profound aspects of their experience. In this section I take inspiration from the work of Beneduce (2018) who in the differences between the homeland and the host land sees the origin of very complex psychological and social dynamics that bring to a continuous definition of one’s identity and image, a continuum between past and present that contributes to create a disorientation regarding themselves and the passing time, a sense of estrangement.

## Methodology

This study is mainly based on qualitative analysis using anthropology and sociology methodologies such as interviews, participant observation, ethnographic fieldwork. In order to collect data, a phenomenological approach has been used, while an emic perspective will be used in analyzing the data, so as to “give voice to people”, thus emphasizing the way they see the world and the meaning they give to it.

In order to understand how this transnational young community refers to its identity and how family ties work to bring people home both physically or imaginatively in methodology, a corpus of in depth semi-structured interviews has been conducted. In fact it is stated that “home (both migrant and ancestral) is defined by family relationships and ties, both real (through nuclear and extended family) and imagined” (Sala and Baldassar 2017, p. 387).

Together with interviews, field notes have been taken to record spontaneous discourses about themes regarding being part of the community abroad. Moreover, notes have been used to collect information regarding the identity expression in the use of the private space and the meaning of details that are shown in that same space and how they change over the generations.

For the aims of this paper, a corpus of ten interviews with second and third generation Sicilian diaspora members, will be taken into consideration. Out of the interviewees, only three are females who have got a tattoo. The gender trend is also relevant for the discussion.

## Results and Discussion

Understanding the role of imagination and nostalgia, as well as generations and family relations is the focus of this paper. Drawing from Sala’s statements that “family is a crucial factor in the development of ethnicity and cultural transmission that must not be discounted, and that family is a key symbol in the construction of ethnicity for the second generation” (Sala 2017), this paper will discuss how the creation of a nostalgic imaginary in the diaspora community can be passed on to the following generations and how this is displayed.

The home-village degree of mythologization and perception of nostalgia can be considered directly related to distance and inversely to the numbers of visits (Princiotta 2019, p. 251). For many decades, visits home were a rare occasion, especially from far distant countries, due to the cost of travelling and the duration of trips. The distance from the homeland and the closeness to the community of *paesani* (people from the same village) set up the circumstances of the ideal environment for the creation of the myth of the abandoned village. The migrant would look for mutual support in the proximity to the community of *paesani* with whom, as tensions would often arise, the relationship was ambivalent: he couldn’t live in it but he could not live without it. The frequency of gatherings and mutual visits, however, would establish a chance for sharing memories about life back in the village, whose way of living was often idealized. In the longing for the

homeland, occasions like these contributed to “the creation of an emotional space where imagination mixes with nostalgia”. In this way, “symbols and histories are loaded with imagined meanings, constructed and reconstructed in distance”. This nostalgic imaginary can be transmitted to younger generations through familial memory (Princiotta 2019).

Sala and Baldassar (2017) highlight the “important role of family and intimate culture in sustaining ethnic identity” in multicultural societies like Australia. In the intimate domain of family, the imaginary about the homeland is shared with family members. In this way, an intimate collective imaginary can be created, based on memories as well as on the taste for movies set in the homeland or with whose protagonists the watcher feels s/he shares the same background of a migrant of Italian origin, established in a foreign country. The worldwide diffusion and success of the trilogy *The Godfather* and of the series *The Sopranos* might have had an influence on the perception of what it means to be Italian and of the values of Italian culture. Some of my informants have pointed out how these films and series represent for them some of the values at the basis of what they perceive as representative of Italia-ness. Together with the stress on the relevance of family, and the related sense of pride and honor, what seems to appeal in these movies is the achievement of power as a means of social redemption. Focusing on the sacrifice made by migrants in leaving their homeland in order to create the chances for a better life for themselves and their descendants, the attainment of a powerful position in the host country can be considered a reward for all the sorrow at the basis of the diaspora experience. In the necessity of creating a personal narrative about the individual experience of separation, transfigured through the role of imagination, these movies can work as a means of connection to the homeland where the personal direct experience of the homeland finds a substitute in the frames of the films. The influence of oral stories interconnected with movies in creating an imaginary about the homeland, is well explained in the following extract:

“I think to be in Sicily and Calabria would be very different to here. I think it would be more traditional, the housing, the mountains, I think it would be like in the movies. I haven’t been there myself to experience it, but from what I have been told, from what I have seen, all that sort of stuff, it is like the Father movies. I have got that picture in my head, I hope it is like that. I’m looking forward to going.”

In the need for a connection with the homeland, popular culture can have an impact in the creation of an imaginary where even bad behavior can exert attraction when it is romanticized by the interference of nostalgia. In this way, the memories about the homeland, handed down from the older generation, mix together with the fantasy based on the images from motion pictures, creating a fantasy upon fantasy. The following quotation from the conversation with a second generation Sicilian can be explanatory on the matter:

“These boys watch *The Godfather* and *The Sopranos* and they act as those in the movies because they think Mafiosi were good and bad, as they acted badly against bad people. So, when these guys are one by one, you don’t see this behavior but

when they are in groups, the way they move, the way they speak is exactly as in the movies.”

These words are relevant as they refer to the creation of an imagined community (Anderson 1983) based on the values shared by ethnic friends whose collective imaginary of Italia-ness is also founded on fantasy upon fantasy. The way of acting reported by the informant can be considered an appropriate manifestation of masculinity according to the youth ethnic culture narrative created by movies. The attraction for deviant behavior, represented by Mafia members can be seen as an ethnic imagined claim for power in opposition to the dominant power, as well as a demand for sticking out in a multicultural environment. In this claim for social mobilization and recognition, these established social patterns, or institutions are “set of relationships” committed to specific purposes, the “constructs” of groups “trying to solve problems, defend or enhance their positions... establish meaning, achieve understanding, or otherwise negotiate the world in which they live” (Tricarico 2017, citing Cornell and Hartmann 2007, p. 149).

In this way, a social ethnic boundary (Barth 2010) is established, that requires a commitment between the members of the group that allows to assert and display their ethnicity both publicly and privately. The imagined space set up through a collective imagined boundary can be occupied by those who share a connection to an ideal *nostos*, that needs to be represented through symbols. The honor and pride of belonging that generates an ethnic feeling can be represented through tattoos that constitute an element of inclusiveness and exclusiveness at the same time. The use of tattoos as a way of connection to the ancestral land, used by younger generations, is an unexplored topic in the literature about the Italian diaspora.

Getting a tattoo is part of a global trend but the symbolic meaning of the images chosen has to be taken into account. Drawing from Geertz (1973) and his stress on the powerful role of symbols, we can assert for the deep meaning of tattoos in culture and identity display and performance. Following Tricarico (2017), I can claim for the creation of a local young subculture expressed in tattoos as specific ethnic symbols and practices, as a “young subculture” is a group whose practices “revolve around the symbolic meaning of stylized presentation of self and around the symbolic meaning those performances have” (Schwartz 1987, cited by Tricarico 2017, p. 146). “Meanings originate in popular culture, specifically via the mass media, but are translated and customized to suit a youth agenda” (Tricarico 2017, p. 146).

This cohort of young people in Perth has developed their feeling of belonging from “the transnational imaginary of shared familial and community ideals about the ancestral homeland” (Sala and Baldassar 2017, p. 387), influenced by mainstream media. This sense of belonging can find its best expression in the commonality with peers. The relationship with fellows can build its strength on the shared background of the ethnic experience while at the same time, the strength of the relationship with ethnic friends can give the opportunity to affirm ethnic identity. As Badci and Çelebi (2018, p. 37) affirm, “social identity theory [...] stated that individuals strive to become part of groups as a way of affirming their

own identities and maintaining a positive social identity would eventually lead to higher levels of personal self-esteem [...]”. That can be particularly relevant in multicultural societies where members of ethnic groups look at being different from other ethnic groups as a way to affirm one’s self-image that finds relevance in the commonality with friends. From this perspective, it can become essential to get a stigma that works as a mark of the belonging to the tribe of ethnic friends. These are the words used by one of my third generation Sicilian informants to describe the decision made with his friends to get the same tattoo:

“There was eight of us who got the same tattoo (a little chilly). We decided to bond our friendship together a little bit more, having the same tattoo together. We’ll always have that friendship, it’s on us now, you know what it is for. We were all Italians except one who is Turkish. We had it done all together at the same place and at the same time. It was just a spirit of the moment, fast. Someone said it as a joke that we should get a tattoo. Me and my cousin called the place and we did it together.”

Drawing on Leszczensky and Pink’s (2019) assertion that “the strength of ethnic identification affects not only how much individuals desire same-ethnic friends, but also how attractive they are as potential friends to others”, I want to focus on the cohort’s choice of a collective rite of passage as a way of reinforcing close ties with ethnic friends. In order to be considered part of an ethnic tribe, a rite of passage based on physical pain, thus on the demonstration of strength, is needed. The belonging to the same community is expressed through a long-life visible symbol that makes the tie irreversible because as my informant said “it is on your body”. That means that the tie is inextricably part of the fellows who participated to a collective ritual that allowed the affiliation to an imagined clan. Moreover, focusing on the performative approach, tattoos can be considered a performance of ethnic friendship, a way of doing friendship based on symbols of Italia-ness. In fact, the image chosen in this case, for example, is a good luck charm very common in Southern Italy and the option picked is even more relevant considering my informant’s words, “it was a spirit of the moment”, a fast decision that brought the choice on a symbol of Italia-ness with apotropaic value. This decision shows the relevant role of *familial habitus* (defined by Sala and Baldassar, citing Reay, as “the deeply ingrained system of perspectives, experiences and predispositions family members share” (2017, p. 386) in creating ties with the homeland, displayed through a symbol that is relevant to ethnic friends because of the share of similar familial habits and practices. In this case, the micro and meso domains interact as the transnational imaginary passed down to kids in the family domain is shared with ethnic friends, thus can create communitarian boundaries in which a shared sense of belonging is expressed.

As Sala and Baldassar point out, the notion of a transnational imaginary is relevant to the second generation, “as their transnational emotional connections are facilitated through their parents’ attachments, particularly for those (like the second generation born in Australia) who have never been to their ancestral homeland” (2017, p. 387). This is also confirmed by one of my third generation interviewees who states:

“My connection to Italy is through my parents. Moreover, we have family there, with the same last name, through the same heritage, through the same channels, but my connection is mostly through my parents because I have never been there. However, I see myself mostly as Italian, as we still hold the traditions, as I know quite a few Italians who are more Australian.”

This declaration supports the centrality of family role in maintaining an emotional connection with the homeland but also the importance of expressing elements of Italia-ness in opposition to other ethnic members who seem to have lost the connection with the ancestral homeland. Moreover, this attitude has to be considered related to the Australian multicultural context and the way European ancestry is regarded in this environment. As one of my informants testifies:

“I get it as a bonus to be Italian and having connections there that I know other people would love to have. Let’s say people who have been Australians for 100 years would love to have a connection to another country. Almost everybody here has got a mixed identity, if you don’t, it’s like you are missing out something.”

From this perspective, the reference to the ancestral past becomes valuable, attractive and calls for an emphasis. The recognition, starting from the 1980s, of the migrants’ culture as an added value in the process of integration has highlighted the importance of maintaining culture. Therefore, for nowadays young Italian-Australian generations, to be a “*wog*” (word that was used with derogatory value to refer to migrants of Southern European origin) is a merit rather than a cause for shame. In this way, the perception of the personal connection with the homeland can be romanticized and even mystified in the emotional connection to the homeland that is shared with fellows, creating a love for nostalgia. Using a second generation Italian perspective:

“This boys who have those tattoos and think they are Sicilian, have got no idea of what it means to be Sicilian. They don’t have the connection me and my wife have, they don’t know what those symbols mean. They are in love with nostalgia.”

Together with a generational gap, what is understood in this extract is the need of the return visit as a direct experience of the source of culture so that the connection with the homeland is not mediated through somebody else’s tie, but made personal through direct contact and knowledge. On the other side, these young ethnic group members express the need for self-identity recognition connected to ancestry, becoming necessary in a multicultural environment, even when the individual has not embarked in a physical trip to the homeland. The significance of the return visit in dealing with self-identity is highlighted by another informant who expresses himself like that on the matter:

“My identity is still evolving, it’s not something that is set. I got a very interesting perspective last year. Previously, growing up in Australia, I always saw the Italian part as being pretty important, but then the few times I went to Italy, that was put in contacts with how Italian I am and that is not so Italian.”



This testimony highlights how the return can create a fluctuation in the perception of self-identity when dealing directly with the homeland. On the contrary, the auto-identification, even hyphenated, can result to be perceived as more steady in the absence of direct experience with the homeland. This is the testimony of a third generation migrant, who has never visited Italy:

“Even though I speak English as a first language and live in another country, I identify myself as Italian opposed to Australian. We always get everyone together, family, friends, everyone, it’s always 50-60 people, 100 people, it has always been big. That’s the way I feel the Italian sort of way is, getting everyone together, being in one area, one room, being together and have a good time.”

This highlights how, in this case, the self-recognition is based on the context of Australian multiculturalism and that calls for a need for homogeneity and sameness with other fellows who share the same experience of transculturation that requires to look for identity definition. Following Ricatti (2018), the studies about new generation in Australia suggest a high level of transculturation so that young people appropriate different attitudes towards family in order to develop their own “moral community” as they have to manage “not only the expectations of their ethnic group, but also those of the broader society”. “Many embraced and embodied certain values, but rejected others that they felt were no longer relevant” (Ricatti 2018, p. 87).

In this need for negotiation in a very complex and multiple context, a connection to the past can be maintained by choosing signifiers that remain valuable in the present (Chirico 2019). One of the trends in the community of young Italian-Australians in Perth is the choice of an ethnic tattoo. This can be particularly evident in some areas of settlement traditionally Italian. These are the words of one of my interviewees:

“In Balcatta it is full of those tattoos: Sicilian map, Trinacria (the symbol of Sicily), the word Sicily, names, Italian cards.”

This trend becomes popular in areas where the presence of the ethnic community has been strong for decades and its heritage is displayed in individual-collective forms that are considered by young people to be adequate to the global trend followed by peers. Of course, the choice of ethnic symbols as signs of showing a sense of belonging makes these icons a trend in the trend, being exclusive of a specific group manifesting the affective and emotional dimension of migration (Sala and Baldassar 2017). Sala and Baldassar (2017, p. 397), following Hollan (2012) underline “the role of emotional attachment and identifications with other people and meanings that come to influence the desires of individual experiences”. According to relational psychoanalysis, motivations emerge from a specific history of interpersonal engagements. In accordance to that, my data show how the young cohort is expressing their ties to the community and to the homeland in ways that can be misunderstood in the generational gap, as long as being a specific means of identification with fellows who share a similar family background.

Even though often first generation migrants complain about their children's disinterest towards their tradition, my data demonstrate that of course, in the effort to feel at ease in the host country young people have rejected some of the traditions brought from their parents, but have found their own ways to express that bond in an attempt of adaptation of the inherited meanings to new forms. These new ways sometimes are hard to understand for older people. Talking about second generation Italian-American youth in New York, Tricarico (2017), drawing from Lipsitz's assertion that they can be characterized as "bifocal" (1994), states that these young cohorts are appropriating popular culture from a position inside ethnic culture. In this scenario, being bifocal means that "they could be immersed in kinship traditions as well as peer-group rituals" (Tricarico 2017, p. 141).

In this need to negotiate between inherited meanings and new forms, between kinship traditions and affiliation with peers, in the need to use symbols that can be associated with masculinity and that can explicit the symbolic affiliation to a group, younger male in Perth are likely to choose an ethnic tattoo as an element of collective youth identity display related to ancestry. One of the trends I have found is that tattoos are associated with religious icons. This becomes relevant if considered in accordance to generations and family relations. In fact, with disagreement of the older generation, Italian youth are not likely to participate to processions or celebrations of the patron Saints brought to Australia from the home-village or to go to mass, but are likely to have a cross or Virgin tattooed on their body. These can be seen as two different ways to express the same relation with faith used as a means of urban space appropriation through a public display of Catholic belief. In fact, bringing a Saint in procession means that a Crucifix or a Holy statue is carried around a demarcated area in the city, that needs to be authorized by public authorities. In this way, the feast makes explicit the strong relationship between feast and power (Teti 2002). What happens with somebody who has got a religious tattoo is that the procession happens to be every day and with no space limitations and no need for authorities permission, as this is not done in a showing off way, but in a more intimate way. So, basically, the expression of meaning is very similar, what is different is the way, that in the distance between generations, made deeper in the foreign land, can create discrepancies. Besides, in a mobile world, the conquerable space expands and ideally it can be the whole space the subject, physically and imaginatively, explores. The strong symbolism at the basis of the use of tattoos implies that it represents the return/non return of younger generations who have distanced themselves from the home-village, where most of them have never been, while looking for a connection between the host and homeland, where the two mix up and overlap. Therefore, physical and imagined spaces mingle also through fantasy upon fantasy that requires embodied symbols that can work as a counterpart in the interconnection between distant places.

Moreover, as Iuliano demonstrated (2010), the celebration of the annual feast, was an occasion of socialization with family and friends, of a special day during which they behaved differently than in everyday life. As demonstrated before, tattoos become a means of socialization, reinforcing ties between the members of a community. The relevant point is that through the practice of tattooing, there is a personal choice at the basis of deciding to become part of the clan, as well as there

needs to be a commitment between the members in order to be allowed into the community. Moreover, in this way, the special day of celebration of the Saint becomes part of everyday life, as symbolically the procession takes place every day through the individual's performance of the tattoo that can be displayed publicly or be kept into the intimate domain as a personal celebration of the inherited religious faith. Therefore, tattoos with religious icons reunite the public and private religious practices brought with them by emigrants: tattoos can be seen as modern expression of devotion that combine the public procession with the domestic shrine many migrants have in their houses. In the mediation put in act by young generations, contemporary social inclinations have to be taken into consideration. In fact, "in the modern disposable approach to many aspects of life, neither the house is conceived as a permanent place where to live, in opposition to the older generation for whom the purchase of a home, generally meant that it would have been a life-long place of stay. From this perspective, the body is the only physical place that can shelter symbols that are considered representative of the individual's identity, thus expected to be of key importance for the subject's whole life" (Princiotta 2019, p. 261).

In looking at the house as a transient place, in accordance with a change in taste, I have noticed a relation between the decreasing of numbers of photos exhibited in the homes, with the increasing number of tattoos dedicated to family members, ancestry and lineage. The importance of photos for emigrants has been stressed in the literature, and it gets to the point that the second generation in particular, has demonstrated an interest in creating family trees, when possible completed with pictures of kin members. This practice can be regarded as a modern form of worship of the dead. Furthermore, tattoos can be considered replacements of photos and family trees in representing a modern cult of *Manes*. This has been confirmed by a third generation interviewee, while describing his tattoo:

"The wings set in the shield, that is my family crest, mean that our family has always been carried and brought forward. The knight's helmet is something that I added to it myself and that in my mind means that there is always someone protecting in that family, so you always have one knight looking after that family. To me it's a person and then that person may become a spiritual thing later."

Despite the rupture created by separation, or even because of separation, it becomes necessary to put the family under the ancestors' protection. While emigration is a chance for the emigrant and his immediate family to be brought forward, the fault at the basis of parting can last as a burden for generations, so in the need for the sin to be expiated, a reconciliation with lineage is necessary. In this requirement, a rite of passage based on physical pain can be considered appropriate in order to look for ancestors' protection. In this way, the family is made sacred through a ritual that connects to ancestors, a ritual that is needed because the conflict happens to be inside the family, so that it could cause the ancestors' fury. Through the ritual the contrast is mitigated in the symbolic offering and demonstration of bravery. Showing loyalty to the clan through a

symbol of affiliation is a way of redemption, which means that the subject and his family are meritorious of ancestors' mystical protection.

The centrality of family for Italian migrants has been largely discussed and has also been displayed in monuments as Iuliano (2010) highlights talking about a sculpture set in Perth's foreshore. As she points out, the monument underlines the "importance of the *ideal* of family unity" for Italian migrants, most likely made more acute by the separation and hardship faced by families in dealing with the migration process. As stated by Sala (2017) in citing Phinney and Ong (2007), "the family environment provides the foundation for the development of knowledge and understanding of one's ethnic background". Moreover, it is where, through familial habitus, also the ideal of family unity is passed down to younger generations. A new form of expressing the importance of relationships and family ties is through tattoos. This is the description of his family tattoo provided by one of my informants:

"My tattoo is basically a representation of me and my immediate family. There is a slogan that we used to use when I was doing my military training, that is something we were built with (honor), so that's me, that is my meaning. The two roses that are highlighted in the red symbolize my mother and my sister. I didn't need a picture of them, or their names, or their dates of birth, I just needed something that is to me what represents them and a rose when it's matured is something beautiful, so that's why they are there. The veins that connect the roses, that to me is to symbolize our life, our life has never been straight line path, it has been a windy road with lots of bumps. With those sharp thorns you are going to experience a little bit of pain but at the end of the day something beautiful comes out of it and you get two roses."

The further symbols my interviewee illustrates are embedded in his family crest. In this way, the relevance of both nuclear and extended family is outlined as the unity of the whole clan can be represented through an emblematic image, that can symbolically reunite the extended and nuclear family, shortening distances as the kinship is gathered in the same place: the body. Therefore, in this tattoo, family is performed as united, as the immediate family is put in direct contact with ancestors, all of them represented as wholeness in the family crest. It is a symbolic way to overcome the fracture created by emigration and ideally cover the distance that separates from ancestors and extended family members living abroad. This ideal reunification can be made more tangible in the somatic depiction through the artistic technique of tattooing that makes visible what is invisible, as blood lines are, so that this unity can be experienced through the sense of sight, sensory experience that the visual image makes possible. Moreover, it can be considered an imagined physical manifestation of the kinship members, as the token is embedded in a clan member's body, inextricably linked to his corporal presence that ideally nullifies blood relatives' absence. The relationship with them is imagined as even stricter as their essence is embodied through the permanent image.

In the graphic depiction described by my informant, a special spot is devoted to the female members of the nuclear family. As a common trend with other guys, women are often represented as roses. This common scenario calls for the

association of female family members with Virgin Mary, as a result also of “their central position in the family domain and their association with the sacred realm” (Baldassar 1999, p. 13). However, the symbolism associated with roses can be very different, as it varies from purity to passionate love, from virginity to sensuality, but overall it is associated with beauty. This image suits the Bottomley Mediterranean honor and shame maxim (Anderson 1983), according to which, as used in Baldassar’s reference (1999, p. 11), women are accorded spiritual and emotional superiority in their association with the Virgin Mary. At the same time, “they are believed to be temptresses with voracious sexual appetites”. Therefore, through an icon, the family confirms to be “the sphere of validation of women” (Baldassar 1999, p. 13). In giving preeminence to the female members of the family, they are validated through the values of the patriarchal system. In the rose symbol, two antithetical aspects of femininity are represented: purity and sexuality. In this way, according to patriarchal values, potential female corruption is exorcised as her contingent diabolic nature is made innocuous through the ritual that is undertaken by a family member, so the tempting sexual element is annihilated. At the same time, through the symbol, the male member takes the responsibility for the female protection and honor. Thereby, tattoos can also be considered an exhibition of habitus as they express a reformulation of beliefs and practices that are handed down through family and generations.

In the Italian diaspora socio-cultural dimension, the way of looking at the practice of tattooing is strongly related to gender. In fact, if it is considered an appropriate means of showing masculinity, where the social consensus refers to the reinforcement of evidence of male sexual proficiency, a more general dissent is shown when the decorating technique is employed on female bodies. Actually, out of my informants, only three females have got tattoos. One got it in a hidden place, on the sly of the family, another one after she got married dedicating it to her first son, the last one got it as a reminder of a difficult time that she overcame. What my data show is a connection to ancestral necessity of custody of the woman body, with relation to Christian and patriarchal values. As related by Mendoza citing Sánchez (2019, p. 2), Catholic religion, in different eras, prohibited tattoos, starting from Costantine, as “God created mankind in His image and likeness and it was sinful to alter the human body”. According to patriarchal values, “the ideal order of the virginal and faithful woman” (Baldassar 1999) has to be protected. As a result, the female body has to be kept pure and a mark on it would make it impure. Moreover, tattoos can be perceived as signs of sinfulness as in some cultures they are performed as a social practice that shows the achievement of sexual maturity. This could also imply the freedom of promiscuous sexual relations. Therefore, the restrictions of the Italian moral code make the tattooing practice inadequate for women, especially if they are single, for the implied relation with sexual activity. In this scenario, the male is the protector of family woman’s honor and respectability. However, also mothers contribute in fulfilling what Pallotta-Chiarolli defines “the myth of good Italian girl”. “Italian mothers rise their daughters in accordance with patriarchal laws and values, in order to fit that myth” (Baldassar 1999, p. 14). Therefore, both males and females from older generations are generally against the practice of tattooing for girls as the corruption of the body

symbolically involves a corruption of the soul. This attitude entails a connection with the Christian heritage, according to whose symbols, there is only the Virgin or the whore, there is no intermediate figure. The family has to protect the chastity of women, thus these marks symbolically would contaminate the girl's body and her reputation.

In accordance with the relevance of marriage for Italian culture, following the patriarchal system, the female's body has to be kept immaculate for the husband, as it will be his possession after marriage. He will be, then, the one who can decide what the wife can change in her appearance, that's why it's more likely that a woman is allowed to get a tattoo after marriage than before, especially if its meaning is linked with her change of status: becoming a wife and a mother. In this case, the icon is a manifestation of the achievement of *sistemazione* (to set one up, establishing his/her household), (Baldassar 2001) and it can be accepted as culturally adequate. Moreover, being married prevents the woman to be involved in promiscuous relationships, so that to put her reputation at risk. Even if the mark can be associated with being sexually mature, that is considerate culturally adequate, as sex inside marriage is to fulfill her Christian duty to become a mother. In this case, the mark can even be seen as appropriate, as in her status of mother, the woman proves the man to be "healthy" as being able to procreate, thus she becomes the guarantee of family stability and of the prosecution of the family line.

The challenge to the honor/shame model, put in act by second generation women, as discussed by Baldassar (1999), a challenge mainly against the "gender role inequity", is carried on by younger generation females. As some of them are breaking free from the control of the family domain at an earlier stage in life, as they are able to be financially independent and to establish their own accommodation even though they are not married, some of them might explicit the achievement of personal success and independence in tattoos. In fact, the images used by women are not related to cultural heritage or symbols connected with Italia-ness, they can be decorative images, words used as a personal positive reminder or symbols of strength. In challenging the patriarchal system, put in practice with the decision to leave the paternal household before the social norm would consent, the girl might look for a mark as evidence of the personal fulfillment. The inner strength necessary to break the social communitarian code calls for a reminder. That means being included in the community is not that relevant anymore, while freedom becomes the most important pursuit to be followed. The icon works as a self-reminder of the possession of the force required to break free from judgment and restrictions, as strength is needed in order to release oneself from familial expectations and reputation inside the community. Drawing from what Pallotta-Chiarolli and Skrbis (1994) define "The voices of resistance", meaning resistance to parental and communal authority in second generation, these artistic practices in females can be considered exhibition of resistance. These young women, following previous generation challenges, can manifest their resistance in elements that are visible, even though not always shown.

The same inclination to have tattoos in parts of the body where they can be hidden was shown by some male informants. In this dialectic between concealing and exposing private life, visual communication can be understood as a way to

access the informal youth network, where symbols of association can become common and whose meaning is understandable to ethnic friends. For example the association of the female members of family with the image of roses was confirmed by another informant that described his tattoo in this way:

“I have got a clock with the time my daughter was born and I have got four roses. I have got roses because I didn’t want to get names as there are four girls in my life: my two sisters, , my mum and my wife. Instead of names I got those four roses that I liked the design. The saying: “Ogni rosa ha le spine”, I got it because every rose has a thorn, so every scenario in life, there is something, every good thing comes with a bad thing and every bad thing comes with a good thing. It’s a saying that I like and I ended up with translating it into Italian. That was my first tattoo and I felt like I didn’t want it to be in English, because a lot of people could read it, so putting it in Italian was a way that not a lot of people could read it. Many people would ask the question but it is in an area where I think it’s kind of hidden when I wear a T-shirt. None of my tattoos are visible when I wear a T-shirt. I’m not that generation that I get a tattoo purely to show off or show everybody. I don’t want tattoos on my body where people can see them and I don’t want to get stupid tattoos that mean nothing to me.”

This testimony exemplifies the double intrinsic capability of tattoos as bearing intimate meanings that can be shared in public when there is the individual will to do so. Moreover, they have a direct impact on the inclusion in the clan as their association with the hidden meaning is immediately clear to those who are part of the community. The translation of the saying into Italian underlines the need for a “secret code” that is shared with ethnic friends, a code that needs to be decrypted from those who are not part of the tribe or of the larger Italian community, but that is likely to draw attention precisely because it is different. At the same time, the translation into another language highlights the point of the correctness of the words when using a foreign language in a permanent mark. In this case, the rendition is correct but it makes clear, to a mother tongue speaker for example, that it is a literal translation from English, as the correct way of saying it in Italian is: “Non c’è rosa senza spine”. In the desire to show a connection to the homeland, the hybridity of identity becomes evident. At the same time, these tattoos become an artefact of specific local youth culture, whose meanings are influenced by popular culture and are clearly recognized by the group. Some signs are also distinguishable from outside the group, when the observer has got a knowledge of some elements of the ethnic culture. This is the testimony of a second generation Sicilian, who can be regarded as an insider/outsider of the ethnic tribe, as he does not have tattoos so he is not part of the imagined community but has got a direct relationship with some of the members due to age and family:

“They have tattoos with <<Siciliano, famiglia>>, but they can’t speak Italian. Famiglia is a very interesting tattoo. If you go around Perth you will see wogs with tattoo that says familia and it’s written in Spanish because they are influenced by the American TV and Mexican immigrants who write familia and that’s how little they understand Italian as they don’t get the right Italian spelling of what they meant.”

This can be considered a manifestation of what Tricarico (2017, p. 138) refers to as “youth agency”, indicating “meaning making, narratives, cultural productions, and social engagements” of young people in relation to popular culture, the specific ethnic context taken into account. This testimony marks a dividing line between those who need to “embody” a “thicker ethnic culture” (Tricarico 2017) and those who stand apart from the tribe of ethnic friends, while sharing some cultural features. In this case, the difference can be marked by the individual’s direct interest and connection to the homeland versus connection through family members. That means that the link of the insiders/outsideers of the ethnic tribe is established through periodic visits, interest in Italian politics, listening to recent music, ability to communicate in the Italian language. In this respect, for example, what can become relevant for them might be the reference to experienced cultural practices as leisure activities can be, as signifiers of “ethnic family rituals” (Tricarico 2017) as the following extract exemplifies:

“If I was to get a tattoo, it would be a playing card, probably one of those aces, some have interesting designs. I wonder if Italians have something similar. I think it is because one of the ways of connection as children was playing Italian cards. This is something unique as we played with other family members or other Italian kids as maybe many Australians don’t even know these cards or games even exist. If I was to look for a tattoo that expresses my identity, that would be what fits the box.”

This testimony demonstrates, as stated by Sala and Baldassar (2017), a clear link between habitus and family environment, where the choice of symbols representing connection to the homeland is strictly tied to the habits developed inside the household and with close friends. Drawing from Reay (1998), Sala and Baldassar (2017, p. 397) define familial habitus as a “concept that invokes an understanding of identity premised on familial legacy and early childhood socialization”. Sala and Baldassar (2017, pp. 397–398) continue affirming that, “for Bourdieu (1984), habitus refers to cultural understandings as unconscious, internalized dispositions that are deeply engrained within ourselves and socially produced, for example, habits, behavior, beliefs, values, movement, language, thoughts, and feelings”. In this way, these interiorized practices can be externalized through the use of symbols that become representative of what the individual perceives as performative of his identity.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has been an exploration of new forms of connection to the ancestral homeland used by young cohorts in Perth. In doing so, the role of familial imaginary created in the distance from the homeland has been taken into consideration. Together with familial habitus, a sense of belonging shared with ethnic friends calls for the need of a rite of passage in order to be affiliated to the tribe of ethnic friends. In the necessity to show elements of masculinity, the practice of getting a tattoo can be considered an appropriate way to affiliate to the ethnic group, so as to assert the sense of belonging to the ancestral homeland. In this way, using a



practice that is globally shared by peers, in order to embody symbols of ethnicity, a bridge between practices, habits and beliefs brought to Australia by migrants and new forms of adaptation is built. I maintain that analyzing the ritual of getting a tattoo, as well as the symbolic meaning of the icons chosen, can lead to a better understanding of the semantics at the basis of the younger generation interpretations of self-identification and their world view.

Furthermore, using a feminist perspective, the role of gender in dealing with ethnicity has been taken into account. The association of tattooing with eroticism and sexual maturity in many cultures, makes this practice unsuitable for women according to the patriarchal model of surveillance. In the wide range of symbolic associations opened up by a multilayered protean means of signification as tattooing is, a search for freedom from familial and communal surveillance can mostly be seen in the female practice. On the contrary, in relation to the widespread male trend, the semantics of shared symbols can be understood as a way to become more rooted in the group of ethnic friends that, through the connection between fellows, creates a thicker shared ethnic identity. The individual perception of the belonging to the ethnic tribe is seen at the basis and one of the reasons for strong friendship ties that need to be performed in rituals of doing friendship. These friendship ties are made stronger as the ethnic tribe refers to an imagined shared ancestral past that finds its commonality in the members' connection with the ideal *nostos*. A shared desire of identification with lineage is expressed through the common trend of tattooing family crests or features related to kinship, that can be seen as *Totems*. In doing so, through the icon on the skin, a symbolic embodiment of the family protective entity is pursued. The shared symbolic reference to elements of heritage, that is relevant to males for their function of guarantors of the continuation of the family line, becomes a means of identification for the group members that is made more evident through the indelible aspect of the image.

The importance of tattoos as means of communication can become a privileged simulacrum to express the innermost feelings of a group that, in the inconsistencies of many aspects of the modern era that bring many young people to forms of rebellion that often are represented in tattoos, needs to express their search for identity. That is made elusive because of the lack of a rooted family background in their country of birth, so that it needs to be performed in impactful ways. This visual practice can be seen as a response with permanent symbols to the recent familial rootedness in the host country, in order to overcome the sense of impermanence as a consequence of the lineage eradication from the homeland. In claiming for the use of ancestral rituals, revived in order to be applied to new experiences, a bridge with the ancestral past is built so that new certainties, as the permanence of the ties inside the tribe is, can be created. The permanency of the sign that remains on the skin even after death can be considered an attempt to contrast the transiency of life, when even the survival of the individual through lineage is jeopardized because of the caesura in the family line generated by separation.

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