

Foot, John

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**Mapping Diversity in Milan.  
Historical Approaches to Urban  
Immigration**

John Foot

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KTHC - Knowledge, Technology, Human Capital

John Foot, *Department of Italian, University College London*

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# Mapping Diversity in Milan. Historical Approaches to Urban Immigration

## Summary

An historical and spatial approach is crucial to the understanding of any city. Waves of immigration and population movements from different sources have constructed the cultural mix of this financial, industrial and market city over time. To focus just on the new foreign immigration into Milan over the last 25 years or so risks omitting the deep historical fissures created by previous (and bigger) waves of population movements – the traces left by these populations in the urban fabric and their role in subjective experience. Moreover, the historical and spatial comparison of various types and moments of population movement can help us to understand the changes to this city at macro and micro-levels. This paper uses a mixture of approaches in order to understand and map diversity in Milan, its province and its region. It is intended as a discussion paper to be looked at in conjunction with the work and arguments laid out in other research projects and published work. Methodologies used in this paper range from straightforward historical research (using documents and archives) to photography, micro-history (the examination of one small area – in this case one housing block) and oral historical interviews.

**Keywords:** Immigration, Urban Space, Periphery (*Periferia*), Memory, Housing

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*Address for correspondence:*

John Foot  
Department of Italian  
University College London  
Gower Street  
WC1E 6BT London  
United Kingdom  
Phone: +44 2076793421  
Fax: +442072090638  
E-mail: J.foot@ucl.ac.uk

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### ***1. Milan as a City of Immigration and of Mobile Populations***

Modern Lombardy has always been a society in movement. From the early growth of the silk and textile industries to the creation of contemporary Milan, the region has attracted and moved groups of workers, consumers, pilgrims, traders and administrators. Since 1945 the region has been host to two waves of mass immigration, the first from within Italy, the second from outside the peninsula. These two immigrations have corresponded with two different economic phases. The first immigration coincided with the economic miracle, a period of extraordinary growth based around classic industry and public works. The second immigration has taken place against the background of a vastly different economy, centered around services, small industry and post-industrial scenarios. Yet, the population movement which has characterised Lombardy has not only been concerned with immigration.

People have always commuted to the cities to work and consume and trade, from the building workers of the early twentieth century who arrived in Milan every morning, to the worker-peasants of the 1920s who maintained strong links with the countryside, to the classic industrial commuters of the 1950s. Others have used the cities of the region to buy, to sell and to enjoy themselves, or simply as ways of moving on to other areas, countries or regions. These *city-users* have become a key part of the post-

industrial region of Lombardy. Business-users, with their specific needs and usage of the city are a key sector within the category of city-users. Finally, there are those who seem not to move - the residents, the old, the young, the urban populations. Yet, even these groups are in continual movement - for work, for necessity, during holiday periods. Many city residents have become intelligent and discerning city-users as the industrial city has declined. Others have left the region altogether, preferring to return to their region of origin than to suffer in silence the pollution and stresses of the modern metropolis.

Official statistics, and in general, public political discourse and debate, tend to concentrate upon the *sleeping* population - that is the restricted number of people who remain within big cities at night - the *residents*. These legal residents vote in local elections and use the city on a daily basis to live, shop, work or as students, children and pensioners. This group dominates all the available statistics - and yet represent a minority both in numerical terms as well as in terms of their impact upon the city. In an earlier phase of the industrial city, the sleeping population and the daily population were far more similar, although there were always complicated and shifting relationships with the countryside and rural work. The demolition of city walls (Milan's were removed in 1873) represents a key moment in the shift towards differing populations and institutionalised commuting.

## ***2. Comparing waves of Immigration***

As we have seen, over the course of 50 years or so the territory of Milan has seen two mass immigrations. The first concerned Italians, from the countryside, the mountains and the cities of the South, the East and Lombardy. The second concerns non-Italians, from a myriad of countries but above all from North Africa, South America and Easter Europe. Notwithstanding the proximity and shock-effects of these two immigrations, very few researchers have attempted any kind of comparison between them. In general, when comparisons have been made, the tendency has been to take refuge in simplistic clichés concerning the first migratory movement. In short, the Italian migration is generally seen as a difficult but essentially unproblematic phase. This immigration 'from the South' (in reality only 20% of the immigrants were from the Mezzogiorno) is characterised as integrative and positive, that of the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s as non-integrative and negative. Little reference is made to the enormous body of research carried out at the time with regard to internal immigration. Little weight is given to the debates, institutions, contradictions, laws and processes which characterised the population movements of the 'economic miracle'. The two immigrations<sup>1</sup> are also seen as self-contained and separate processes, where the experiences of the former have nothing to tell us about the problems linked to the latter.

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The immigration of Italians to Milan in the 1950s and 1960s (as well as that into Turin, Genoa, Rome and Naples) provoked a series of national political and academic debates. The bibliography referring to the period is huge. Massive publicly and privately funded research projects analysed immigration, the

immigrants and the host society. Yet, by the time of the new immigration of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s it was as if none of this had ever happened. There is now a large bibliography on this latter period, but very little makes any reference to the previous experiences of migration, or the debates, or even the most important books. Why? There are a number of possible explanations. First, there is a widespread belief that the internal immigration of the boom years was absorbed with difficulty but, over time, without enormous problems. This belief is far stronger for Milan - where the supposed 'generosity' and 'openness' of the Milanese is often cited - than for Turin. In the latter city the isolated research projects which were carried out in the 1970s and 1980s revealed a city still divided essentially along an immigrant/non-immigrants divide - spatially, socially and culturally.

A second possible reason for the lack of comparison is the common exaggeration of the importance of the Italian/non-Italian question. It is claimed that the immigrants of the 1950s were essentially different from those of the 1980s and 1990s *because they were Italians*. This basic fact signified a far greater level of integration - linguistically, culturally, socially - than has been possible with those coming from outside Italy. To cite the journalist Giorgio Bocca, these were 'people with language, religion, cultural history and skin-colour in common with the Milanese'<sup>2</sup>. As I shall try and show below, this 'Italianness' alone tells us very little about the integration processes involved, and there are far more similarities than differences between the immigration paths and experiences of the two mass movements than the general academic position allows (or even contemplates). In fact, the racialisation of the southern immigrants in particular - their *Otherness*, their *Outsiderness* - went very deep. This was also at the level of language, of accent, of appearance - often in very similar ways to those of the later period and precisely in terms of the characteristics cited by Bocca.

A third possible reason for non-comparison is far more banal. Methodologically, the vast bulk of the research on the immigration of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s has been carried out by sociologists and anthropologists - not by historians. Those working on this period and these processes have simply not been used to looking back for explanations and comparisons, and have limited themselves to a perfunctory examination of the bibliography or, in the worst cases, the simple repetition of a few clichés. Much of this research has been funded by local associations anxious to gather information to deal with immediate and pressing problems - the Church, the voluntary sector, local administrations. Most of the researchers employed on these projects have not even contemplated any kind of backwards look towards the 1970s, let alone the 1950s. The practical aspects of this research (who lives where? what do they need?) is, of course, essential, but it tells us little about what worked and what went wrong before. The lessons of the past could prove more useful than the facts of the present.

For example, if we take one key area of possible integration in the 1950s - housing - we can start to pick up some crucial signals about the different treatment of the two immigrations. In the 1950s and 1960s whole neighbourhoods were built from scratch to house the waves of immigrants from the countryside and the South. Most of these were on the periphery of the city. Other immigrants built their own houses - in agglomerations which became known as *Coree* - in the province and hinterland. Others

chose to live well outside the city and travel to work every day. The immigrants of the 1980s and 1990s have had no neighbourhoods built for them, and have had to make do with emergency prefab 'housing' (see the section on Via Corelli below) or deal with the saturated and expensive Milanese housing market. On the one hand this has led to the creation of inner-city mixed quarters near the central stations of the big northern cities - Corso Buenos Aires in Milan, San Salvario in Turin - and on the other to a diffuse presence of immigrant residence right across the city. The 1980s and 1990s has not seen the creation of massive immigrant ghettos like Comasina and Quarto Oggiaro (Milan) or La Falchera, Mirafiori Sud e Le Vallette (Turin). Strangely, the scarce response of the state to the needs of the immigrants has favoured integration with the city by preventing ghetto formation, but it has also helped to create areas with shifting, rootless populations often in conflict with local communities. Comparing the two immigrations, therefore, can help us understand each individual period with far more clarity.

One final reason for the lack of comparison has to do with memory, and also refers back to the waves of emigration which saw Italians leave their country in huge numbers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Italy was, until very recently, a poor country. This poverty forced many Italians to search for work in far-off countries and – in the 1950s and 1960s – in the cities of the north and centre of their own country. The Italians of today – who have seen a vast increase in living standards in recent times – are a very long way away from their ancestors in many ways. Thus, despite the many (rhetorical) calls to Italians to compare the fate of recent foreign immigrants with that either of their own experiences of 50 years ago, or of the experiences of their families in previous generations, the comparison has great difficulty in making much impact. Gianfranco Petrillo has put this very well:

the second and third generation of Milanese, as we have defined them above, have put poverty, privation, sacrifice and illiteracy behind them, along with the need for communication and solidarity so sorely required by their immigrant parents and grandparents. Citizens of the world without a past or future, they are ashamed of those earlier burdens and forget their own historical past as migrants. Not only do they not recognise the new foreigner as akin to the earlier ones, who might have been their father or grandfather: they actively *do not want* to remember, they *do not want* to recognise them as such. And when they do remember, they prefer the myth of the self-made man: they do not want to admit that the person whose hard graft ensured their well-being and education, needed not only his own abilities, but also support, help, solidarity and collective organization.<sup>3</sup>

### ***3. Exodus. The 1950s and 1960s***

One becomes very quickly Milanese, without forgetting one's own customs, one's own affections. (Piero Bassetti, Comune di Milano 1963).

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From 1951 to 1961 300,000 people moved to Milan in search of work. Industrial employees in Italy rose by 1,379,000 over the same period and more than 20 per cent of these jobs (279,000 posts) were in the province of Milan alone. Most are still there, or have moved to the vast urban hinterland which dominates the contemporary city. During the heady years of the boom (1958-63) internal migration to the ‘capital of the miracle’ reached huge proportions: 32,619 came in 1955, 36,970 in 1956, 41,416 in 1957, 55,860 in 1958, 59,856 in 1959, 66,930 in 1960, 87,000 in 1961. In 1962, 105,448 immigrants arrived. The city took in nearly 400,000 residents in 15 years. Certain peripheral areas saw their population increase fivefold. At San Donato Milanese just south of Milan the population exploded from 2,667 in 1951 to 15,422 in 1966.

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A considerable mythology has built up in Italy about those years, and the migration of potential workers to Milan. This mythology is based a number of clichés. First, that the migration was overwhelmingly from the ‘deep’ South of Italy to the North. In fact, most immigrants were from Lombardy, whereas those from the South and islands only made up 24 per cent of the total immigrants to Milan in 1958. Moreover, not all migration was rural-urban. Urban to urban movement was common, as was ‘rural’ to ‘rural’ migration.

The second ‘myth’ is that the vast majority of these migrants were forced to live in self-constructed shanty-towns, the *Coree* on the extreme urban periphery and in the rural hinterland. Whilst many did build *Coree* - the most recent estimate is that 70,000 were living in this type of accommodation in the early 1960s - the extent of this kind of housing around Milan in the mid to late 1950s was lower than that of the immediate post-war ‘reconstruction’ period, and of no comparison with the institutionalized *borgate* around Rome. In fact, the over-concentration on the *Coree* is symptomatic of a wider problem in contemporary discussions of the boom - an excess of concern with two or three contemporary accounts of migration in Milan, published in the early 1960s, most notably Montaldi and Alasia’s famous ‘inquest’ *Milano, Corea* (1960). This is not to under-estimate the extent of the *Coree*, or their impact of the popular consciousness of the migrants and the Milanese (*Coree* were identified by the police and many Milanese as centres of criminal activity, and they were often the first areas ‘searched’ after important robberies or violent crimes, they were also identified with the region of their inhabitants). Nonetheless, at least eight out of ten migrants did not live in the *Coree*, and the *Coree* themselves became integrated into the urban fabric of the city fairly quickly. In addition, the *Coree* were not flimsy constructions (like those depicted in De Sica’s classic 1951 film *Miracolo a Milano* but *real houses*, built by the migrants themselves. In fact, most are still standing and are lived in today, within the boundaries of the city and its hinterland. To construct *Coree* houses immigrants needed some sort of capital, putting them amongst a kind of élite within their community, not amongst the poorest of all. The real problem in the *Coree* areas was the (near-total) lack of public services, not the houses themselves.<sup>4</sup>



Finally, there has been a tendency to concentrate the effects of migration into the five 'peak' years of the 'miracle' (1958-63). Mass migration to Milan had been a fact of life from the early 1950s onwards, and the city's demographic decline, accompanied by rapid de-industrialization even in the older peripheral zones, did not begin until the 1980s. In addition, Milan had been a centre for migration in the past, particularly in the 1890s and in the period of the First World War, but also right through the 1930s.

In some ways these 'myths' have served a purpose - to reinforce the depiction of the early southern immigrants both as 'backward' and as 'helpless' on arrival in the big city - as passive victims/recipients of poor conditions and economic and social repression. In fact, there was another side to these migrants and their lives in Milan. Many came to Milan already armed with contacts - family, regional or otherwise. Many already had a house or a job to go to, or both. Many were not politically naive, but had participated in the last great rural struggles (and defeats) in the South (1944, 1950-1), Centre and North of the country.

There is also a fourth, unwritten, cliché that pervades the whole area of boom studies. This is the assumption that, somehow, the whole problem of what was called the 'integration' of these immigrants had been solved almost immediately, or even *before* the migrants had arrived. What Francesco Alberoni called a 'frenzy of assimilation' had apparently overcome all divisions within the space of a few years. 'Nearly all [the immigrants in Milan], in a word, were already Milanese and wanted to be so'.<sup>5</sup> In the early 1960s, a series of massive, well-financed and important research projects were carried out in Milan, Turin and Genoa concerning internal migration and the integration of, in particular, southern migrants. Milan's *Istituto Lombardo di Scienze Economiche e Sociali* (ILSES) foundation undertook detailed surveys of the living conditions of the new immigrants, their work situations and their attitudes to the new city. The results were collected in five huge volumes (ILSES 1964, a-e). Since then, they have hardly been referred to again. The *Comune* also commissioned an exhaustive survey of its peripheral zones (where most of the immigrants ended up) right down to counting the number of phone boxes and grocers' stores in each area. Again, these reports were safely filed away.

Since 1964, and Luciano Cavalli's invaluable work, *La città divisa*, very little original research has been carried out on the internal migration of the 1950s and 1960s. Why? Had the immigrants really 'pre-integrated', adhering to the 'dominant cultural values' of the industrial society in the North *before* their arrival, as Alberoni and Baglioni had claimed in their studies of 1960 and 1962? Or had they simply 'integrated' quickly into the urban-industrial societies of the North? Or did other issues obscure those of the 'integration' of the migrant workers - above all the rise of student protest and class struggle? Certainly, researchers are now lucky to have a large body of untouched material to work from. But others are still forced to rely upon contemporary accounts, written twenty or thirty years ago, for some of the most important chapters of post-war Italian history. The rich, complicated story of Italian immigrants during and after the boom was simply left untold.

*Four Neighbourhoods: Baggio, Barona, Bovisa and Comasina*

These issues will be examined with regard to four different neighbourhoods in Milan: Baggio, Barona, Bovisa and Comasina. All are areas on the periphery of Milan. Bovisa is what was once described as an 'old' peripheral neighbourhood. A village until the 1880s, Bovisa's growth was the child of Italy's first industrial revolution. Hemmed in by the main railway network running out of Milan to the North, Bovisa was a natural home for heavy industry. Once the quintessential workers' quarter and 'red' zone, Bovisa was associated with manufacturing industry and with a certain kind of *operosità Milanese* 'Milanese work ethic'. During the boom, Bovisa's industries experienced rapid growth - especially the chemical and electro-mechanical sectors - and thousands either commuted to the zone or moved there permanently. Bovisa has always had a close relationship between the jobs within the neighbourhood and the zone's population. Despite periods of hectic change and growth (the zone's population reached 44,391 in December 1967), the zone has retained its 'community', its 'isolation' from the city centre, its 'village' feel.

Many of these features could also be found in the neighbourhoods of Baggio and Barona. At Baggio, another 'classic' working-class neighbourhood (54 per cent of the active population were classified as 'workers' and 10 per cent as 'builders') on the Milanese periphery, the patterns of sociability were those expected of a traditional 'community'. More than half of all residents (and nearly 70 per cent of men) were members of an association - cooperatives, political parties, *Azione Cattolica*, sports clubs and other organizations. Consumerism had not yet 'taken off' at Baggio in the early 1960s (only 16 per cent possessed a car). Similar social patterns characterized Barona.

Comasina presents us with a clear contrast to these neighbourhoods. Begun in 1953, Comasina became the biggest public housing project in Italy on final completion in 1958-60, with its eighty-three buildings and 11,000 rooms. A modernist, 'futuristic' estate on the city's borders, Comasina was the first 'self-sufficient' neighbourhood built in Italy. The estate's layout was based around underground walkways, long concrete balconies and a space-age church. Most of the first inhabitants of Comasina were immigrants from the early 1950s and this was one of the first quarters to be studied by ILSES under the auspices of their massive 'Social Integration in Milan' research project of the early 1960s. As a new neighbourhood, Comasina's community was to be created, or so the town planners believed, through the construction of churches, social centres, shops and bars.

By January 1962 there were over 10,000 people on the estate, grouped in 2,200 families. A third of the heads of families were from the South of Italy, but nearly 80 per cent had been in the city for more than ten years. These were not recent immigrants, but those who had arrived before the start of the boom, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Within the estate there were clear social divisions. Different blocks were used to house various 'types' of residents, including large groups of the *sfrattati* (evicted), *senza-tetto* (homeless) and *ex-baraccati* (ex-shack dwellers). Tensions soon emerged between families from the more 'respectable' parts of the project and those lower down the social scale. Often seemingly petty issues -

noise, child care, rubbish - were the catalysts for (or masks of) broader social and/or 'ethnic' divisions. Some immigrants constructed complicated caste-type structures to distinguish themselves from those at the poorest end of the scale. For these reasons, and others, a 'community' spirit was never really a possibility at Comasina, with serious consequences for some of those who came to live there from the late 1960s.

### *Housing*

It would be difficult to claim that Milan, as a city, welcomed the migrants of the 1950s and 1960s. Most were forced to seek housing either on the extreme urban periphery or in the newly urbanized belt of towns around the *Comune*. However, this was not a problem that affected immigrants alone. Milan had, historically, 'expelled' its workers *en masse* to its endless urban fringe. Luchino Visconti claimed that he shot *Rocco and his Brothers* (1960) in black and white because that was how Milan would have looked to a family from the South. Many of these peripheral residents rose at 4.30 in the morning to travel to work, not reaching home until 8.00 or 9.00 in the evening. This crucial separation between work and home, between the 'point of production' and the 'point of reproduction', analysed in the American context in Katznelson's *City Trenches*, was a harsh and daily reality for these citizens.<sup>6</sup> Others found poor-quality housing closer to their place of work, in the 'historic' periphery that had developed around Milan's first industrial revolution at the turn of the century.

### *The 'Old Neighbourhoods': Bovisa, Baggio and Barona*

Bovisa is a zone without any public housing. As such it represented an extreme of the housing equation at the opposite end to new estates like Comasina. Immigrants found rooms or beds at Bovisa through advertisements, private contacts, work contacts, private organizations or house-to-house enquiries. Many found rooms in the older tenement blocks to the North of the zone. Certain streets became known as those where 'the immigrants lived', and maintain that 'reputation' even today. In the 1970s, as space began to dry up, many of these blocks were occupied by protesting immigrants looking for rooms, but in the 1950s accommodation was available. Speculation had not yet pushed the market out of control and immigrants could often find cheap, poor quality and short-term accommodation in peripheral neighbourhoods like Bovisa or in the more central zones around the canals (the *Navigli*) and near the key railway stations (*Garibaldi-Isola, Stazione Centrale*). Certain types of 'solidarity networks' helped immigrants find short-term accommodation at Bovisa ('everybody had a spare mattress'). There is no evidence of great tension over housing and migration at Bovisa until the great struggles over rent and the occupations of the early 1970s, when the boom had already run its course. But Bovisa residents, immigrants and Milanese alike, could certainly complain about the lack of services in their zone. According to a 1962 *Comune* publication, the zone needed two chemists, a covered market, two playing fields, 95 school rooms and a civic centre

Conflicting evidence about integration within 'old' Milan emerges from surveys carried out in the 1960s in two other peripheral neighbourhoods in the city, Baggio and Barona. In Baggio the *local* population was relatively stable - 60 per cent were natives of Milan or its province and 17 per cent had been born in Baggio itself. 41 per cent had been resident there for more than ten years. Relationships amongst these people were 'face-to-face', daily and street-based, conforming to the 'Bethnal Green' model of the proletarian community. Modern consumerism was not yet dominant at Baggio and oppositional subcultures, symbolized by traditions such as civil funerals - with just a red flag - survived. By the mid-1950s, this apparently quiet, settled world was being torn apart by one process - mass immigration.

As one 'old' resident of Baggio put it in 1964: 'from 1953 onwards Baggio began to change, the first big groups of immigrants started to arrive, *chaos broke out*' (my emphasis). Immigration, especially from the South, created huge problems in this area with its settled, long-term worker population. Four thousand people settled in the quarter between April 1962 and 1964. Immigrants were assigned public flats in the 'new' part of Baggio, or took over ex-farm house-courtyards in the older areas of the neighbourhood. 'Real islands' were formed between different housing blocks, similar to those at Comasina (where divisions were more socially based). The complaints against the immigrants were familiar ones: they were too loud; they argued ('many were dirty, they shouted continually'); they had criminal tendencies ('there were always police sirens'); they had isolated themselves ('they are tempted to close themselves off in clans') and were hostile to Milanese; they left their children unattended; they were 'backward' ('they have a modest love for their cultural and civic backwardness'). They were, in short, different: 'they have another kind of character, they do not easily adapt to our ways and traditions'. Bars were either frequented by Southerners or 'locals', very rarely by mixed groups. And in Baggio, this hostility and spatial isolation even ended in violence.

Finally, immigrants in Baggio were also accused of political 'crimes'. They were consumerist ('whilst on the one hand they said they had no money . . . on the other they would have needed money to buy their new furniture, their electrical goods and even their cars'). In short, although the charge was not made explicit, the immigrants were also criticized as familists. And these arguments were not without contradictions. On the one hand, the immigrants were seen as 'closed' within an ethnic group, as having reproduced the same social relations from their Southern villages, of *collective* hostility towards Milanese people. On the other hand, the immigrants were seen as family-oriented, as ignorant of any collective interests outside of their own immediate kin relations. As ILSES put it (in a discussion of an 'immigrant' block in Baggio):

each family lives in isolation from the others, without communicating either with the other inhabitants of the neighbourhood, or with their neighbours . . . their children don't play with other children in the neighbourhood and they have *no contact* with the external environment. (my emphasis) (ILSES 1964c)

This was about as extreme a level of negative or downward integration as could be imagined. Immigrants at Baggio had certainly integrated into the value system of modern capitalist society, but at the level of housing, of community, of the city, of class, they had closed themselves off (and the closure was also reciprocal, as the hostility to them described in this section has shown) from the Milanese and from Milan as a whole. They had accepted 'Milan' and the 'Miracle', and all it stood for, but rejected Milan at an everyday level. They had integrated as ethnic groups, or families, but not as citizens or workers.

Research on Barona, another Milanese working-class neighbourhood, confirmed the impression from Baggio (ILSES 1964e). Barona was a less settled quarter than Baggio, with only 7 per cent having been born in the neighbourhood and 35 per cent resident at Barona for over ten years. Here, as at Baggio, there were strong spatial divisions between the Milanese and Lombard populations and immigrants in the zone. In fact, Via Biella (and the street numbers were also specified) became known as an 'ethnic island'. The immigrants there, who were 'exclusively southerners', were again seen as criminals, noisy, argumentative, hostile and as uncaring parents. According to ILSES, the inhabitants at Via Biella had reconstituted their previous 'small communities . . . closed in on themselves . . . a real small village within the neighbourhood'. Relations between ethnic groups were, at best, strained. Immigrants had been thrown out of some bars, and kept to 'their' two bars in Via Biella itself. Milanese were insulted in the street. Via Biella was known as *La Casbah* locally (ILSES 1964e).

At Barona as well, then, the working class was divided, spatially and along ethnic lines, although there were cases of inter-ethnic integration in other parts of the zone. Via Biella was not even at the lowest end of the social scale. In Via S. Rita towards the extreme periphery of the city, there had been a spate of suicides and residents were accused of allowing their children to 'disturb people' and vandalize public gardens. It was extremely difficult for local associations to attract immigrants, and the latter were accused of taking an instrumental attitude to membership. In all of these zones there was an extremely dynamic situation of instability and of rapid and unplanned change. 'The zone', argued ILSES, 'is in great ferment, the population changes continually, there are houses where in the arc of two or three months the occupiers have changed two or three times.'

What can we conclude about immigration and integration at Baggio and Barona from this survey, based on research from the 1960s? First, that these communities, once so (apparently) united, had been torn apart by immigration - with a 'double refusal' on the part of both immigrants and Baggio-residents, and the creation of well-defined spatial ghettos and boundaries between the various ethnic and social groups. Second, that many immigrant families had serious problems adapting to the Milanese urban environment - hence the talk of suicides, frequent family arguments and crime reported by ILSES. They found strength in two forms of integration, within well-defined ethnic groups or simply as families, united against a hostile outside world. Third, that the class unity of the 1940s and 1950s had been replaced by internecine struggle - a 'war amongst the poor' within the neighbourhood in which the social and environmental problems of the quarter were marginalized. Finally, the classic, proletarian communities of Baggio and Barona had great problems in dealing with 'Others', with outsiders of any kind, and this was part of both its strength and its

conservatism. Without the shock impact of the boom, and the mass immigration that accompanied that development, Baggio 'Vecchio', with its Milanese bars, its street life, its male-dominated associations, political parties and co-operatives, would have continued to dominate the neighbourhood. The 'dark side' of the proletarian community was laid bare by the rapid and spontaneous economic forces behind the 'miracle', and the creation of ghettos like Via Biella and 'Baggio Nuovo'.

*The 'New Quarter': Comasina.*

The ILSES enquiry team of the early 1960s made a thorough investigation into living conditions and social integration at Comasina. They discovered a contradiction. Although the houses themselves were generally judged favourably by the new residents (there were differences between various housing blocks) - the quarter outside of the four walls of the family home was already in decline. Dark underground walkways were filling up with rubbish and were centres for crime even before the estate was finished. Even the internal courtyards in certain blocks, which were designed as arenas of social interaction, were being used as rubbish dumps in the early 1960s. Residents complained about the lack of consumer choice, the dearth of areas to meet people, the absence of shops. The area was described as a 'dead zone, isolated [and] lifeless'. The estate possessed no phone box. 86 per cent of houses had a phone, so the remaining 14 per cent, at least 1,300 people, had no local access to one. By 1962 there was only one post box to serve over 10,000 people, and no post office. Nine out of ten residents felt unsafe at times in the quarter and called for a heavier police presence. Communications to the centre of Milan and even to the next neighbourhood were infrequent and slow. Only 30 per cent possessed a car. Shopping was difficult on the estate and judged as expensive and of poor quality by many of the residents. The supposed 'self-sufficiency' of Comasina, it was admitted, had already failed almost as the last brick was built on the estate. Distrust of fellow Comasina residents was extremely high. Nearly half the residents claimed that there were 'many ill-mannered people'. 23 per cent found it difficult to make friends.

This isolation of the urban immigrant, the alienation from the urban environment, is confirmed by other studies, notably that undertaken (by the journal *Classe*) on manual workers at Alfa Romeo. This research found that a third of migrant manual workers (many of whom were immigrants) at Alfa spent their free time 'resting . . . at home', a quarter helped out at home, 20 per cent went to the bar and only 6 per cent were visited by friends or family. *12 per cent admitted to having no friends at all.* 90 per cent had to travel for more than an hour to arrive at their place of work. Similar patterns were to be found amongst immigrant building workers. Television was already central to the leisure time of Comasina residents. There was little alternative. Milan's provision of open spaces and parks was the lowest in Europe. Each inhabitant could count on one square metre of green space in 1953, and only 52 square *centimetres* in Bovisa.

Comasina, therefore, became the classic 'ghetto', empty by day except for the old, the very young, the unemployed and non-working women, and full by night, but barren and lacking in informal social structures (the estate was well-served in other ways, having *three* social centres and a church with sports

and cultural facilities). The quarter was at the extreme edge of the city, and those re-housed from the *barrache* were located next to the northern boundaries of the neighbourhood. Their chances of integration with the city itself were limited indeed. Some of what had been gained in terms of 'privacy', of 'liberation' from the oppressive aspects of the courtyard or village square, and through the great improvement in the quality of housing for the vast majority of residents, had been lost in the absence of community and in the relationship with the city. *Most inhabitants in Comasina, however, seemed quite happy to pay this 'price'*. Many (but not all) had traded traditional forms of urban integration (the 'community') for other values - privacy, status, a spacious living room. For many, the internal, private life of the family had taken precedence over other forms of social relationships.

#### *City, Immigration and Culture during the Boom in Milan*

In Goffredo Fofi's classic study of immigration to Turin the 'moment' of class-based integration of southerners is symbolised by this incident:

When, at Mirafiori [the biggest FIAT factory], another southerner, little more than a boy, was applauded by the other members of the picket as he insulted a scab, an old Piedmontese, with the terms 'napuli' and 'marocchino'.

'Radical integration' in the factory had taken place via the exclusion of other groups, and even the self-exclusion of one worker's own identity. But Primo Levi, Turinese, in an interview in 1986, described this moment in another way:

At Turin we have experienced the mass immigration of 600,000 southerners. This process was traumatic at first; they were seen as foreigners. But over the course of one generation, only one, this hostility has ended. There have been mixed marriages, children who have been educated in local schools. Nowadays the southerner at Turin is no longer treated like a stranger.

Integration had clearly taken place, over time, even in 'hostile' Turin, but what kind of integration? In the 1960s, tendencies towards forms of integration were contradictory and flexible. Many migrants found a role as members of a class at work in the factories of Milano. For a long period (1968-1980), this class was a protagonist of struggles on the national stage. Whilst many immigrants found life difficult in the city - and were forced to deal with social isolation and rejection in the urban environment - as a class the new migrants were able to carry forward certain *collective* values. And even the 'isolation' in the city should not be exaggerated. Recent research has revealed that the improvements in living conditions experienced by many migrants outweighed, for them, the negative aspects of the city. Isolation also implied privacy. The decline of neighbourly or community-type relationships was compensated for by the conquest

of social space in the home. The contradictions of the integration processes in Milan are perfectly summarized in the testimony of a young school teacher from Apulia, who arrived in the city in 1962:

I remember that first winter. It was terrible looking out of the window: fog everywhere, you could never see the sky . . . we were forced to spend day after day at home . . . we were six children in three rooms. My father had a job at Alfa Romeo found for him by his brother. My mother was scared to go shopping. But it was our first happy year. There were no longer arguments at home . . . we ate well and we had a home which for us was like that of a Lord.

#### ***4. Foreign Immigration since the 1980s***

The foreign immigrants of the 1980s, 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century found work in a wide variety of sectors, mirroring the new economies of the post-industrial region (and the wealth) which Lombardy has become.<sup>7</sup> Many women immigrants are employed as domestic servants, maids or helpers for the aged and the ill. Other immigrants are employed in the 'dirty' service sector - restaurants, cleaning companies. Another group work in more traditional sectors - the small factories of the Lombard miracle, or the steel furnaces of the Brescia region. Many work illegally, but many others have regular contracts. In recent years, a series of immigrants businesses have sprung up across the region - 'ethnic' restaurants, food shops, artisans outlets, pizzeria. Finally, a small but visible minority of immigrants are recruited into activities linked to organised crime (above all the drugs trade) or forced into prostitution on the streets of the cities and peripheries of the region.

For the new immigrants, the housing question was far more dramatic than it had been in the 1950s and 1960s. *No* new houses were built for these non-Italian immigrants and emergency solutions were adopted in the early years of the phenomenon, especially after a series of shocking newspaper reports concerning the conditions of immigrants living in abandoned trains or ex-factories. With time, and through traditional networks of friends and families (and associations, including and above all church charity institutions) many immigrants found rented accommodation, often on the periphery or in the hinterland of the big cities. Certain cheap-rent areas began to have relatively high numbers of immigrants as residents - for example the Stadera zone in Milan. Many immigrants, forced to live far from their place of work due to the organisation of the housing and rental market, faced long journeys to work on a daily basis as commuters.

At the same time as foreign immigration began to take off, Milan's populations began to change. Since 1969 the resident, 'sleeping' population has been in decline - and ageing. Milan now has a negative birth rate (in 1990, for example, 9.529 babies were born in the city and there were over 15.000 deaths) and three grandparents for every child<sup>8</sup>. By 1997 25% of this population were over 65 and the average age of Milan's residents was 45. 31.4% of these pensioners live alone, as do 42% of all residents<sup>9</sup>. There are far



more resident milanese over 80 than there are under five<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, this resident population has been shifting away from the centre of the city (a long-term process). Meanwhile, the other ‘populations’ have been stable (commuters - with far fewer workers and far more service employees) or on the increase (city-users and especially business-users). This pattern of change creates its own problems and patterns - with, at night, the city resembling a form of urban drive-in theme park with its own, semi-forbidden, attractions.

In addition to these changes, which are cited time and again as evidence of the generalised crisis of Milan, the national mix of the urban population has also been changing dramatically. The 1980s, 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the arrival of consistent numbers of immigrants from outside Europe. This ‘fifth population’, a combination of city-users, commuters and residents (often without legal status) has probably found more of a welcome at Milan than elsewhere in Italy, not least because of the need for cheap, ‘dirty’ labour in Milan’s enormous service sector - domestic help, restaurants, small commerce, building work. This is not to say that there have not been tensions - which the Lega administration (and the centre-right post-1997 administration) played upon and created. Immigrants have also been at the centre of an incipient urban cultural renaissance. The impact of Milan’s second mass immigration in the last fifty years is often forgotten in the interminable debates over the city’s ubiquitous ‘crisis’ (partly because, as with the city users, immigrants are often absent from any official statistics). The immigrant presence despite a static housing market is also evidence of the dynamism of the resident population (the *actual* sleeping population) despite evidence to the contrary from most official sources. Between 1985 and 1990, 10% of the new children in Milan’s schools were of non-EU origin, and this figure rose over the following decade<sup>11</sup>.

##### ***5. Milan and its Foreign Immigrants: Stories from the City.***

One of the tasks before the historian is to discover which racial categories are useful to whom at a given moment and why.<sup>12</sup>

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In the sections that follow I will consider two stories concerning immigration from the Milan of the 1980s and 1990s. The comparison with the migration of the boom (based around the concept of integration) will focus on the areas of crime, housing, ‘foreignness’ and urban conflict.

§

*The Emergency: Via Corelli.*

The first mass immigrations from outside Italy in the late 1980s caught both the state and local authorities completely unprepared. Milan itself was in the throes of a deep housing crisis, due to excessive rent controls, speculation, the financial problems of the local administration and housing authorities and the transformation of many residential areas into offices or transport links. Many of the first foreign immigrants, especially those living illegally, found shelter in the thousands of disused factories on the Milanese periphery. Even more desperately, many slept in train carriages stored in rail hangars (dubbed 'hotels of fear' by the Italian press). Others formed caravan camps or mini shanty towns in areas of wasteland such as train terminals or abandoned building sites. Numerous evictions (or 'clearings', known as *sgomberi*) took place around the city in the 1990s, and were followed by summary expulsions or the issuing of expulsion orders. These immigrants occupied the slow lane of a two-speed urban environment characterized by industrial decline, the fragmentation of the proletariat, and an erosion of communal identity, in a deindustrialized West with creaking welfare states. They have joined a new, shifting underclass which is vulnerable to unscrupulous employers and petty criminals.

Following the first Italian immigration law in 1990 (the so-called 'Martelli law' - law 39) Milan's Council, unlike many other administrations, made an attempt to provide temporary housing for homeless immigrants. Council housing has also been allocated to resident immigrants, mostly Eritrean refugees, since 1982. Ten reception centres, known as *Centri di prima accoglienza* (Cpas) were built or opened, including the large immigrant camp constructed in Via Corelli, opened in the summer of 1990. This 10,000 square metre concrete space consisted of 100 pre-fabricated containers (built to house four people each) surrounded with barbed wire, located on the extreme periphery of the city under a main underpass. Local protests tried to stop the construction of the camp (and similar protests accompanied the opening of nearly all the Cpas). Conditions were hardly luxurious. There was little shade and the containers were unbearably hot in summer and freezing cold in the winter. Elaborate rules (which quickly broke down) were drawn up under which the male occupants were forced to evacuate their 'homes' during the daytime - even at weekends - and smoking, women, friends and card-games were banned. Via Corelli quickly became the symbol of the failure to deal with the immigrant housing problem. By 1991, the centre was seriously overcrowded, the prefabs were not being maintained and there were constant reports of violent incidents. An estimated 700-800 immigrants were sleeping in an area built for 200-300. The law also required that such housing should only be provided for a maximum of six months, so the need to periodically evict all Via Corelli's inhabitants created a situation of fear and police intimidation (in reality the occupants stayed for an average of three years). The site (and the Cpas in general) became a costly embarrassment. In April 1993 the site was described as a 'powder-keg' and 'unmanageable'. The original decision to contract out the management of the centres to co-operatives had proved disastrous in the Corelli case, as they were unable to keep any kind of control over the inhabitants. Both the regionalist Northern Leagues and the neo-fascist MSI called for their immediate closure. The 1993 election campaign saw these promises dominate the campaign of the winning candidate - Formentini of the Lega.

In May 1994 Formentini maintained his election promise and 'closed' Via Corelli. This was against the wishes of the Assessor for Social Services who, faced with the reality of 800 immigrants to re-house, appealed for time to find an alternative and 'humanitarian' solution. The administration also entered into conflict with the more realistic priorities of the State authorities. In reality, Via Corelli continued to be occupied by over 200 immigrants, despite its official closure. Christmas 1994 saw the electricity company turn off the gas and lighting to the centre, and eleven immigrants were taken to hospital suffering from hypothermia. In October 1995 the last 107 immigrants were evicted and the remaining prefabs crushed by cranes. For three years, the area remained empty, but in 1998 the spectre of Via Corelli was raised again. This time the zone was chosen to 'house' a detention centre for those awaiting expulsion under the new immigration law (L. 40/1998) passed by the centre-left government. These centres were to be known as 'Centres for temporary permanence and assistance (sic.)'. After a series of debates and protests, 'Via Corelli' re-opened in January 1999.

The new detention centre was made up of a series of nineteen containers, similar to those that had been there before, but this time the whole area was surrounded by a huge metal fence and barbed wire. The police were in charge of running the centre, along with Red Cross workers. Very quickly, Via Corelli returned to the front pages of the newspapers. Human rights groups complained that those detained had committed no crime, and yet were in a worse situation than 'normal' prisoners. In fact, detainees could make phone calls, but many were not told of their rights to legal protection and appeal. It was very difficult for observers and the press to gain access to the centre. Throughout 1999 Via Corelli was host to a series of riots, attempted suicides, rapes, escapes, demonstrations and protests. The chief of police, it was said, would ring up Via Corelli to see if there was 'space'. If there was, he would order a 'round up' of immigrants who were then taken to the centre. Men and women were not separated, leading to a number of attacks on young and vulnerable prostitutes. In March 2000, after a series of nation wide demonstrations against detention centres (and a number of deaths, including three in Trapani and one in Rome) the new interior Minister, Bianco, decided to close Via Corelli. Over fifteen months, 2,724 immigrants had passed through the gates of the centre. The centre was again emptied and the prefabs were again demolished. Plans, however, were soon made for a new 'more human' centre - Corelli 2 - on the same site. In October 2000, yet another 're-opening' took place in Via Corelli, this time of a more prison-like structure with proper buildings and the same high fencing. Soon, Via Corelli 3 was in the news (again), as doubts were raised by a series of judges over the constitutionality of the 'centre' and the imprisonment of immigrants who had committed no crime therein. The story of the new Via Corelli perfectly symbolized the change in the attitude towards immigrants in the 1990s. *From a social question, the immigrants had become a security issue* (especially after the moral panic in Milan following a number of murders in January 1998). It also symbolized the abject failure of the local and national state in its dealings with the immigrants. This securitization of the immigrant issue mirrored processes in other countries and seemed to indicate the growth of a new, right-wing 'authoritarian' consensus around the issues of crime and race.

To return to the first incarnation of Via Corelli, not only did the Cpas create expensive and ugly ghettos, but they failed completely to deal with the problem of immigrant housing. In the 1990s only 11 per cent of all documented immigrants were housed in these centres, and little or no new cheap housing was built in the city or outside. This approach contrasts strongly with the construction of new, economic neighbourhoods for the immigrants of the boom years, usually on the urban periphery. With the foreign immigrants, therefore, the second, stable home has been almost completely ignored as a problem. There is an assumption that these immigrants are temporary urban dwellers, whereas with those of the 1950s, the supposition was that they were permanent.

Nonetheless, we can also pick out some similarities between the situation at Via Corelli and that involving southern immigrants in the city in the 1960s. First, there is this strong association between crime and immigration - linked to the territorial presence of immigrants from the same region or country and tied up with a widespread fear of these areas. This is as true for Via Corelli as it was for the *Coree* in the 1960s, or the urban ghettos inhabited by southerners such as those in Baggio. Every proposed new centre for immigrants, or drug addicts, or the homeless provokes protests from local residents, in areas where collective action of any other kind is a distant memory. A second comparison is the link made by local residents and the press between immigration and a series of urban anti-social activities - noise, dirt, violence, crime. Via Corelli and the other Cpas, like the *Coree*, also became centres of attraction for police activity, being subject to frequent raids and controls. In the 1960s, after certain crimes, the police would often sweep through the *Coree* picking up a series of 'usual suspects'. Even at a micro-level, certain 'immigrant' streets (or even certain housing blocks) in certain areas became associated with crime and wrongdoing. Often these areas were racialized and given nicknames - such as *Casbah* or *Suk*. Similar terms are often used today.

The whole saga of Via Corelli was important and damaging in the city for a number of reasons. First, it reinforced the stereotype of the immigrant *extra-comunitario* as Moroccan, probably a criminal, male, young, unemployed, violent, desperate, costly. Via Corelli was a highly visible site and 'problem' - both in the press and literally, as thousands of Milanese passed over or next to the camp every day in their cars. The realities of *invisible* immigration in the city were not present in Via Corelli - peaceful, not mainly male (45 per cent of immigrants are women), employed and from a whole range of different nationalities. Second, the (costly) emergency model (never adopted for the immigrants of the 1950s, who were able to benefit from a whole series of local government initiatives - from a welcome centre in the Central Station to a guide to the city published by the Council) was never transformed into a model resembling something like normality, with serious consequences for immigrants, administrators and Italians in the late 1990s. Lastly, Via Corelli, although built to house 'regular', legal, documented immigrants soon became a symbol of the problems linked to illegal, undocumented and so-called clandestine immigration. The whole purpose of the centre - to provide short-term housing for those working regularly in Milan - was overturned in reality and even more so in the public mind by a combination of incompetence, lack of planning, criminal activity and a permanent sense of 'emergency'.

*Violence and urban conflict. Via Meda 1998*

These fears and conflicts, linked as they are to the use and abuse of urban space, exploded briefly in Milan during the summer of 1998. The Stadera area, at the extreme South of the city's boundaries but only ten minutes by tram from the city centre, is characterized by ageing and badly maintained public housing estates. The Porta Venezia area near the Central Station (with its plethora of rented accommodation) performs the function of a first port of call for many immigrants in the city - similar to that of San Salvatoro and Porta Palazzo in Turin, or the historic centre of Genoa, or Stoke Newington in London - but Stadera is the area where many immigrants go to find a more permanent home.<sup>31</sup> Most of these immigrants are unable to procure public housing through legal means (the waiting lists are extremely long) and have decided to occupy empty flats on these estates. By 1997, over 200 flats on the estate were occupied illegally by Italians and non-Italian immigrants. The authorities more or less tolerated this situation, given the lack of alternative housing available and the closure of the Cpas in the 1990s. Every so often, for political reasons, the police would raid specific flats and evict the occupants. In many cases, the flats were reoccupied almost immediately.

In this zone, given the relatively high numbers of non-Italian immigrants and the fact that many had regular jobs, a number of businesses began to open linked to the immigrant presence. One of these was a bar catering for immigrants called Bar Skirrat in Via Spaventa near Via Meda. In the late 1990s, this bar began to become the focus of conflict over social space, urban space and immigration. Local residents (mainly Italians but also foreign immigrants - the dividing lines were not always immigrant/non-immigrant) complained to the council and the police on numerous occasions of excessive noise, violence and drunkenness. The authorities often ignored the protests of these so-called 'locals'. On a hot night in June 1998 this situation reached the point of violence. After two days of street protests, where demonstrators sat on tram lines and distributed leaflets, around 300 people gathered in the street and began to surround the bar (and the fifty immigrants inside). The police arrived. Stones were thrown towards the bar and a number of immigrants were beaten up (some by the police) and seven were injured. There was only one arrest. These incidents went on for a number of hours and were reported in the national press and on television.<sup>32</sup>

The reaction of the authorities to these events was informative. First, the police sent hundreds of officers to the zone where they remained night and day for over three weeks. This highly visible presence secured the attention of the mass media for at least a week. Second, the political authorities took immediate action. The bar was closed - officially because of an administrative error in its licence - but obviously as a result of the protests. This decision heartened those who had demonstrated against the immigrants, who called for the permanent closure of Bar Skirrat. In addition, the public statements of the Mayor, Vice-Mayor and Social Services Assessor more or less backed the actions of the 'locals' and blamed the violence on the immigrants. Deputy-Mayor De Corato spoke of a 'widespread problem. The immigrants meet in some bars and transform them into fortresses under siege'. Colli, responsible for social services, argued that

'this is no longer immigration, it is an invasion', Mayor Albertini claimed that 'the people cannot take any more'. The only representative of the state who criticised the violence with any clarity was the Prefect, Sorge, who had often in the past attacked the administration's purely repressive attitude to immigration. Two clear and contrasting versions of the 'facts' emerged. The first, sustained by the political Right but also by many on the Left, and backed by the mass media, argued that, as in other areas of Italy (above all San Salvario in Turin) the 'citizens' (i.e. Italians) were tired of the antisocial and criminal behaviour (such as drug dealing and prostitution) of foreign immigrants, above all Moroccans. To cite the journalist Cervi, these residents wanted to live 'in a decent environment, not in an illegal *casbah*' without 'the incessant night patrols of the North Africans'. For these commentators, a 'pressure-cooker situation' had exploded spontaneously in Via Meda and the 'locals', who merely wanted a quiet life, had understandably taken the law into their own hands. The second version, that of the Prefect and of some of the immigrants, describes a planned attack on the bar controlled by local criminals (linked in the press to Italian southern immigrants) and far right elements using the cover of 'local' anger over noise and violence. The victims in the first version are (Italian) 'locals', in the second foreign immigrants.

The actions of the local authorities over the next few days were all in favour of the demonstrators. Bar Skirrat remained closed. Evictions (with the presence of the press and local television stations) targeted immigrants despite the widespread *Italian* illegal occupation of houses in the zone. Public pronouncements spoke of a war on *clandestini*. The message was clear. Violence pays. The real problems of Stadera (housing maintenance, social services, transport) managed to filter through to the institutions for the first time in years. Cosmetically, the state attempted to provide at least the appearance of non-discrimination. A series of controls were made on all the bars in the area (but no others were closed), and, two weeks later, Bar Skirrat reopened (despite protests) with vastly reduced opening hours. The situation remained tense, but there was no repetition of the violence of June.

Via Meda is an instructive case of urban conflict over a series of contentious issues. First, the right to silence (and the right to be noisy). Throughout the history of post-war Milan, immigration has been linked to a series of 'anti-social' attributes that threaten the 'tranquil' life of locals - noise, drunkenness, violence, threats to women, dirt. The connection of these features with immigrants is a crucial part of the construction of negative stereotypes. The positive 'twin' of this stereotype is the 'non-racist' Milanese tired of being disturbed and hassled during his or her daily activities). In the Stadera zone, these negative stereotypes are linked above all to young Moroccan men, whilst the vast majority of immigrants in the zone are Egyptians (many of whom live with their families). Noise transcends urban space and creates conflict between the noise makers and those who wish to work, sleep or simply live in silence (or relative silence). It is also worth noting the role of the street and the market in Moroccan and Senegalese culture - the importance of public space, and the lack of private space for these immigrants to use in their free time. The local residents are defending (collectively and in public) their right to silence within their own, bounded private space. Finally, the link between crime and immigration is an extremely controversial one and has

begun to provoke a bitter scholarly debate (and political debate) in Italy. This link was made explicit in Via Meda by the protesters and found agreement amongst the city's administrators.

Similar problems of co-habitation in the city had emerged with the mass internal immigrations of the 1950s and 1960s. Southerners were accused of various 'crimes' that were linked to classic stereotypes - jealousy, excessive noise, violence, lack of respect for the others. On public housing estates such as Comasina in Milan the divisions were often along immigrant/non-immigrant lines, which often coincided with social fissures. Often, bars and public spaces (like playgrounds) became known and frequented by Southerners or Northerners. The Bar Skirratts of today were the Bar Sports of the boom. Yet, the differences with today are important - the housing market allowed immigrants during the boom a house and their own space, this is far more difficult today. The possibility of factory work, and the integration provoked by such activity, no longer exists in Milan (aside from small industry). Most immigrants find work today in the service sector where integration is far more difficult and unionization virtually non-existent. During the boom the vast majority ended up in industry after a period in the building trade. Finally, the legal position of the 1950s immigrants became stabilized with the changes to the laws in 1961. Up to that point, despite being Italians, immigrants were often denied basic social and political rights in the city, and were also known as *clandestini*. They could be 'expelled' from Milan (if not from Italy) in similar ways to today. After 1961, these immigrants were put on the same legal level as non-immigrants, and were able to vote and claim social services in Milan. Foreign immigrants have to go through a far more difficult and dangerous process to gain basic residence permits, and all non-EU immigrants have no political rights. Political parties that organized the immigrants of the miracle years had much to gain - votes, members, militants. The new immigrants have much less to offer, and in any case the biggest parties in Milan are unlikely to attract immigrants.

Via Meda is at the frontier of integration and conflict over the use of the city, the management of space and the focus of social problems. Neighbourhoods like Via Meda can either move towards the ghetto-type model which has evolved, for example, in the USA or around Paris, or towards a more successful if fragile mosaic model found in parts of a city like London. Which of these 'two roads' Milan takes in part depends on the attitudes and responsibility of the city's politicians. The rise of political racism in Milan and Italy in the 1990s provides cause for some pessimism in this area.

#### *Needed but not Welcome - Lessons from the Past and for the Future*

By the end of the 1990s Milan had a 10 per cent foreign immigrant population, the vast majority of whom worked in the low-level service sector (restaurant workers, cleaners, maids, domestic workers) or in factories. Even in the regionalist North-East (especially around Brescia) many of the workers in the steel furnaces were (cheap and often non-unionized) African immigrants. This integration at an economic level is necessary to keep the Milanese economy alive, as the 'Italian' city ages at an alarming rate. Nonetheless, it is clear that these immigrants are, to cite Zolberg, 'needed but not welcome . . . there is a contradiction

between their presence as economic actors and the undesirability of their social presence'.<sup>13</sup> The increasing urban fear and tension linked to deindustrialization, rises in criminality and the spatial segregation of the city have created tensions that Milan appears to be unready and unwilling to confront. Yet the immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s were also 'wanted but not welcome' - in different ways. This phrase is not enough to encapsulate the differences and the similarities between the two mass immigrations experienced by Milan over the last fifty years. We are also dealing with two very different cities. An industrial and financial centre going through a period of extraordinary development as opposed to a service-financial conurbation whose economy is based on mobility and flexibility. It is impossible to deal with the complications of these two immigrations without grappling with the changes that have transformed Milan itself.

The immigrants of the 1950s nearly all arrived in the same way and in the same *place* (the Central Station). Their experiences were focused and in many ways linked with those millions of Italians who had once emigrated abroad. This link is not there today, and the *memory* of the experiences linked to these movements appears to have evaporated. The immigrants arrive in hundreds of different ways and through hundreds of different entry points to the city. Their subjective experiences, despite the rhetoric of some writers and filmmakers, have little in common either with internal Italian immigration or emigration. They are 'needed but not welcome' and often made to feel decisively unwelcome. The economic space, at the dirty end of the economy and in the dirty corners of the city, is there, but the political, social, cultural and urban spaces are all extremely limited. The city is not ready to absorb these new immigrants, and their presence is and will continue to be marked by a series of conflicts that range from the micro and everyday to the global.

#### ***6. Micro-History and Micro-Analysis. Methodologies.***

This paper utilises a series of methods to try and understand the relationship between immigration and Milan over the last fifty years. Above all, this piece uses micro-historical analysis. The particular, the everyday and the ordinary are often used to try and explain the general, the extraordinary and the exceptional. The scale of research is often reduced to housing estates, individual life stories, families, events, scenes from feature films, and places. Milan, as this chapter has tried to show, is a complicated and complex city, as are all cities, with a long and rich past. These micro-histories do not replace the big picture or a wider analysis, but are part of the whole story. This is not an automatic process - a series of micro-histories do not necessarily make a macro-history. Smaller stories need to be interpreted, drawn together and compared. Finally, this work draws its evidence from a whole series of sources, ranging from the traditional (archives, newspapers, published work) to other, less common sources for a work of history (film, interviews, photographs, participant observation and direct experience, housing plans, surveys). Some of this work is descriptive, but no less historical for that. The historian often benefits from playing the role of reporter, or even detective. Clues, small signs and traces can be as important as broad trends and



planned monuments. Non-events can mean as much as real ones. The lack of protest can tell us as much as ten years of street demonstrations.

Narration and description have always played a key role in historical explanation and these techniques have recently begun to take on more credibility in conjunction with other methodologies and alternative sources. Yet, 'no description is neutral' and 'the reporting of concrete facts is a way of understanding the real functioning of society . . . which otherwise would end up as simplified or distorted by quantitative calculations or excessive generalisation'.<sup>14</sup> This micro-approach has been inspired by the work of many historians and researchers, in Italy and elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the architect Ugo La Pietra carried out a number of research trips into the Milanese urban periphery. 'The city', he wrote, 'was my territory'. In his visits to and walks around allotments, public housing projects and wasteland, he took photographs, drew maps and interviewed inhabitants or users of space. He called these trips 'urban safaris' on which he came across 'routes, obstacles, signs, ruins, traces, beauty, dangers and adventures'.<sup>16</sup> During his safaris, he discovered numerous 'models of micro-behaviour' which revealed levels of individual and collective participation in the growth of the city. Space was often liberated, modified or reclaimed through these tiny interventions in the city, which went totally unnoticed by most academic research.<sup>17</sup> 'Every urban space', wrote La Pietra in 1971, 'has its own history . . . stories of people, of facts, of good and bad events, of accidents – all things which pavements and street signs cannot tell us about'.<sup>18</sup>

### ***7. Micro-studies. One House***

Two blocks of flats, connected by a central staircase surrounded by four sets of balconies. A small factory stands in the courtyard alongside a pizzeria, another block, constructed in the 1950s, a cellar and a garage. This is Piazzale Lugano, 22. Constructed in the 1890s in open countryside, the house once looked out upon one of the villas of the Visconti family. A canal ran in front of the houses. Soon, the Bovisa zone became one of the nerve centres of Italy's first industrial revolution. Chemical and metalwork factories sprung up. Workers began to flood into the zone from the surrounding countryside. New housing was constructed around the area of the railways. Visconti's villa was knocked down to create a bridge over the railway tracks. In the 1950s, the first southern immigrants began to arrive in Piazzale Lugano. Many were employed in the huge post office constructed in the opposite side of the Piazzale. Other dialects began to mingle with the Milanese and Italian. The ring road began to be permanently clogged with traffic. The piazzale was no longer a piazza, but a series of roads curving around the city. The canals were cemented over, the fields disappeared, only some tiny rural features remained. Bovisa became an area of high pollution with the lowest level of green space per person in the city. The osteria (bar) in the courtyard became a pizzeria.

With the boom over, factories began to move out of the city. As the 1980s approached, the debates over the zone centred on the re-use of industrial areas and some factories were demolished. A new station

was built and important parts of the university, including the Architecture Faculty, were moved to the zone, housed in an ex-metalwork factory. Seven banks opened in the high street whilst small shops closed and three supermarkets were set up in the area. Piazzale Lugano, 22 also began to change. Foreigners arrived. An Argentinian woman, an English man, a Kurdish family, an Egyptian family, people from Ecuador, Cuba, Israel. The average age in the blocks plummeted as the older generation left, or died. Five children were born to mothers in the flats in the 1997-9 period. Other languages challenged Italian within the courtyard and on the balconies. Scooters filled the parking spaces. The jobs were also different - film researchers; editors, illustrators, journalists, teachers, university researchers, students and pensioners but also motorbike dispatch riders, tram drivers, door-keepers and builders. The rapid changes to 'my place' - Piazzale Lugano, 22 - over the last ten years reflect those in the city. The mosaic is that of Milan, but it is also unique. Every block, every house is different, and has its own history and future to be written, but the history of every house and every block can also tell us something significant about the whole city, its inhabitants and its future.

*Micro-Studies. a. The Casa di Ringhiera and the two-track city*

The classic *casa di ringhiera* – working-class apartment blocks constructed in Milan during the industrial revolution at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries - contained apartments with two rooms. One room was the 'day-room' – for cooking, eating, talking, reading, washing. The other room was the 'night-room', for sleeping and making love. In many of the original houses, there was no running water, and many of these activities took place almost in public, in the courtyard. Washing was only possible with water collected in the cortile. Toilets were located on the balconies, and not in the houses. The apartments were heated with coal which was kept in the attics near the roof, brought round by coal-merchants and usually carried up by boys with sacks on their backs. Space was at a premium. Families of 5, 6, 7 people slept together in one room, leading to high levels of promiscuity and sometimes darker events which were hushed up in the highly visible world of the ringhiera. Arguments were frequent and public. In some of the bigger *casa di ringhiera*, the space of the *ringhiera* itself was used for eating – as was the courtyard.

Over time, technological change, changes to the ownership of houses and increasing incomes led to changes to the houses themselves. First, families chose to have water. This allowed them to wash themselves and their clothes in their own houses, and cut down on the visits to the courtyard water supply. Then, residents chose to install hot water heaters, baths and showers. However, this choice sometimes cut down on the tiny living space available. Innovative architectural solutions were adopted – holes in walls, steps, beds on stilts. Often, however, there was no room for a toilet, and the *ringhiera bagno* often remained open until the 1990s.

In the 1960s, technology arrived. Families purchased washing machines, gas cookers, driers and (later) dish-washers. Telephones were installed. The roofs of the houses and the walls were covered in wires, electric connections and TV aerials. Bathrooms became white and gleaming. The noise of washing

machines and TVs mixed in with the traditional *ringhiera* sounds of children playing, talking and running water. During the economic miracle, in Milan, case di ringhiera went down two separate roads. Some were left to their own devices, and mainly occupied by immigrants. These houses deteriorated in quality and were often unsafe, until the immigrants left for newer houses on the periphery of the city or in the province of Milan in the 1980s. This was true above all of the navigli zone of Milan, or of areas like the Isola, Bovisa and Giambellino.

Other houses were part of an early gentrification process. The first gentrifiers were artists, bohemians and students. Later, young professionals moved in on the back of the increases in living standards which prefigured the rise of *Milano da bere*. With the decline of the Milanese working class, the *ringhiere* began to be colonised by richer, childless families. Space was at a premium and numerous strategies were devised to increase it - beds on stilts, the combination of one, two or even three flats, the creation of closed rooms using balcony space. Public space became privatised against strangers, intruders and potential criminals. Doors appeared on balconies and net curtains in windows. Privacy and security took over. Consumer durables, individual heating systems and private bathrooms replaced the collective services of the past.

New housing dealt with the *ringhiere* tradition in different ways. Often, on the new peripheries, flats were equipped with individual balconies whose view of other flats and balconies was restricted. Other architects tried to recreate the *ringhiere* in concrete, usually with disastrous effects as long walkways became crime black-spots or rubbish dumps. The premium on space in the city remained. Flats and house prices are calculated by the square metre, and builders devise ever more ingenious ways of re-gaining or creating space within the home for the ever-smaller families of Milan.

These renovated houses can now be seen all over the city – and many architects have become specialised in their work on ringhiera re-qualification. The old, crumbling, small two-room apartments are now very rare. Milan's extraordinary potential to re-invent the past, to destroy and re-build itself in the same place, is perhaps at its most ingenious here. Thousands of small changes have, over time, completely transformed one housing, social and cultural model into another. So much so, that the very term *casa di ringhiera* now makes little sense.

#### *Micro-analysis. b. Architecture and Urban Change*

Architecture mattered in our apartment block. The long-balcony system was not only a cheap way to build housing, it was also inspired by rural-courtyard farms. The shape of the house was similar to that found in many areas of the Po Valley, with important differences in terms of the height of the house and the ways in which collective activities were organised. Urban *ringhiera* (the name given to this type of housing) houses were not constructed so that residents should work in the courtyard for the same employer and within the same economic unit, so the economic unity of the rural farm was not the same as it was in the city. The courtyard in itself was not a productive place in the city, although it was often a place of production. Many

entrepreneurial families, for example, used urban courtyards to set up little metal-beaters shops or tiny factories – *fabbrichette* – which usually produced goods linked to the industrial production in the neighbourhood – in Piazzale Lugano’s case a garage was followed by a nuts and bolts factory, which survives and produces to this day.

The courtyard was also – for a long time – the location of a series of collective services – water for washing clothes and people, small plots for growing vegetables, parking for bicycles and later cars and scooters, small workshops for a myriad of activities. In addition, many better-off families – who certainly weren’t rich but had some money to invest – set up trattorie, restaurants and osterie within ringhiera houses which used part of the courtyard as a location for drinking, eating, card-playing and the game of *bocce* – similar to bowls but played on a dusty pitch. Super8 film of Piazzale Lugano, 22 from the early 1960s shows a number of men playing bocce in the courtyard linked to the house’s own restaurant owned then – as now – by the former proprietors of the whole housing block, two families who had purchased the house as a two-floor building at the end of the nineteenth century and had added two extra floors (after World War Two) and a whole new house (the ‘pink house’) in 1951. These families lived off the rent for the restaurant and the small apartments, as well as the proceeds of stationers shop which they opened on the ground floor and worked in together. As inhabitants of a largely working-class area, they had escaped from the factory and their children would not be forced into factory work.

The residential set-up of the house was divided into one extended family – the owners – who inhabited many of the flats and assigned them to their children when they got married. The other flats were rented out – at a very low rate – to workers and others who heard about availability either through word of mouth or by chance – simply dropping in to see if something was available. The community was built around a set of long-term residents – mainly but not exclusively linked to the property-owners – and a series of other residents, who sometimes stayed for very brief periods. It was thus a mixture of highly stable populations and highly unstable residential patterns. As such, the apartment block naturally became a kind of refracted mirror of the city, reflecting the social changes in Milan and the waves of immigration to the area.

The first immigrants – including the property-owning family – came from the immediate Lombard countryside, or from nearby streets in Bovisa. A second wave were from areas such as Cremona and Bergamo – slightly further a field. In the early 1950s some families arrived from the Veneto, and two in particular were to stay for over thirty years. In the same decade a number of southern immigrants took up residence, many of whom were employed in the vast new postal depot constructed on the other side of the Piazzale. In the 1980s the first foreign immigrants began to turn up and by the 1990s foreigners outnumbered Italians. This latter trend coincided with a decline in the ‘community’ feel of the house, but was not the *cause* of that decline. The first foreign immigrants had bonded with some of the original or longer-term residents of the house, leading to a situation where some residents ‘always left early as it was so easy to meet up with people and chat and end up having a coffee ... it wasn’t like being in a city’.

With the creation of a condominium (after the owner-family divided up the property) in the mid-1990s, the central role of the two families who had run the house for 100 years entered into steep decline. As the flats were sold off, and rented apartments became more and more of a rarity, the previous communities – linked by friendship or by connections to the family-owners – began to break-up. Moreover, the central role of the unofficial house-administrator – a woman called CM who ran things *inside* the block on behalf of the family-owners – no longer prevailed.<sup>19</sup> Information about residents, passed on through this central figure (central in terms of the possession and transmission of this information, as well in terms of the *physical* position of her flat) was no longer freely available. Many residents were simply unknown to the others. The simple act of ‘saying hello’ became less common, given doubts about the status of various people within the house. The structural features which helped to create and maintain a community – with all the negative features associated with such a micro-society (surveillance, gossip, social control) – collapsed. Some houses were rented out by rack-renting landlords, others sub-let by immigrant owners, others rebuilt by students or others. The end of the old-style community – which had always been idealised, as it was in other houses - in Piazzale Lugano, 22, thus coincided with high levels of foreign immigration, but was not entirely a result of this immigration.

Piazzale Lugano, 22, thus reflected and refracted the development of Milan in a whole series of ways – through immigration, through the sociological and cultural make-up of its residents, through physical changes to the house itself (investment led to more flats being constructed, the rural-type restaurant became an urban pizzeria, a small factory was built in the courtyard, the stables became garages). These micro-changes to the fabric of the house, recounted in the interviews with residents and neighbours in some detail, were also linked to cultural changes in the house – the arrival of revolutionary politics, the rise and fall of fascism, the formation of an artists community, the arrival of foreign immigrants – by 1992 there were people from 13 different nationalities in the house. Ten years on, the majority of the residents were from outside Italy. It is clear that the relationship between the micro and the macro, between memory and place should not be viewed in a hierarchical fashion. The micro is perhaps the only, real, way to understand macro changes to the city – and their complicated links to memories and narratives.

Alongside this ‘natural’ movement of immigration, which passed through and changed the house – physically, culturally, socially – there were those residents whose arrival was due to their links with the property-owning family. Hence, a series of residents were family friends, who then created further chains of residents in turn by recommending the house to their own friends. In this way, a semi-sub-community of artists and cartoonists was created in the late 1970s. After the arrival of CU, a worker and aspirant artist, in the early 1970s, a chain of similar people lived in the house. These residents often included the house itself in their work, and this has led to a kind of artistic memory, or cartoon documentation, of some of the changes to the house.<sup>20</sup> More bohemian lifestyles were led by these artists, something which occasionally clashed with the conservative outlook of the longer-term residents. In the late 1980s, as we have seen, the family decided to divide up the house amongst themselves, sell off the apartments and move out. As the house became privatised in an individual, not extended family basis, many residents no longer knew who

their neighbours were and turnover increased in intensity. The older residents – the memory of the house's past – moved out or died, leaving the physical space of the block to a galaxy of voices, cultures, renters and proprietors. The house no longer had a centre. Its fragmentation – and its multi-culturalism – reflected, once again, that of the individualist and post-industrial city in which it was located.<sup>21</sup>

### **8. Conclusions. Mapping Cultural Diversity in the City: A Research Agenda**

This micro-study can help us understand cultural diversity in the city as a whole, which has been patterned and layered by previous waves of immigration and population movement, all of which have left traces in the urban fabric and within the experiences and memories of residents and immigrants. In today's city, we can only suggest some areas for study (some of which have already been the object of research): religious centres (mosques and related businesses and meeting places; immigrant churches); shops, small businesses and phone centres; immigrant work and workplaces; restaurants; clubs, pubs and bars; informal meeting places (stations – in particular the area around the central station); places of exchange (also linked to transport nodes); street markets – whether new markets set up by immigrants, or through immigrant involvement in old markets; domestic workers and their cultural spheres; immigrant artistic production, literature, film, photography. All of these spaces, places and institutions – whether set up by or merely utilised in new ways by foreign immigrants – constitute arenas of cultural change and diversity. This work – however – needs to be placed firmly in the historical context of the city of immigration which Milan has always been, and without consideration of this context, today's 'cultural diversity' will make little sense.

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Milan today is a dynamic, glittering fashion capital which hides the dark side of the urban dream. The billions of lire that circulate around fashion shows, design weeks, advertising companies and private television are underpinned by immigrants working in the 'dirty' jobs which feed this economy. These immigrants are often 'non-people', ignored by the political system (except for short-term propagandist campaigns), marginalized within the urban fabric, lacking in economic and political rights.<sup>22</sup> In the kitchens, sweatshops, bars and building-sites of Milan, these immigrants provide the labour that maintains Milan's extraordinary post-industrial economy. In the private kitchens and nurseries of the city, thousands of domestic servants and cleaners carry out the menial household tasks that free the Milanese to fulfil their hard-working reputation. Beyond the stunning veneer of the 'block of gold' or the magnificent Piazza del Duomo and Galleria, Milan's peripheries stretch across the Lombard plain, with their bleak housing estates and ageing 'local' populations. Milan is a *shop-window city*, where the gloss and sparkle are only, and necessarily, skin-deep. This was also true of the first economic miracle, which brought hundreds of thousands of Italian immigrants to the city and its hinterland. Then, the veneer of that city was far less glamorous - Pirelli, Breda, Alfa-Romeo - but the raw material was similar, builders and workers from Apulia and Sicily, the Veneto and the Lombard mountains. Milan has always been a city of population

movement and immigration, and the histories of these various movements and at the heart of any understanding of the development of the modern metropolis and its links with the countryside, the nation, Europe and the rest of the world. The region's particular model of industrial development allowed this movement to co-exist with small rural-based industries, industrial districts and seasonal migration, as well as long-term and historic systems of commuting.<sup>23</sup> Most foreign immigrants are both visible and invisible. They are noticeable as different, but synonymous with other immigrants. They are *marocchini*, *albanesi*, *sudamericani*. They are nameless, and faceless – the shop-window city has no place for them.

### *Appendix. Rural Movements and Migrations*

Very little work has been carried out into the impact, importance and legacy of successive waves of rural migration to Milan over hundreds of years. Even in the 1950s and 1960s, on the industrial periphery of the city, rural work was still common (as the section below shows). Moreover, Milan had absorbed hundreds of thousands of ex-peasants from the Lombard countryside as it became an industrial and market centre in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many of these people maintained their links to the countryside – either by working as seasonal peasant-workers (as with many building workers) or through a more solid relationship with the city as worker-peasants who still kept land or family ties in rural areas. This successive and complicated urbanisation – historians in the 1920s spoke of an ‘osmosis’ between city and countryside in the Milanese area, created a city with many levels of cultural diversity and with multi-layered links with different parts of the region and province. This is an area where more work needs to be carried out. The end of rural society is a vastly neglected area within the historiography relating to Milan and to Italy in general.<sup>24</sup>

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The influence of the rural could also still be felt within the city itself, until recently.

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Seventy years ago, close to the wide-open square of what is now called Piazzale Lugano in the Milanese inner-suburb of Bovisa, there were extensive plots where raspberries were grown. Women wearing baskets around their necks would pick the raspberries by hand. The fruit would then be washed, sorted and put into large containers. Every morning two or three carts would transport the fruit to Sesto San Giovanni, an industrial zone to the north-west of the city. There, the raspberries were used by the Campari firm – which had (and still has) its main factory in Sesto - to produce the famous red colour in *Bitter Campari*, drunk all over the world.

Then, in about 1935, the unexpected happened. In the USA an insect – a kind of ladybird – was discovered which produced the same kind of red at a far lesser cost. The raspberries from Bovisa were abandoned. Their production collapsed. Soon, the land was sold off to industrialists or housing-speculators. Now, no trace of that production remains, apart from in the memories of some older residents of the zone. The area where fertile fields produced raspberries is now a mixture of abandoned factories, toxic waste, rubbish, roads, signs, and faceless 1950s housing blocks and a seedy strip joint. It is almost unbelievable, surreal no less, to imagine the production of raspberries there. Yet, this was not two hundred years ago, but a moment in *living memory*, an active part of Milan’s recent past. In fact, the *only way* to explore *this*



history of the recent past – now obliterated from the landscape – is through interviews with those who remember that past.

A rich urban-rural mix of fields and factories, workers and peasants, also marked the lives of the post-war generation, who grew up in a kind of urban village where physical traces of the countryside – as well as real fields – were slowly eaten up by the inexorable growth of Milan.

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During research for an oral history project on memory and place in Milan, one former resident remembered not only the fields and production of fruit in the vicinity of the house, but that she had worked as a peasant girl in her youth. She recalled with pleasure the walk to work – where her task was to fetch and carry the baskets or ripe fruit to the peasant women who picked and washed them. The same interviewee also recalled the rapsallion, bucolic nature of this activity, where the children would ‘steal and eat fruit from the Luraghi family [the employers] on the way home’. Other testimonies related to the renting of land from the Visconti estate, whose magnificent villa stood in front of the apartment block. AF’s family used to rent and work that land, and she recalls similar fruit-picking, washing and the cold water which was used to prepare the fruit. AF’s ‘feet feel hot’ when she remembers running over the grass to pick up a fruit basket, or take a drink to the working women. The F. family farmed the land, and ran a restaurant nearby, until the 1950s, when the land was sold to housing entrepreneurs and businessmen, and the rural production went into swift decline with the destruction of the Visconti villa.

Other memories relate to a large courtyard farm in the neighbourhood, known as the ‘big courtyard’ – *corte grande*. This housing complex was one of the poorest parts of the zone, and one side of the courtyard was demolished in the 1960s to make way for more modern housing. Two sides of the house survive, along with some original residents. Immigrants often found their first house in the *corte grande*’s small apartments, and some still do today. The surprisingly rich architecture of the *corte grande* – a real palimpsest of a rural farm and parts of a villa – now hidden and eaten up by more urban-style architecture, mirrors the fate of many rural courtyard farms as Milan expanded northwards. In fact, as Consonni and Tonon have noted the city grew according to a model whereby ‘processes of inter-dependence and the territorial division of work linked farms, villages, towns and cities in one unique structure’.<sup>25</sup> They cite one commentator from the 1940s who argued that 1940s – ‘industry had taken away [from agriculture] not only the best workers, but also the house themselves’.<sup>26</sup>

A more recent series of interviewees, who grew up in the house in the 1950s and 1960s, do not have memories of active agricultural work in the zone or linked to the house. However, the traces of agricultural work were still there. A horse still lived in the stables to be found on the right of the house and much of the surrounding areas were still taken up by fields. A recurring memory is of sheep being driven through the city, something which could still be seen right up to the early 1970s. Residents who arrived in the 1980s, however, contrasted the entirely urban-industrial nature of the neighbourhood with their

previous dwellings. In one case, an interviewee who had grown up in the south of the city recalled rural activity in that zone – farms, animals, chickens – and argued that Bovisa was ‘the city’ in comparison with that part of Milan.

The survival not just of agricultural activity but also of active rural work in Bovisa has some important implications not just for the history of this zone, but also in a wider sense. After all, this area was one of the symbols of Italy’s industrial revolutions of the 1890s and the 1950s and 1960s. Bovisa was a highly visible industrial zone, where intellectuals came specifically to ‘watch the working class’, where futurists visited to paint smokestacks and gasometers and where millions of commuters on the northern railways into Milan could see the dark satanic mills from their train windows. Yet, even in this ‘small Manchester’<sup>27</sup>, rural work not only remained, but was an important part - visually at least - of everyday economic and cultural life right up to the 1960s. *This urban peasantry disappeared more or less at the same time as the industrial working class, in historical terms.* Italy, even in the ‘city of cities’, never had a ‘full’ industrial revolution. It was always a rural-industrial mix, and this mix had important effects on the culture and politics of the zone, and the city. This osmosis between industry and agriculture, and between city and county, can also tell us a lot about families, lifestyles, communities and resistance, as well as helping to explain the aching narratives of nostalgia with which many view a rural-past which has been obliterated and forgotten (*physically* as well as in terms of memory-narratives). Perhaps the lifestyles and community-feel of Bovisa – where many residents did not work directly in the factories which surrounded them – owed more to the culture of the village – than it did to the culture of the fordist production line or that of a modern proletariat. Perhaps, therefore, we should look well beyond the factory in trying to explain the urban development of a city like Milan? Perhaps we need to re-evaluate and re-assess our ways of seeing with relation to this kind of city, and adopt new language to deal with this ‘rural-city’ which was also Italy’s economic capital?

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<sup>1</sup> I do not have the space here to discuss rural immigration to Milan over a longer time-period. See the Appendix for some pointers.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Milano invasa per la terza volta’, *La Repubblica*, 6.6.1998.

<sup>3</sup> G. Petrillo, ‘The Two Waves: Milan as a City of Immigration’ in *Italian Cityscapes*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>4</sup> For an extended discussion of the historical experience of the coree see my previous FEEM paper and ‘Revisiting the Coree. Self-construction, Memory and Immigration on the Milanese periphery, 1950-2000’ in *Italian cityscapes*, pp. 46-60.

<sup>5</sup> F. Alberoni and G. Baglioni, *L’integrazione dell’immigrato nella società industriale*, Bologna, Il Mulino.1965, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> I. Katznelson, *City Trenches. Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States*, Chicago e London, The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> The best and most detailed work on immigration in Milan in the 1980s and 1990s is to be found in G. Barile et al., *Tra due rive. La nuova immigrazione a Milano*, Irer, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1994 especially

the innovative articles of A. Dal Lago, 'La nuova immigrazione a Milano. Il caso del Marocco', pp.135-240 and A. Marchetti, 'La nuova immigrazione a Milano. Il caso senegalese', pp.241-366. See also the collection edited by S. Allievi, *Milano plurale. L'immigrazione fra passato presente futuro*, Milan, IREF, 1993. The best general synthesis is E. Pugliese, 'L'immigrazione', *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, 3\*, *L'Italia nella crisi mondiale. L'ultimo ventennio*. 1. *Economia e società*, Einaudi, 1996, pp.933-984. For up to date statistics for Milan and Italy see Caritas Diocesana di Roma, *Immigrazione. Dossier Statistico 1997*, Milan, Mondadori, 1997. See also A. Dal Lago, *Non-persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1999, M. Ambrosini, *Utiles invasori. L'inserimento degli immigrati nel mercato del lavoro italiano*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 1999, D. Cologna, L. Breveglieri, E. Granata and C. Novak (eds) *Africa a Milano. Famiglie, ambienti e lavori delle popolazioni africane a Milano*, Milan, Abitare Segesta, 1999 and D. Cologna (et al), *Asia a Milano. Famiglie, ambienti e lavori delle popolazioni asiatiche a Milano*, Abitare-Segesta, Milan, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> The importance of family ties (on a daily basis) and the role of grandparents in child care should not be underestimated, in Lombardy in the late 1980s, 57.8% of Lombard heads of families saw talk their non cohabiting children on a daily basis and 52% met up at least once a week with non-cohabiting brothers, sisters, or cousins, 80% of children in the city of Milan are left with their grandparents when their parents are away, Irer, *Le trasformazioni degli anni ottanta. Conferenza d'Istituto 1991*, Irer, Milan, 1992, p.6. For the repercussions of these relationships in terms of the layout of the territory and architectural form, see Stefano Boeri, 'Per un "Atlante eclettico" del territorio italiano' in Gabriele Basilico, Stefano Boeri, *Sezioni del paesaggio italiano*, Arte e editore, Udine, 1997, pp. 9-24.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Cirillo, 'La città dai capelli grigi', *La Repubblica*, 17.10.1997, 'La città allo specchio', *La Repubblica*, 15.11.1997, 'I nonni di Milano. 360.000 sopra i 60', *La Repubblica*, 26.1.1993, 'La Milano dai capelli bianchi', *La Repubblica*, 9.12.1993.

<sup>10</sup> Nearly 70.000 as opposed to 55.462, Clement Lanzetti, 'I cambiamenti nella struttura della popolazione e nei comportamenti familiari', in Eugenio Zucchetti ed., *Fondazione Ambrosianaum, Milano '94. Rapporto sulla città*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 1995, pp.29-56.

<sup>11</sup> *Milano in Comune*, III, 2, June 1997. For the actual numbers of immigrants at Milan, the official statistics are all but useless, based as they are upon legal residents with either residence permits or identity cards (and often divided into semi-spurious (and racist) 'EU' and 'non-EU' groups), and upon census results which fail to cover large numbers of clandestine and homeless immigrants. Estimates of those actually in the city at any one time in the late 1990s range from 50-150.000 'non-EU' immigrants but we also need to add the large numbers of city-users and commuters to these figures.

<sup>12</sup> M. Frye Jackson, *Whiteness of a Different Colour. European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Ambrosini, *Utiles invasori*, p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> Luca Pes, 'Descrivere il territorio: il punto di vista storico', *I viaggi di Erodoto*, 12, 34, January-April 1998, pp. 50-1.

<sup>15</sup> A. Portelli, *Biografia di una città. Storia e racconto: Terni 1830-1985*, Turin, Einaudi, 1985, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories. Form and Meaning in Oral History*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1991, *The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin, 1997, *L'ordine è già stato eseguito. Roma, le Fosse Ardeatine, la memoria*, Rome, Donzelli, 1999; D. Montaldi, *Bisogna sognare. Scritti 1952-1975*, Gabriella Montaldi-Seelhorst, Milan, 1994; C. Ginzburg, *Miti emblematici*, Turin, Einaudi, 1974, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, London, Routledge, 1980, *Occhiacci di legno. Nove riflessioni sulla distanza*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1998, L. Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory. The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, Cambridge, CUP, 1987, *Storia e soggettività. Le fonti orali, la memoria*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1988, *Autoritratto di gruppo*, Florence, Giunti, 1988, A. Lüdtke, (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995; G. Levi, 'On Microhistory' in Burke, P. (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Bari, Laterza, 1991, pp. 93-113.

<sup>16</sup> *Abitare la città. Ricerche, interventi, progetti nello spazio urbano dal 1962 al 1982*, Alinea editrice, Florence, 1983, p. 110.

<sup>17</sup> Ugo La Pietra, 'Il sistema disequilibrante: ipotesi progettuale per un superamento de "L'utopia" come evasione', *In*, II/1, Jan-feb. 1971, pp. 24-30. See also *Abitare la città*. It should be added that the vast areas of the Milanese outer periphery which were quite literally built and developed by the spontaneous work of

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hundreds of thousands of Italian immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s – urban self-constructed villages which became known as coree – were the most important examples of this use of space.

<sup>18</sup> *Abitare la città*, p. 94. For micro-histories of a street and a housing block in London see Jerry White, *Campbell Bunk: The Worst Street in North London between the Wars*, Pimlico, London, 2003 and *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block, 1887-1920*, Routledge, London, 1980.

<sup>19</sup> CM was described as ‘part moral authority, part historical memory, part doorkeeper’ by LS.

<sup>20</sup> See above all Lorenzo Sartori, *ogni matto ha la sua fissa*, rasputinlibri, Milan, 1998 (and especially the stories *Il problema degli spazi* (1996) and *Il problema dei tempi* (1996) and Lorenzo Mattoti and Lilia Ambrosi, *L'uomo alla finestra*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note how Milanese and Milan-based architects were inspired by, or rejected, the ringhiera tradition. At the Cesate public housing estate, built in the early 1950s just outside Milan for up to 5,000 Italian immigrants, many houses were based on English style architecture, with small gardens. The middle of the ‘village’, however, was dominated by a huge long block of flats which represented a mix of modernism and the ringhiera-style. In Comasina, on the northern edge of Milan, a housing estate built at about the same time rejected the ringhiera model. Flats had small balconies which did not connect to each other. Here, privacy, not inter-house community, was expressed in the style of the housing itself.

Elsewhere, long concrete walkways copied the ringhiera style.

<sup>22</sup> Dal Lago, *Non-persone*.

<sup>23</sup> Consonni 1984, 1993.

<sup>24</sup> See G. Petrillo, *La fabbrica verde. Terra, lavoro e società nel Basso Milanese 1916-1960*, Provincia di Milano, Parco Agricolo Sud Milano, ISEC – Milano, Milan, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> G. Consonni and G. Tonon, ‘“La terra degli ossimori”’. *Caratteri del territorio e del paesaggio della Lombardia contemporanea*, in *Storia della Lombardia*, Einaudi, Turin, 2001, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> F. Mauro, *Impianti industriali*, Hoepli, Milan, 1948, p. 533.

<sup>27</sup> This term was commonly used to describe Bovisa. For an analysis of the impact of the Manchester model in Italy and in Milan in particular see Martin Brown, ‘Progress and Danger: The Manchester Model of Industrialism as Viewed from mid-Nineteenth Century Italy’, conference paper (2001).

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