Inventing ‘Italians’ : Experiences and Responses in Australia’s Colonial and Federation Societies

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On the evening of 20 September 1910, a large gathering of Italians, their families and probably Italianites met at St James Hall off Elizabeth Street in the city of Sydney. It was an extravagant display in celebration of the Italian Risorgimento. The Sydney Morning Herald reported that:

St. James’ Hall was ablaze with colour, and all agog with the excitement of a national celebration last evening, when the Italian residents of the metropolis commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the capture of Rome and the fortieth anniversary of the Sicilian expedition of Garibaldi. The utmost enthusiasm prevailed, and cheers greeted the entrance of Signor Sani, a veteran, who fought with Garibaldi.¹

The preparation for this event had doubtlessly been planned for months in the Italian Sydney-based community and, in the days preceding it, it is likely that some of *i prominenti* [the prominent figures] and *i paesani* [the working class people], as well as their wives, daughters and sons would have pitched in to help. Amongst such a crowd, for instance, would have been four sisters who had lent an artistic hand to decorate venues in past years.² They were Ethel Pullè (aged 30), Margarita Pullè (aged 29), Ivy Pullè (aged 23) and Irene Pullè (aged 21) - all single at the time. ‘The decorations were picturesque’, continued the Sydney Morning Herald:

Over the platform was suspended a full-length portrait of King Victor Emanuel [*sic*], framed in the Union Jack and the five-starred flag of Australia. The predominating colours were the red, white, and green tricolour of Italy. From the balconies were suspended delicate vines and wild clematis, relieved with sprays of wistaria [*sic*], lilies, and apple blossoms. At the head of the table were portraits of Cavour, Garibaldi, and Mazzini.³
Ethel, Margarita, Ivy and Irene were four of seven children whose mother, Sarah, had been born of Irish parents in Goodna (her maiden name being McFarlane) and whose father was Giovanni Pullè - an Italian immigrant and notable.

We could imagine that the evening unfolded with food, wine, music and dancing - perhaps in a unique Italo-Australian way. There were certainly speeches made, as the newspaper reported, in honour of both Italy’s and Australia’s greatness as nations. The history of Garibaldi’s expedition to Sicily was recounted. Professor Michele Blunno proposed a special toast to “Australia, the Land We Live In”! and the ‘Ladies’ were toasted too, as were others. What more visual and symbolic display of that almost ubiquitous but evolving term, **italianità** (Italianness). It was during this era that **italianità** was being purposefully voiced for the first time in Australia. But the nationalistic tone of the evening, combing history with legend, is contrary to what historians account as central to the interest of most Italian migrants. Bosworth (1996:4-5), for instance, explains that the identification of Italians (living on the peninsula or abroad) with the nation state was reserved to the realm of politics rather than part of every-day life experience. How are we then to understand this 1910 community of ‘Italians’ who officially only numbered 6,719 in Australia in 1911, of whom 1,043 lived in Sydney? How in fact was a community-oriented event like this organised to orchestrate both Italian patriotism to the homeland and loyalty to the host society in a way that reflected any real sense of being Italian? To explore this dilemma, we could look at the life of just one of the likely participants at the evening, Pullè himself.

When Giovanni Pullè boarded the *Reichstag* on the summer’s day of 13 June 1876 in the port of Hamburg - that cosmopolitan city port which was the springboard for people from the Old World to the New - his identity seemed uncomplicated. On the German passenger list, he was registered as a 24 year old male landowner, travelling alone from Modena, Italy, and whose destination was Moreton Bay in the colony of Queensland. He was one of three from Modena, amongst 31 Italians and 252 other European passengers recorded, on the nine year old vessel that had made already several trips to Australia and New Zealand since 1870 (Kresse 1972:255). Born on 18 July 1854, Pullè was actually 21 years old, but he was a Modenese, an aristocrat, and unmarried. After voyaging at sea for almost four months, enduring German ‘cuisine’ in
equatorial temperatures as well as the ship surgeon-superintendent’s live stock in the saloon, the
*Reichstag* and most of her passengers arrived in Brisbane on 6 October 1876 without incident.⁸

Like many before him, as the ship pulled out from its German dock, Pullè must have felt
some sadness at leaving behind his family, *paese* or hometown, and native Italy. However, it is
almost certain that he was overawed by his impending adventure to a land that he had apparently
dreamed of exploring as a child.⁹ Such voyages by men like Pullè at this time in history are
reminiscent of a coming of age and were not entirely isolated amongst the single, educated,
professional males from a Northern Italian city or region. In her account of fellow Modenese, Dr
Luigi Bompani’s emigration to Brazil in 1840, Pulini (1989:229) infers that such men grew up
on the Continent, surrounded by literature about other places, cultures, scientific ventures, and
travel that was reflective of the early nineteenth century Romantic movement and adventure.
Pullè, it was said, had intended to return to his homeland after a couple of years, but by 1 July
1878 he had sworn his allegiance to the British Crown and by 19 November 1879 he had married
Sarah McFarlane.¹⁰ He was to return to Italy only a few times during his lifetime. Assimilated, as
he became, his life also reflects his ties to Italy and a strong sense of *italianità*. What is
particularly intriguing is the role that Pullè adopted to encourage his co-nationals to embrace
their Italianness. A discussion of aspects of his life provides insight into both the Italo-Australian
communities of the time and their negotiation of identity. It also reveals a significant phase in
Italo-Australian history that contributes to the debate on the invention of ‘Italians’.

In order to appreciate the impact of Italian migrants on Australia’s colonial and early
Federated societies, and how they managed their place and identities within urban and rural
settings, it is necessary firstly to outline the approach of Australia’s official policies towards
them while contextualising such an approach globally. There are also a number of problems
associated not only with the notion of ‘Italians’, but with the idea of their migrant communities,
or ‘colonies’ to which they were referred by the early 1900s. This point engages the discourse on
regionalism versus nationalism in terms of identity. Finally, the idea of invention needs to be
placed in the context of the turn of the twentieth century for the experiences and responses of
Italian migrants to be expanded from views that have acknowledged neither their dynamism nor
the innovative approaches they applied to their situations. Each of these points can be discussed
following Pullè’s life and activities, and illustrated by examples from Australia’s history and the literature devoted to Italian emigration. In particular, analysis of Pullè’s involvement with his co-nationals renders the concept of inventing ‘Italians’ an important part of early Italo-Australian experience.

More than any other period in Italian migration history, the post-Risorgimento drained the new nation of multitudes of people either fleeing for political reasons or choosing to leave to escape poverty and with the search for work in mind (Ciuffoletti and Degl’Innocenti 1978:1). Mass unemployment and declining mortality rates tend to account for the exodus from Italy (Mack Smith 1989:184; Duggan 1994:18-20). ‘Peasants were half of all migrants before 1896’, explains Gabaccia (2000:61). Many travelled to traditional destinations within Europe, often temporarily, but by 1887 permanent and transoceanic emigrations had emerged as the dominant feature (Istituto Coloniale Italiano 1911:376). In the year of Pullè’s departure, 108,771 Italians sailed for continents like North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia, as well as migrating elsewhere in Europe, 19,848 of these being recorded as permanent (Istituto Coloniale Italiano 1911:376; Rosoli 1978). Between 1875 and 1900, approximately 5.95 million emigrated from the peninsula and by 1915 numbers reached about 14 million (Rosoli 1978). While Australia’s portion of these emigrants was minute compared to countries like Argentina, Brazil, and North America, those who made the journey to the oceanic countries provide a microscopic view of such global characteristics, as Woolcock (1986:48) suggests for the colony of Queensland:

Immigration to Queensland during the last four decades of the nineteenth century represented only a fraction of the total outflow from Great Britain and Europe, but it bore many of the characteristics of this exodus, reflected the impact of conditions and events in both the sending and receiving countries, and certainly influenced the composition of colonial society.

Of the Italians who emigrated to Australia after 1861, the majority were despondent under the social, economic and political hardships that confronted their daily lives. Cresciani (1985:34) states that Australia was also ‘increasingly perceived as a land for emigrants, a commercial outlet where Italian foods could be sold, a market secured and an outpost set up for further colonial expansion’. It is the impact of these Italians that mostly concerns us here.
Seemingly well-behaved on his transoceanic voyage, having shown ‘benevolence and friendship’ to at least one other passenger (cf Cresci 1986:83), Pullè arrived on the Australian continent where those arriving from the peninsula were defined as ‘Italians’ only officially from 1866 and only in the colony of South Australia. The colonies of Victoria and Queensland included ‘Italians’ separately in the 1871 census. However, prior to this, they were classified under the category of ‘other European countries’ and considered such in other colonies for more years yet. In the colony of Queensland Italians literally numbered only small clusters, with the colonial censuses of 1871 and 1881 recording 88 and 250 Italians, respectively (Borrie 1954:51). One reason for such small numbers was that Italians were not considered preferential. Similar to the situation in other colonies, since Queensland’s establishment in 1860 a pro-British stance towards migration policies was adopted (Lack and Templeton 1988:1). As far as colonial authorities were concerned, migrants from Germany, France, and the Scandinavian countries were second to those from Britain and Ireland. In spite of a few organised Italian migrant schemes (Dignan 1993:60), Italians were rarely recruited except as labourers and agriculturalists for specific colonial enterprises, some of which went horribly wrong. The Agent-General for Emigration, Arthur Macalister, tended to maintain a status quo approach to the acceptance of the ‘Continental character’ of migrants from Europe (notably preferring Northern Europeans), indicating that ‘... in no case should Continental Emigrants be placed in a better position than those forwarded from Great Britain and Ireland’.  

11 Macalister’s predecessor, Richard Daintree, also had restricted the intake of European migrants, noting in his 1874 Annual Report that the problem was in their finding suitable work which should generally be reserved for the British.  

12 Indeed, according to one anonymous source writing to the official Italian government’s Bollettino della Società pel Patronato degli Emigranti Italiani, Italian migrants should ‘be content to accept for some time a much smaller wage than that which is given to the English for the same work’.  

13 Thus, it was an atypical experience when Pullè, unlike most other Italians able to arrive in colonial Australia, was fortunate enough to secure a professional government position as a lithographic draftsman for the Survey Office of the Queensland Lands Department shortly after his arrival. Still, he was viewed as ‘Italian’ by the Italian government and in his new host society which rarely distinguished between Northern and Southern Italians let alone according to class and region.
The tension for Pullè between being ‘Italian’ and being accepted in an Anglo-Saxon-dominated workplace was illustrated after five years of employment at the Survey Office when he was rejected for a salary increase despite most of his colleagues receiving promotions. Civic assimilation was how some Italians responded once the decision to remain abroad had been made, but cultural assimilation, certainly within the sphere of their private lives, was another matter. While assimilating into Australian colonial life on the one hand, Pullè also displayed his sense of being Italian very early on in his private life. When 103 Tuscan peasants, arriving on the Indus in 1877, complained of misinformation and mistreatment - they had been ticketed for Brisbane and were largely vinedressers, yet their barque docked in Rockhampton for the sugarcane fields (Dignan 1993:68-9) - a number of people in Brisbane responded quickly to ensure that Italians were protected from such maladministration in the future. Pullè was one who attended a public meeting on 27 July 1877 which resulted in the foundation of the Società di Patronato e Mutuo Soccorso tra gli Italiani nel Queensland, with the young Pullè playing an active role, initially as its treasurer, over the Society’s four year duration. The Society aimed ‘to aid all deserving persons of Italian nationality by giving advice, procuring occupation, making loans, or giving monetary assistance’. The significance of the establishment of such societies in creating a place for Italians, for the benefit of both the host society and ‘Italians’ themselves, is noted by Gabaccia (2000:47) in her general discussion of the activities of migrants abroad:

The use of “Italian” and “nation” in diaspora institutions was significant; national identity took precedence over the ideologies of their founders. Equally significant, however, were terms like “union”, “mutuality”, and “benevolence”, which linked Italian nationalism to the economic concerns of ordinary migrants, and to their lack of interest in accepting charity from the Catholic church.

Such secular institutions attempted to protect co-nationals of all classes and regional backgrounds while also highlighting their common nationhood, and Pullè was to continue similar strategies somewhat independently for the protection and unification of fellow Italians in later years. Whether it was because of his nationality, his interest in Italian ‘ethnic’ issues of the day, or for some other reason that Pullè’s request at the Survey Office was not granted, being ‘Italian’ was in fact a very complicated matter. Pullè’s frustrations there led him to branch out in
1885 as an independent merchant - a profession that enabled him to import Italian goods and eventually to specialise in the new conserved foods industry and pasta making.

The complexity of understanding the nationalisation of the identity of Italians at home and abroad, even today, is described by Baldassar (2001:81): ‘... this ‘unity’ of an Italian people is still far from a reality. Italy exists largely as a myth, a creation’. As historians stress, it was legal Italy that was created by the Risorgimento, not Italians (cf Gabaccia 2000:52). The ‘dilemma’, Bosworth (1996:2) argues, is that ‘there are many Italies’. The term, ‘many Italies’, relates to the multiple village/town and regional identities (Baldassar 2001:ch.3). Hence, self-definitions did not revolve around national frontiers, but according to regional ‘minds and customs’ (Bosworth 1996:4). Scholars exploring the identities that Italians transported from paese through migration to settlement reveal the problems associated with a collective sense of being ‘Italian’. The common view, as Romanucci-Ross (1975:218) emphasises, is that: ‘Immigrants abroad view each other as they did in Italy.’ Italian identity was characterised by loyalties to family, hometown, region, and regional traditions more than any kind of national display. Yet, understanding how Italians negotiated their identities in the migrant context relies in part on how they were perceived within their host societies.

Colonial Australia, for its part, was less tolerant of the Mediterranean than the German or Dane. This was shown by the instance of parliamentary and public debate over the character of Chiaffredo Venerano Fraire’s recruited Piedmontese ‘agriculturalists’ for the sugarcane fields in Queensland’s north even before they arrived in 1891 (Dignan 1991:55-68; Douglass 1995:ch.3). Problematic because not all were bona-fide agriculturalists, this venture nevertheless paved the way for the future success of Italians in the sugar industry. The arrival of the Piedmontese on the Jumna also rallied support from Italianites already living in Queensland. Although Francesco Sceusa’s Società Operaia Italiana di Mutuo Soccorso condemned the Fraire’s scheme as equivalent to slavery (Douglass 1995:50), other Brisbane Italians scolded him for the negative publicity his views brought Italians as a whole and defended the scheme as different from the practice of cheap labour contracts. The Fraire episode thus brought forth strong attitudes about Italian migrants by colonial Australians and instigated other Italians to defend them - issues that were to resume after Federation. In response, Italian migrant identities were crafted through
economic and social processes when their host society grouped them together and contact with other Italians ensured empathy and shelter from discrimination.

The discourse on Italian ethnic identity has moved in recent years to acknowledge a common sense Italianness during the phase of Italy’s first modern mass migrations. Some key studies reveal this fact, as Romano (1994:7) states: ‘What is striking is to note that these Italians, weak in their sense of nationality when they were living in their home country, discovered their Italianness when they found themselves abroad: they were no longer Venetian or Calabrian, Genoan or Neapolitan, but, simply, Italians’. This view of the development of Italo-Canadian identity is shared by Sanfilippo (1989:420): ‘The first immigrants bring with them the culture of their villages and provinces, but on contact with other Italian groups acquire a national consciousness following a process similar to that which is manifesting itself in Italy at the time’. But questions about how and by whom this more national identity was cultivated need to be asked.

The problem with the notion of ‘Italians’ at the turn of the twentieth century is intimately connected with and just as contentious as the idea of Italian communities. Borrie (1954:62) indicates that Italian migrants formed concentrated settlements in certain areas as early as 1911. However, substantial Italian ‘colonies’ were recorded even earlier reflecting regional and occupational bonds: between the 1850s and 1890s at Daylesford in Victoria (D’Aprano 1995:39-64); by 1885 at Woodburn, in Northern New South Wales (Cresciani 1985:37); and, as noted, in 1891 at the Herbert River cane fields district in Northern Queensland (Douglass 1995). Colonial Queensland’s history well before the 1890s also suggests a strong urban Italian migrant presence due to a number of immigration ventures in the 1870s (Dignan 1993:63, 67), which could also be argued for metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne. These were generally communities certainly based on common regional origins or occupational interests. However, Borrie (1954:152) states that Italians ‘brought no secular or religious institutions which bound them together, or which could act as a permanent focal point for the persistence of their national culture’. While Cresciani (1988:95) also refers to the Italian communities of the time as ‘querulous, divided, primitive and isolated’, Pullè notably attempted to define and unify them through his newspaper ventures from 1905. Consistent with the debate on regionalism and nationalism, as Zucchi (1988:162) shows in
a history of Toronto’s Italians, an emerging Italian community leadership played a role in the formation of Italian national consciousness and ‘ethnic’ identity. The description of the 1910 September 20 gathering provides one illustration of this.

After Australia’s Federation, Italian notables like Pullè took steps towards consolidating the protection and presence of Italian migrants in spite of their traditionally fragmented concerns. The journalistic activities of Pullè serve to illustrate the dynamic ways with which many Italian migrants responded to conditions within their host society. Of importance to them were not only counteracting antagonistic opinions that tended to be stereotypical and prejudicial, but also paving the way for economic viability. Established Italian notables were well-positioned to pioneer ‘the Italian community’ through its defence against discrimination, the creation of ‘ethnic’ institutions, and a capacity to form contacts with the mainstream (Zucchi 1988:142-3). Their own business gains were part of the motivation, but with few exceptions ‘they genuinely felt they were performing necessary duties beneficial to other Italian immigrants - as in fact they were’ (Zucchi 1988:159). Promoting Italianità and identità - two words that appear frequently within the pages of L’Italo-Australiano (1905-1909) and the Oceania (1913-1915) - Pullè adopted a representative role amongst his co-nationals (Dewhirst 2002). The reasons for this are again partly bound to how Italians were perceived and treated.

On becoming a nation, Australia asserted an Anglo-Celtic identity and its policy on immigration ensured assimilation to this model (Davidson 1997:144). The introduction of the Immigrant Restriction Act of 1901 (White Australia policy), wherein Italians had just made the cut-off point on the list of acceptable immigrants, did not make it magically easier for them to become accepted, integrated, or even tolerated by Australians in general. The approach to immigration stressed ‘whiteness’ in the form of the White Australia policy, which by no means always meant the unequivocal acceptance of Italians (Murphy 1993:30, 40). Indeed, Italians were sometimes considered ‘dark’, with some British Australians who came to their defence even being called ‘white dagoes’ as late as 1954 (Price 1963:52-3, 215). Borrie (1954:149) explains that, rather than a slight on Italians as ‘inferior’, the issue was that Northern Europeans were considered better able to assimilate in Australia’s society than their Southern counterparts. Thus, one of L’Italo-Australiano’s aims was to dispel negative perceptions about what in reality
were ‘the real sterling qualities of Italians’. Throughout its duration, Pullè advised his co-nationals to conform in ways that would best secure their acceptance within Australian society and enable avenues to prosperity, revealed in the problem of naturalisation. Notorious for their desire to return to the homeland which could, on occasions, restrict their livelihoods, as the Oceania’s battle against the West Australian Mines Regulation Bill of 1913 showed, Italians were encouraged to become British subjects. By taking up citizenship, Pullè argued they would gain certain privileges in their host society, such as rights to buy land and to vote, not to mention the fact that they would not be considered ‘alien’ (officially, if not in practice), and all the while retaining Italian citizenship. Yet there was another reason why Pullè’s newspapers championed Italian migrant concerns. As the fastest-growing migrant group outside the British (Borrie 1954:35-6), there were opportunities open to Italians in Australia.

Pullè attempted to unite and fortify the clusters of geographically scattered, and regionally and socially diverse Italians through a program of cultural activities. In the process, ‘Italians’ were invented. The concept of the ‘invention of ethnicity’ appears in the historical scholarship on nineteenth century American immigration. Rather than a fabrication of ethnicity, migrant community leaders created occasions to display and enact their identities which could be presented as a national peoplehood in a developing society. As Conzen et al. (1990:38) indicate, the concept of ‘invention’ is about ‘cultural construction’ and the reinvention of what ethnicity means in terms of boundaries and symbols within migrant communities. Using the ‘old country imagery’ immigrants were able to nurture a private sense of common heritage while also demonstrating public collectiveness through the establishment of ethnic infrastructure (Conzen et al. 1990:48). For German-Americans, for instance, ‘the foreign-language press played an important role in defining ethnic group boundaries and fostering solidarity by forcefully propagating identification with and commitment to the Vaterland’ (Conzen et al 1990:49). Indeed, as Voigt (1987:62, 66, 70, 73) points out for the German-Australian case, the importance of German roots to the migrants was always present, observed through such symbolic and emotive forms as their Nationalfest, gymnastics, and singing. However, the invention of ethnicity is a process like any other and does not happen overnight. In Pullè’s case, other experiences in Australia’s late colonial history led to the culmination of his pioneering role as an ‘ethnic’ community leader.
Pullè’s prospects never looked better after leaving the Survey Office in 1883. He launched his new career as an independent merchant by a return to Italy where he published a small booklet to elicit funding for his Italo-Australian Commercial Company. His business enterprise was well-researched and based on the importation of every-day consumer products that were already produced in Italy and largely lacking in colonial Australian society (or of lesser quality via the British market). His return to Italy coincided with the 1884 National Exhibition of Turin and, along with 30 of his co-nationals representing the Italian activities throughout colonial Australia in the Italiani all’Estero section, he displayed his company’s tinned foods - a modern achievement of the day. The Turin event was a hallmark for uniting the diverse groups of Italo-Australians in the years to come. Not only was Pullè making important contacts for his later activities in Sydney, he was forging his own national sense of identity. Such events like the exhibition in Turin, and the 1906 International Exhibition in Milan which he attended with at least 14 other co-nationals, recognised the efforts of Italians abroad across classes and employment sectors. On his return to Brisbane, Pullè’s business flourished as he sold Italian commodities, small goods and furniture, exporting wool, tallow and hides, and also ran a hostel and branched into brandy distilling and wine making. But the colonial depression of the 1890s set him back financially, a particular difficulty for him and his wife, now with seven children, and the family moved to Sydney to start again early in 1896. It was here, after working for several more years in the food industry, that by 1906 Pullè had established his Excelsior Macaroni Company and the first of his Italian newspapers, L’Italo-Australiano.

Family and work are always the centrifugal forces for Italian migrants, yet there is some evidence that Italo-Australians generally worked with the efforts of an Italian business elite in Australia’s early Federation years. With great confidence, and amongst like-minded notabili [notables], Pullè implemented a conservative program through his newspapers that ultimately reflects the invention of ‘Italians’. He had already written in the first issue of L’Italo-Australiano that the scope of the newspaper was to ‘give an identity, a moral and material face to our communities’ and that his newspaper represented ‘the first nucleus around which Italian life may develop’. He applied a strategy of bilingualism, showing that the use of his journalism was pitched to Anglophones as well as Italians. His advertising, although mostly Sydney-based,
provided information for migrants on where to buy Italian food products and goods, and access services to assist in the process of **sistemazione** [setting up house and work]. He promoted public occasions for Italians and others to commemorate important moments in Italian history like the anniversaries of Italy’s unification on September 20 and her constitution on Statute Day. By doing this he was nationalising the Italian **festa** [celebration]. The **festa** of course is associated usually by religious village/town traditions and marks a means for community solidarity as Orsi (1985) depicts in his study of the statue of the Madonna in the Italian neighbourhood of Harlem.

In the early 1900s in Australia, Pullè and his associates anchored the notion of the **festa** in a national sense in order to celebrate a collective **italianità**. One instance was the annual picnic held at the sports grounds of Botany on 20 September 1908, coinciding with a visit by the Italo-American and internationally acclaimed boxer, ‘Joe Grim’ [Saverio Giannone]. This instance illustrates how matters normally only *discussed* amongst Italians or within their families were to converge into a public display of ethnicity. Giannone had emigrated to Philadelphia from the Avellino province and he was the guest-of-honour.²¹ On the day, described as ‘a magnificent national event’, about 500 Italians were reported to have attended, sharing picnic lunches, music, sports competitions (including the ‘national competition of bocce’), and prize-giving.²² One month later, *L’Italo-Australiano* reported on 17 and 24 October that the ‘iron man of Philadelphia’ lost a fight with Arthur Cripps, Australia’s middleweight champion. Yet, such competitions were a form of proving acceptance and equality in the eyes of the host society (Wilcox 1992:180). Even though sports did not generally have a strong unifying tradition amongst the ethnic cultures of southern Europe, boxing was symbolic of manliness and caught the interest of Italians - both second generation and newly arrived as well - especially when one of their own was involved (Riess 1992:204-5). These events provided occasions to celebrate cross-regionally and demonstrate a collective community. However, two other specific ventures gave Italians a ‘national’ focus, encouraging their participation.

Pullè pushed for an Italian agricultural village scheme and the formation of a national migrant league, the *Stella d’Italia* [‘Star of Italy’] through his journalism. Again, both represent features of Italianness that captured the interest of fellow Italians across Australia. In the first instance, Pullè worked with various State governments in order to purchase land for unemployed co-nationals and potential Italian migrants in a similar vein to Fraire’s venture. With the need for
agricultural development and increasing numbers of Italians emigrating, this was a scheme that
Italian vice consul for Western Australia, Leopoldo Zunini ([1906] 1997), was also negotiating at
the time. Pullè’s plan was to assist with a dairy or saw-milling industry first which could later be
expanded to other agricultural interests by migrants and their families.\textsuperscript{23} Although the scheme
was not supported completely by the Queensland government, it engaged interest from about 150
families.\textsuperscript{24} In the second instance, Pullè established the \textit{Stella d’Italia} which functioned as a
national league, its ambitious aim being to create a unified presence of Italians, protecting and
assisting further Italian immigration, and setting up networks and centres for their economic and
social support across Australia and New Zealand. Again, insight into the interest it created can be
seen by the expanse of its 130 membership by February 1907, with members including Northern
Queensland sugarcane field workers, Rutherglen grape harvesters, Kalgoorlie miners, and New
Italy’s silk makers. The \textit{Stella d’Italia} created an Italian language school of Italians, particularly
for the children of migrant Italians, and others interested in the Italian language, as well as
raising funds for important community ventures and the 1908 earthquake victims in Calabria and
Sicily. These kind of initiatives were continued in the \textit{Oceania} which also advocated on behalf of
the Italian agriculturalists and workers, and even attempted to organise a labour centre in order to
give advice, information and assist in finding work for newly arrived Italian migrants.

What is clear from the Italo-Australian context is that Pullè orchestrated a program to protect,
unify and promote Italianness through his newspapers which can be acknowledged today as a
common global response to the experience of migration and settlement in the New World.
Passionate about their own regional identities, some established Italians like Pullè appreciated
the realities of host society expectations with the focus on assimilation together with the needs
Italians might have in belonging to a community and expressing their ‘ethnicity’. A sense of both
a collective ethnic and national consciousness developed in response to discriminatory
experiences on the one hand, and to the notion of contributing to a new society on the other.
Although this situation arose from Australia’s policies and attitudes towards Italians in the late
colonial era and early Federation years, Italians responded creatively and dynamically. The
lavish expression of \textit{italianità} during the evening of 20 September 1910 in Sydney may be seen
in this light. If Pullè had never really felt patriotically ‘Italian’ before emigrating from Modena
and embarking on the \textit{Reichstag}, a sense of Italian nationality and ethnic identity was to develop

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for him in a phenomenal way due to his experiences in Australia. The Italians he met along the way constitute a major part of his inspiration. By the time of his death in Sydney on 4 November 1920, a special era of the early Italian ethnic communities was closing and Italian migrants and their children were soon to be confronted with Mussolini’s version of the Italian nation.

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ENDNOTES

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4. Ibid.
6. MS, Staatsarchiv, Senat der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg : Bestand 373-7 I Auswanderungsamt I, VIII A I Band 33.
Oral family history according to the late Yolanda Pullè-Sampson, granddaughter of Giovanni Pullè, who had visited Italy in 1956 and spoken with Pullè’s youngest brother, Felice Pullè, about her grandfather.

Ibid. MS, QSA : COL/72-74 (1878), Z.2204, no.5187; Certificate no. 7274. MS, QSA : Reg. no.1177/93 (Queensland).

12 MS, QSA : COL/78A (1875), no.2300.
14 MS, QSA, Queensland Blue Books, Survey Office Staff, 1878-1882.
15 The Queenslander 4 August 1887; Pugh’s Almanac (1878-1881).
16 The Queenslander 30 January 1892, pp.207-8.
18 L’Italo-Australiano 19 September 1908.
19 L’Italo-Australiano, 26 September 1908.
20 Cf Sydney Morning Herald 24 September 1907, p.4.
21 L’Italo-Australiano 12 October 1907 and 9 November 1907