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Italianness and Migration from the Risorgimento to the 1960s

Edited by

Stéphane Mourlane · Céline Regnard ·
Manuela Martini · Catherine Brice

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Palgrave Studies in Migration History

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Stéphane Mourlane
Aix-Marseille University
Aix-en-Provence, France

Céline Regnard
Aix-Marseille University
Aix-en-Provence, France

Manuela Martini
LARHRA
Lumière University
Lyon, France

Catherine Brice
CRHEC
Paris-Est Créteil University
Créteil, Paris, France

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Virginia de Almeida Bessa is collaborating professor in the Institute of Brazilian Studies at the University of São Paulo and in the Music Post-Graduate Program at the University of Campinas. Her research focuses on popular music history and the transnational circulation of musical theater. She is the author of the book *A escuta singular de Pixinguinha* (Alameda Editorial, 2010) awarded by the Funarte Prize of Critical Studies in Music and translated to french in 2019 (*Pixinguinha ou la singularité d'une écoute*, Presses Universitaires du Midi).

Thibault Bechini holds a doctorate from Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, with a thesis on the contribution of Italian migrants to the urbanization of Marseille and Buenos Aires (1860–1914). He is a fellow of the Convergences Migrations Institute; his research now focuses on the estates of Italians who died abroad at the end of the nineteenth century.

João Fábio Bertonha has a Ph.D. in history from the University of Campinas, the Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches (accreditation to supervise research) from the University of São Paulo, and further post-doctoral qualifications from the University of Rome, the University of São Paulo, and the European University Institute. He has also been a specialist in strategic studies and defense at the National Defense University of the United States, a researcher at the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), and a visiting researcher in many countries. He is currently a professor at the State University of

Maringá and has written dozens of books and articles in his research fields.
<http://joaofabiobertonha.com>

Melissa Blanchard is a senior research fellow at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), working at Centre Norbert Elias, Marseille.

She received a joint Ph.D. in Anthropology at Aix-Marseille Université I and Università degli Studi di Modena. Her research interests include migration, mobilities, and gender. She has published a monograph on Senegalese migrant women in Marseille and has edited a book on religious mobility. Her latest research analyzes “return migration” from Chile and Argentina toward Italy and other European countries. She has published extensively on this theme in both English and French.

Marie Bossaert is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Naples Federico II (Scuola Superiore Meridionale) and a fellow at the Institut Convergence Migrations. She obtained a Ph.D. in history in 2016 at the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes and the Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane, with a dissertation entitled *Connaître les Turcs et l'Empire ottoman en Italie. Constructions et usages des savoirs sur l'Orient de l'Unité à la guerre italo-turque*. Her research focuses on the history of scholarly Orientalism, especially in Italy, in the Ottoman empire and Algeria, and on the social, political, and cultural history of the Mediterranean (nineteenth-first twentieth c.). A former fellow at the École française de Rome, she dedicated several studies to the circulations between Italy and the Ottoman empire and co-edited the special issues *Transturkology* (*European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 2017) and “*La fabrique transnationale de la ‘science nationale’ en Italie*” (*Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, 2018).

Catherine Brice is professor in modern history at Université Paris-Est Créteil, CRHEC, and member of the Institut Universitaire de France (2013–2018). Her research has addressed different topics. She first worked on politics and architecture in Liberal Italy and published *Monumentalité publique et politique à Rome: le Vittoriano (1870–1943)*, Rome, 1998, an exhaustive enquiry on the Monument to Victor-Emmanuel II located in the center of Rome. She then switched from the monument to the monarchy itself, questioning the part played by the Savoia dynasty in the construction of Italian identity at the end of the nineteenth century

(*La monarchie et la construction de l'identité nationale italienne (1861–1900)*), Paris, EHESS, 2010). A funded project on *Fraternity*, conducted between 2008 and 2012, saw her research interests expand beyond Italy and into political anthropology (with Gilles Bertrand and Gilles Montègre (co-ed.), *Fraternité. Pour une histoire du concept*, Grenoble, 2012; Catherine Brice (ed.), *La fraternité en actions: Frères de sang, frères d'armes, frères ennemis en Italie (1824–1924)*, Rome, 2017). She met Italian exiles while carrying out this research (with Sylvie Aprile (ed.), *Exil et fraternité au XIX^{ème} siècle*, Bordeaux, 2013), and she designed a project on exile and innovation, specifically the circulation of political “technologies” (Delphine Diaz and Catherine Brice (ed.), *Mobilités, savoir-faire et innovation au XIX^e siècle, Revue d'histoire du 19^{ème} siècle*, 2017-1; Catherine Brice (ed.), *Mobilités créatrices, Diasporas. Circulations, migrations, histoire*, 2017-2). The discovery of vast, unexploited archives on the confiscations of exiles’ properties led her to create a new project in which she questions the modernizing effects on states of confiscating policies. This new project deals with the comparative history of administration, material sovereignty, and policies (Catherine Brice (ed.), *Séquestres et confiscations des biens des exilés dans l'Italie du 19^{ème} siècle*, MEFRIM, 2017-2). She published an edited volume *Exile and the circulation of political practices in the nineteenth century*, Cambridge Scholars, 2020

Silvia Cassamagnaghi is a researcher and lecturer in contemporary history at the Università degli Studi, Milan, Italy. She also participates as a columnist in history programs for Italian national television. Her main topics include Italian-American cultural relationships, media studies, gender studies, and the history of emigration and she has published several articles about these subjects. Her most recent book, *Operazione Spose di guerra. Storie di amore e di emigrazione* (Feltrinelli, 2014), is focused on the experience of young Italian girls who married American soldiers during World War II and emigrated to the United States.

Bénédicte Deschamps is associate professor in American studies at the Université de Paris, where she teaches US history. She has published numerous articles on Italian-American history and has co-edited several books, including *Les Petites Italies dans le monde*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007 and *Racial, Ethnic, and Homophobic Violence: Killing in the Name of Otherness*, London: Routledge Cavendish, 2007.

In 2020, she published a history of the Italian-American press from the Risorgimento to WWI (*Histoire de la presse italo-américaine du Risorgimento à la Grande guerre*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020) and in 2021 she co-edited (with Pantaleone Sergi) a volume on the Italian immigrant journalism in the world (*Voci d'Italia fuori d'Italia : Giornalismo e stampa dell'emigrazione*, en collaboration avec Pantaleone Sergi, Cosenza, Pellegrini editore, 2021).

Delphine Diaz is associate professor in nineteenth-century history at the University of Reims, France, and a member of the Institut universitaire de France (IUF). Former student of the École Normale Supérieure, she obtained a Ph.D. in history in 2012 at the University of Paris Panthéon-Sorbonne. In 2014, she published a book entitled *Un asile pour tous les peuples? Exilés et réfugiés étrangers dans la France du premier xix^e siècle* (Augustin Thierry prize from the History Committee of Paris). Her research focuses on political exiles and asylum policies in France and Europe in the nineteenth century. Between 2016 and 2020, she coordinated a research program funded by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (AsileuropeXIX, "Towards a European history of exile and asylum during the 19th century"). She is the author of a forthcoming book on the history of refugees in Europe (*En exil. Les réfugiés en Europe de la fin du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Gallimard, « Folio », 2021).

Marco Fincardi conducts research on social history and popular culture and teaches contemporary history at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. He is a member of the scientific committee for the journal "Memoria e ricerca" and for the Gramsci Emilia-Romagna Foundation. He has published: *La terra disincantata* (Unicopli, 2001); *Emigranti a passo romano. Emigranti dell'Alto Veneto e Friuli nella Germania hitleriana* (Cierre, 2002); and *Campagne emiliane in transizione* (Clueb, 2008).

Laura Fotia has a Ph.D. in European and International Studies and the Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale as Associate Professor in American History and Institutions. She is Adjunct Professor of Contemporary History of Latin America and History and Institutions of Latin America at the Department of Political Sciences of the University of Roma Tre. She was Adjunct Professor, Research Fellow, and Visiting Fellow at university departments and research institutes in several European and American countries. Her research interests include cultural and political relations

between Argentina, United States, and Italy; transitional justice, human rights violations, and “hate politics” in Latin America.

Laura Fournier-Finocchiaro is associate professor in Italian studies at Paris 8 University. Her research focuses on the construction of Italian national identity (nineteenth–twentieth centuries). Her latests works are on political exiles from the countries of Southern Europe during the nineteenth century (*Les exilés politiques espagnols, italiens et portugais en France au 19^e: questions et perspectives*, ed. L. Fournier-Finocchiaro & C. Climaco, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2017), and on intellectual exchanges and networks in the nineteenth century between France and Italy (*Entre France et Italie: échanges et réseaux intellectuels au XIX^e siècle*, ed. M. Colin, L. Fournier-Finocchiaro & S. Tatti, *Transalpina*, 21, 2018, online <https://journals.openedition.org/transalpina/285>).

Giacomo Girardi obtained his Ph.D. in History from the University of Milan and Université Paris-Est Créteil. He is post-doc Fellow at the Archivio del Moderno, Università della Svizzera Italiana (Switzerland) and a member of the Swiss National Science Foundation project “Milan and Ticino (1796–1848). Shaping the Spatiality of a European Capital”. His research focuses on nineteenth-century political history. He published articles in Italian and international journals and books, and he edited a volume on the antiquity of Sicily (Lionardo Vigo, *Protostasi sicula*, Roma, 2017). He is a member of the editorial board of the journal “Il Risorgimento. Rivista di storia del Risorgimento e di storia contemporanea” and member of the Scientific Committee of the Center for European Studies (Università di Verona).

Jessica H. Lee is the executive director of Freedom & Citizenship, an educational program for low-income New York City high school students run through Columbia University’s Center for American Studies. Jessica received her Ph.D. in history from Columbia in 2016 with a dissertation titled “To the Seventh Generation: Italians and the Creation of an American Political Identity, 1921–1948”. Her research interests center on questions of citizenship, political identity, and mass migration. Her forthcoming manuscript examines Italy’s successful politicization of its migrants in America before and during World War II.

Manuela Martini is professor in modern history at the Université Lumière Lyon 2 (France) and a member of the Institut Universitaire

de France. She belongs to numerous scientific organizations and advisory boards and is a member of the editorial committee of the journal *Gender & History*. Her research lies at the intersection between the history of the family and gender, labor history, and migration studies. She has published extensively in French, Italian, Spanish, German, and English and has authored or edited twenty-five books and journals' special issues on European economic history, gender history, and international labor migrations. Her publications include the authored book *Bâtiment en famille. Migrations et petite entreprise en banlieue parisienne au XXe siècle*, CNRS Éditions, 2016 and the collective book *What is work? Gender and the Crossroads of Home, Family and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present* (edited with Raffaella Sarta and Anna Bellavitis), Oxford-New York, Berghhan, 2018 (paperback 2020). For further details, see: <http://larhra.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/membre/506>.

Gabriele Montalbano obtained his Ph.D. in Late modern history at EPHE of Paris with a joint supervision with the University of Florence (2018). His Ph.D. thesis focuses on the Italian nation-building in the French Protectorate of Tunisia. He is currently adjunct professor of history of colonial and postcolonial spaces at University of Bologna, and post-doc researcher at SciencesPo of Paris on slavery in late Ottoman and colonial Libya. Alumnus of “Collegio Superiore dell’Alma Mater Studio-rum”—University of Bologna and of “École Normale Supérieure” of Paris, he was visiting scholar at the “Institut de Recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain” of Tunis and at Remarque Institute of New York University. His main research interests concern the social, cultural, and political history of the Mediterranean area in the age of Imperialism.

Gaetano Morese, Ph.D. in history, many times adjunct professor, he carried out research for various public and private cultural institutions and foundations. Actually, he is studying youth participation in the European integration between the '70s and '90s. Member of the scientific committee for the journal “Rassegna Storica Lucana”, his main interests are the ruling classes' history and the social, economic, cultural, and landscape dynamics. He attended many national and international seminars and conferences, including The migration conference (Bari, 2019) and The Transatlantic Studies Association 18th annual conference (Lancaster UK, 2019) with a paper on “A country built on the paper «Italiani per mondo»”. Among his recent works, there are essays on the Italian referendum of 1946 (2020), on the identification and discrimination process

(2020), and a monograph on the Home Front during the First World War (2018).

Stéphane Mourlane is associate professor in modern history at Aix-Marseille University (France) and researcher at TELEMMe-Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme in Aix-en-Provence. He is a former member of the École Française de Rome and has been a visiting scholar at New York University (2015) and North Carolina State University (2017). His research interests focus on Italian migration, especially in the south of France, and Italian culture around the Mediterranean space. He has published (with C. Regnard) *Empreintes italiennes. Marseille et sa région* (2014), (with A. Delpirou) *Atlas de l'Italie contemporaine. En quête d'unité* (2011), and (with Y. Gastaut and R. Schor) *Nice cosmopolite 1860–1980* (2010). He is editor (with V. Baby-Collin, S. Bouffier) of *Atlas des migrations en Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (2021), (with J. Boutier) *Marseille l'Italienne. Histoires d'une passion séculaire* (2021), (with D. Païni) *Ciao Italia. Un siècle d'immigration et de culture italiennes en France* (2017), (with Baby-Collin, S. Mazzella, C. Regnard, and P. Sintès) of *Migrations et temporalités en Méditerranée. Les migrations à l'épreuve du temps XIX^e-XXI^e siècles* (2017), (with E. Canepari and B. Mesini) of *Mobil hom(m)es. Formes d'habitats et modes d'habiter la mobilité XVI^e-XXI^e siècles* (2016), (with L. Anteby-Yemini, V. Baby-Collin, S. Mazzella, C. Parizot, C. Regnard, and P. Sintès) of *Borders, Mobilities and Migrations. Perspectives from the Mediterranean, nineteenth and twenty-first Century* (2014), and (with C. Regnard) of *Les batailles de Marseille. Immigration, violences et conflits XIX^e-XX^e siècles* (2012). He has also been editor of the following special issues: "L'Europe en mouvement", *Homme & Migrations* (2017) and "L'immigration italienne dans le Sud-Est de la France. Nouvelles perspectives", *Archivio Storico dell'Emigrazione Italiana* (2015). He was a scientific advisor of the "Ciao Italia!" exhibition at the National Museum of Immigration History in Paris (2017). He is a member of the editorial committee of the journal *Studi Emigrazione*.

http://telemme.mmsh.univ-aix.fr/membres/St%C3%A9phane_Mourlane

Manoela Patti is assistant professor in contemporary history at the University of Palermo, Department of Political Sciences and International Relations. Her research interests mainly focus on World War II, the history of the Mafia and its transnational networks, fascism, migration,

and Republican Italy. Her current project deals with the history of radical psychiatry movement in Italy, where she is focusing on the Southern Italy and *Psichiatria Democratica*. Her publications include: *Un ponte ancora aperto? Alcune note sull'emigrazione siciliana verso gli Stati Uniti durante il fascismo*, in *Migrazioni e Fascismo*, «Meridiana. Rivista di storia e scienze sociali», n. 92, 2018, which she co-edited with G. D'Amico; *Il rinnovamento psichiatrico in Sicilia prima della Legge 180 (1968–1978)*, in G. Mamone, F. Milazzo (eds), *Storia e psichiatria. Problemi, ricerche, fonti, Biblion*, Milan 2019; and the monographs *La mafia alla sbarra. I processi fascisti a Palermo*, Istituto Poligrafico Europeo, Palermo 2014; *La Sicilia e gli alleati. Tra occupazione e Liberazione*, Donzelli, Rome 2013.

Anna Pellegrino is associate professor in contemporary history at Bologna University. She is also an associate researcher at the Laboratoire ICT/Paris Diderot 7 and at the CNAM (Paris). Her research interests have focused on the history of work culture in industrial societies and the great World Fairs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her publications include *“Les Fées machines”. Les ouvriers italiens aux Expositions universelles (1851–1911)*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2017; *La città più artigiana d'Italia. Firenze 1861–1929*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2012; *Italian workers and the universal exhibitions of the nineteenth century: imaginaries and representations of technology and science*, Quaderns d'Història de l'Enginyeria, vol. 13 (2012), pp. 97–114; and *Entre clasicismo e industria: imágenes del país del arte en las Exposiciones Universales del siglo XIX*, en Sofia Diéguez Patao (ed.), *Los lugares del arte: Identidad y representación*, Barcelona, Laertes, 2014.

Céline Regnard is associate professor in modern history at Aix-Marseille University, France. As a researcher, she is a part of the research unit *TELEMM*e (Temps, Espaces, Langages, Europe Méditerranéenne-Méditerranée) in the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme in Aix-en-Provence, institution of which she is deputy director. She is also a former member of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, a former junior fellow of the Institut Universitaire de France and a former visiting scholar to the *Moïse A. Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora* (North Carolina State University), USA.

She obtained a Ph.D. in history in 2006. Her research explores migration history, with a focus on Marseille as a transit place for Italian and other migrants before World War I. Recently, her main focus has been on

Syrian migration. She has published several books and papers on migration history. Recent among them are *En Transit. Les Syriens à Beyrouth, Marseille, Le Havre, New York (1880–1914)*, Anamosa, 2021; « The Transit Stage as a Migratory Experience. The Syrians in Marseille (1880–1920) », in Christina Reimann, Martin Öhman (eds.), *Migrants and the Making of the Urban-Maritime World*, New York/ London, Routledge, 2021; “Stopgap Territories: Inns, Hotels and Boarding Houses in Marseille at the beginning of the 1870s”, *Quaderni storici*, 2016; “Urban growth and police reform in Marseille (1855–1908)”, *Urban History*, 2016; *Migrations et temporalités en Méditerranée. Les migrations à l’épreuve du temps (XIX^e-XX^e siècle)*, (as an editor) 2017; *Borders, Mobilities and Migrations: Perspectives from the Mediterranean, nineteenth-twenty-first Century*, (as an editor) 2014; and *Empreintes italiennes. Marseille et sa région*, (with S. Mourlane), 2013. http://telemme.mmsh.univ-aix.fr/membres/C%C3%A9line_Regnard.

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**When the Italians Came on the Scene: Immigration and
Negotiation of Identities in the Popular Theater of São
Paulo in the Early Twentieth Century**

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So Many Italies in so Many Suitcases

*Stéphane Mourlane, Céline Regnard, Manuela Martini,
and Catherine Brice*

There is a paradox in the history of modern Italy. Italian unification, a long process that began in the nineteenth century, was taking place just as millions of people were leaving their native lands to live in the United States or elsewhere in Europe. This concurrence impacted on the way in

S. Mourlane (✉) · C. Regnard
Aix-Marseille University, CNRS, TELEMME, Aix en Provence, France
e-mail: stephane.mourlane@univ-amu.fr

C. Regnard
e-mail: celine.regnard@univ.amu.fr

M. Martini
LARHRA, Lumière University Lyon 2, Lyon, France
e-mail: manuela.martini@univ-lyon2.fr

C. Brice
CRHEC, Paris-Est Créteil University, Créteil, Paris, France
e-mail: catherine.brice@u-pec.fr

which the Italian nation was defined and on the Italian people's sense of belonging.¹

The construction of the Italian state was largely based on the development of the notion of "Italianness" (*Italianità*). This word, whose use has been attested since the middle of the nineteenth century,² originally referred to the quality of being Italian, especially with regard to language, geography, people, artistic works, and heritage.³ Reading like an inventory of the nature and qualities of Italy, it encompassed what Italy represented in these nationalist times in the same way that the words "Greekness" and "Romanness" are used to refer to the worlds of the two great ancient civilizations and their artistic output. In the second half of the century, the "engineers of Italianness"⁴ began to manipulate the concept for political purposes. For some historians, Italianness sustained a national discourse that was based on a now almost biological connection with the mother country.⁵ It had to be maintained, preserved, and passed on in order to ensure the regeneration that was necessary for the development of a "Great Italy."⁶ Moreover, the well-known saying "Fatta l'Italia, bisogna fare gli Italiani" (Italy has been made, now we have to make Italians), which has virtually become a proverb, made this all the more pressing. In the middle of the nineteenth century, national unity was a new development, and regional allegiances, dialects, and cultures still dominated. Moreover, the departure of millions of nationals across the Alps and the Atlantic raised questions about the strength of the Italian unitarian project.

¹ Manuela Martini, "Migrazioni: comunità e nazione," *Memoria e Ricerca* 8 (1996): 8; Matteo Sanfilippo, *Problemi di storiografia dell'emigrazione italiana* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2002), 213; Emilio Franzina, "La patria degli italiani all'estero," *Il Mulino* 4 (July–August 2011): 611.

² Daniel Grange, "La société 'Dante Alighieri' et la défense de l' 'Italianità'," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 117, no. 1 (2005): 261.

³ Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2010).

⁴ Giulio Bollati, "L'Italiano," in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 1, *I caratteri originali* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), 949–1022.

⁵ Alberto Mario Banti, *Sublime madre nostra: la nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011), VII.

⁶ Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia. Il mito della nazione nel XX secolo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011), 36.

However, as some studies have shown,⁷ migration and exile did not weaken national sentiment but rather contributed to strengthening and perhaps even embodying it.⁸ Italian emigrants were generally poorly received abroad.⁹ As a result, those who did not feel very Italian when they left would go on to discover, feel, and affirm their connection with the mother country through a multiplicity of experiences that varied according to the contexts of their arrival.¹⁰

The way in which migration phenomena are studied strongly influences the level of attention historians give to identity. Since the 1980s, researchers have been gradually abandoning both the state-centered approaches, and the macroeconomic prism of push-and-pull explanations (and also consequently studies of immigration or emigration, those linear trajectories from a departure point to an arrival point) to concentrate instead on the individuals concerned. The focus is now on the migrants' complex movements and on migratory flows within a sometimes vast sphere whose common denominator is the migrants.¹¹ In the case of the Italian migrants, studies have highlighted the extent of temporary migrations, of travels back and forth between their adopted and homelands, and

⁷ For a global historiographical approach, see in particular: Donna Gabaccia, "Italian History and *Gli italiani nel mondo*, Part I," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (1997): 45–66; Donna Gabaccia, "Italian history and *Gli italiani nel mondo*, Part II," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 3, no. 1 (1998): 73–97; Sanfilippo, *Problemi di storiografia*.

⁸ Jean-Charles Vegliante, "L'émigration comme facteur d'italianisation au tournant du siècle," in *Vert, blanc, rouge. L'identité nationale italienne. Actes du colloque des 24 et 25 avril 1998* (Rennes: LURPI, 1999), 223–43; Ludovico Incisa Di Camerana, *Il grande esodo: storia delle migrazioni italiane nel mondo* (Milano: Corbaccio, 2003), 77–90; Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Paola Corti, "Le dinamiche dell'italianità nella storia delle migrazioni nazionali," *Pasato e Presente* 89 (2011): 89; Sanfilippo, *Problemi di storiografia*, 213; Franzina, "La patria degli italiani," 612.

⁹ Matteo Sanfilippo, *Faccia da Italiano* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2011).

¹⁰ Martini, "Migrazioni," 7; Corti, "Le dinamiche dell'italianità," 89; Donna Gabaccia, "L'Italia fuori d'Italia," in *Storia d'Italia, Annali 24: Migrazioni*, eds Paola Corti and Matteo Sanfilippo (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), 227.

¹¹ Loretta Baldassar, "Ritorni e viste in Patria: la circolarità dello spazio migratorio," in *Storia d'Italia*, eds Corti and Sanfilippo, 469; Paola Corti, *Temi e problemi di storia delle migrazioni italiane* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2013), 18.

even of permanent returns,¹² which accounted for around half of those who had departed. This renewed theoretical approach has quite naturally been accompanied by a semantic shift whereby the vocabulary now used comes from the domain of migration and the migrants. The emergence of the concepts of flow and migration has also led to a rethink of the notion of integration. Contributions from the field of ethnic studies since the 1960s have played a significant role in this regard.¹³ Postulating that ethnic and cultural identities did not disappear in host societies but rather coexisted alongside new allegiances¹⁴ in a form of transculturation,¹⁵ proponents of the ethnic approach switched to analyzing the migrant's "adjustment process," as understood from a comparative perspective.¹⁶ This meant no longer just examining possible "double loyalties"¹⁷ but also reflecting on the modalities of forming "mixed identities,"¹⁸ which resulted not just from links between the community of departure and the host country but also from substantial contact with other migrant populations present in the same place at the same time. All Italians

¹² George R. Gilkey, "The United States and Italy: Migration and Repatriation," *Journal of Developing Areas* 2 (1967): 23–35; Betty Boyd Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900–1914* (Staten Island, NY: Center for Migration Studies, 1973); Francesco Paolo Cerase, *L'emigrazione di ritorno: innovazione o reazione? L'esperienza dell'emigrazione di ritorno dagli Stati Uniti d'America* (Rome: Istituto Gini, 1971); Dino Cinel, *The National Integration of Italian Return Migration, 1870–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Loretta Baldassar, *Visits Home. Migration Experience between Italy and Australia* (Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2001); Francesco Paolo Cerase, "L'onda di ritorno," in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana. Partenze*, eds Pietro Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi and Emilio Franzina (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 113–25.

¹³ Dino Cinel, "Ethnicity: A Neglected Dimension of American History," *The International Migration Review* 3 (1969): 58–63.

¹⁴ George E. Pozzetta, "Immigrants and Ethnicity: The State of Italian-American Historiography," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 1 (1989): 67–95.

¹⁵ Marie-Christine Michaud, "The Italians in America: From Transculturation to Identity Renegotiation," *Diasporas* 19 (2012): 41–51.

¹⁶ Samuel L. Baily, "The Adjustment of Italian Immigrants in Buenos Aires and New York, 1870–1914," *The American Historical Review* 2 (1983): 281–305.

¹⁷ Mona Harrington, "Loyalties: Dual and Divided," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, eds Stephan Thernstrom, Anna Orlov, Oscar Handlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 676–86.

¹⁸ Maurizio Ambrosini, "La costruzione di identità trasversali: relazioni e appartenenze sociali attraverso i confini," in *Storia d'Italia*, eds Corti and Sanfilippo, 674.