I PUBBLICI CINEMATOGRAFICI DELL’EMIGRAZIONE ITALIANA NEL MONDO

A CURA DI
MORENA LA BARBA E MATTIA LENTO
In April 1961, the Sydney screening of Federico Fellini’s latest film La dolce vita (1960) broke all box office records, and the associated scandals attracted the attention of Sydney cinemagoers and the migrant and local press. Over two hundred thousand Italians had migrated to Australia by this time, creating a local demand for Italian film in theatres and within social and religious groups. This article examines the central role that film plays within the social and cultural lives of Italian migrant audiences and draws on a series of oral history interviews supplemented with film reviews from Italian and local newspapers and cinema industry journals. Cinema played an important role, not only in cultivating and maintaining cultural and national identity, but in establishing a new sense of Italianità in 1960s Sydney.

KEYWORDS
Italian cinema audiences; Italian cinema; Migration; Post-war Sydney

DOI
10.54103/2532-2486/18698

In April 1961, posters of the voluptuous Swedish actress Anita Ekberg announced the arrival of Federico Fellini’s latest film La dolce vita (1960) in Sydney. Ekberg in her strapless black velvet couture gown, her head tilted back, swaying hips and tousled long blonde hair attracted the attention of cinemagoers and the press. The Italian community newspaper «La Fiamma», was the first to report that «La dolce vita represents shame for Italy and for Rome»¹. Despite, or perhaps because of its scandalous nature, Fellini’s film smashed all records at The Lido Theatre, attracting Italian and Australian audiences. Of the 227,599 Italians living in Australia in 1961, an estimated 6000 resided in the City of Sydney local area². Their arrival coincided with the re-emergence of

¹ Terra, 1960: 3: «La dolce vita costituisce una vergogna per l’Italia, e per Roma».
the Italian film industry, and an increased demand for Italian films. A very diverse migrant cinema audience from all over Italy found its way into art deco suburban theatres, grand picture palaces, clubs, church halls, social groups, universities, old newsreel theatrettes, and remote work camps and religious organisations.

This article examines the role of film in the cultural and social lives of Italian migrant audiences, and draws on a series of oral history interviews. These recollections reveal the importance of cinema in creating, cultivating and maintaining their national and cultural identity. The interviews with Italian migrants focus on recollections from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. Over 80 interviews were conducted with Italians and local cinephiles. Most Italian interviewees live in Sydney and migrated from Italy during the 1950s as young adults. These memories form an important and often overlooked cultural marker through a period of enormous change in post-war Australia. Italian cinema enabled the migrant audience to maintain an important sense of cultural and social contact with their distant homeland.

Recent approaches to film history have shifted away from the heavy textual analysis of the previous decades. This article focuses on three areas which were prominent in my research into the migrant cinema audience. The recollections of neorealist and 1950s film and its perceived reflection on Italian migrants, the important role that cinema played within social and religious groups in post-war Sydney, and the reception of *La dolce vita*. Oral history interviews are supplemented with records of film reception in migrant newspapers, local English press, and a locally published cinema industry journal.

There is a long history of Italian migration to Australia. The major sources of migrants include Sicily, Calabria, Campania, Lombardy, Tuscany, Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia. The Italian population was 38,000 in 1939, by 1971 there were 289,476 Italians living in Australia. Many of these new arrivals began working in agriculture, small business, construction, labouring in new infrastructure projects and in factories and manufacturing.

There were widespread anxieties in Australia in the immediate post-war period and Italians often endured discrimination and hardship. While Australia’s Immigration Restriction Act entrenched xenophobic sentiments from 1901,
this situation was exacerbated during the 1940s in response to wartime hatreds and a mass influx of migrants\textsuperscript{12}. Italian social clubs and religious groups provided a much-needed network of widespread support. As noted by Morena La Barba, «migrant associations engaged with social welfare activities but also served as a cultural movement»\textsuperscript{13}. As well as the established community groups such as Società Dante Alighieri in Australia from 1896 and Circolo Isole Eolie from 1903, many new social clubs and religious groups were formed through the post-war years. Club Marconi, the Italo-Australia Club, Casa d’Italia and others aligned with regional, religious, political, sporting and welfare associations. Cinema played an important role within these organisations, bringing in newly arrived migrants for regular screenings of Italian films, and allowing the audience to share and enjoy popular comedies and melodramas.

I. Open city?

Following the Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell’s new search for immigrants, 33,632 Italians lived in Australia when \textit{Roma città aperta} (1945) screened in Sydney in 1948\textsuperscript{14}. The film gave Sydney audiences their first cinematic glimpse of war-torn Italy\textsuperscript{15}. Australia’s mass immigration programme and the accompanying assimilation programme assumed that «only the Anglo-Australian culture was legitimate and that other cultures would have to disappear»\textsuperscript{16}. Many Italian migrants were greeted with hostility, expressed through cultural, racial, religious and economic tensions\textsuperscript{17}. However, a glowing review of \textit{Roma città aperta} featured on the front page of local anti-fascist newspaper «Il Risveglio» prior to screening\textsuperscript{18}. The paper praised the «epic and glorious fight of the partisans», the «unforgettable performance» and declared that:

\begin{quote}
many, many people should be expected to see this emotional film to understand the falsity of the accusations against the partisans and convince them of the greatness of their contribution to the liberation of Italy.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} See Bosworth, 1986, on responses to Italian migration in Australia during the 1950s.
\textsuperscript{13} La Barba, 2014: 179.
\textsuperscript{14} Jupp, 1988: 608. By 1933, Italians had formed the largest group of immigrants from Europe in Australia and remained so during the post-war period.
\textsuperscript{15} [s.n.], 1948e: 8. \textit{Roma città aperta} was listed as \textit{Open City}.
\textsuperscript{16} Castles et al., 1992: 52. See Tavan, 1997: 80, on the national campaign to suppress «foreign» and «alien» cultures.
\textsuperscript{17} See Battistessa, 1948: 6. For an extended study of xenophobia and hostility towards Italian migrant workers in Switzerland, see Lento, 2017.
\textsuperscript{18} [s.n.], 1948a: 1. «Il Risveglio» was founded by Claudio Alcorso in 1944.
\textsuperscript{19} [s.n.], 1948a: 1: «l’epica e gloriosa lotta dei partigiani», «spettacolo indimenticabile», «molte, molte persone dovrebbero vedere questa emozionante pellicola, per comprendere la falsità delle accuse elevate contro i partigiani e convincersi della grandezza del contributo dato alla liberazione d’Italia».
The Sydney press noted the «brutally frank» realist style where «its news-reel-like simplicity makes every other movie of life under the Nazis look sissified»\textsuperscript{20}. The film was highly praised, with sympathetic attention drawn to «the earthy and humble Romans who were caught up» [...] «in the Gestapo’s hunt for the Resistance leader»\textsuperscript{21}.

{
\textit{Roma città aperta}} opened in November 1948 and ran for over two months at The Variety Theatre in Sydney\textsuperscript{22}. This was a comparatively successful run although David Forgacs has noted that {
\textit{Roma città aperta}} ran for twenty months in New York from February 1946\textsuperscript{23}. Early research by Peter Bondanella, and subsequent studies conducted by Daniela Treveri Gennari, established that the «neorealist classics» by Rossellini and De Sica were not the most popular films in Italy. The comedic, melodramatic and pink non realist films were far more successful\textsuperscript{24}. Neorealist films were very well received by Sydney audiences and film reviewers. How were these films remembered by Italian audiences? There were several interviewees who had no connection at all with early post-war Italian films. Paul had no memory of seeing neorealist films in Italy:

I remember well, my preferred films were with Errol Flynn, Clark Gable, Charlie Chaplin, Bing Crosby. That five year old wonder girl singing?... the lollypop. There were many others. Few Italians were patriotic enough to support Italian films at that time. When I was in Italy, it was like a ritual... going to the picture show on Sundays, especially if American films were on. There was a real craving for anything American in those days.\textsuperscript{25}

Raffaello did not recall having any interest in seeing neorealist film in Italy: «Those movies were really depressing. Italy sent these films overseas, they gave people a bad impression. The good ones were the ones with a lot of luxury»\textsuperscript{26}. Terry also remembered the undesirability of neorealist films at that time, she recalled that:

In Italy, I did not appreciate the Italian realistic films at all. I never saw them... I realised their merit much later, when I was older, in Australia. \textit{Ladri di biciclette}, I can’t even look at these films anymore. We couldn’t understand why they had to do the realistic films. The image of Italy, that was a problem, too. Of course these films were a great success in America and other parts of the world so they continued doing them for a while. As an Italian, I was sad to see Italy only portrayed by poverty.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{20} [s.n.], 1948c: 7; Hart, 1948: 7.
\textsuperscript{21} [s.n.], 1948d: 2.
\textsuperscript{22} [s.n.], 1948b: 16; [s.n.], 1948g: 7.
\textsuperscript{23} Forgacs, 2000: 9.
\textsuperscript{24} Bondanella, 1983; Treveri Gennari, 2009: 94; Brunetta, 2003; Fanchi and Mosconi, 2002.
\textsuperscript{25} Interview with Paul, 8 September, 2013.
\textsuperscript{26} Interview with Raffaello, 8 September, 2013.
\textsuperscript{27} Interview with Terry, 11 September, 2013, telephone conversation 9 August, 2022.
Early neorealist films depicted images of hardship and often confirmed the negative articles frequently found in the Sydney press. As noted by Janet Staiger, post-war foreign film tackled «serious subject matter compared with Hollywood’s entertaining (and regulated) fare».

Interviewees were concerned about the impoverished imagery and the depictions of war-torn Italy in these films. However, film reviewers in the local press were very sympathetic to the plight of the Italians, drawing attention to «the tragedy of a people fighting for freedom against overwhelming oppression».

Maria remembered the unfavourable reception of neorealist film by Italian audiences in Sydney:

We criticised the first Italian films after the war. So much poverty, it was so miserable. We were against these films, all people saw was that everything was miserable. In that time, there were no documentaries on Italians, people thought we came from another world. You can imagine...

Vito endured the war as a young boy and as a result, he was unable to view the early post-war films. Vito regarded them as «pretty traumatic. I couldn’t watch the early Italian movies because it was too painful. Roma città aperta, Paisà... I couldn’t watch without being emotionally destroyed by them».

Interviewees differed greatly in their responses and recollections of Italian wartime films. Yvonne recalled that: «most movies showed the poor side. Roma città aperta, the rape of Loren [La ciociara], these movies were big here, and in Italy».

In contrast, Pino claimed:

The great passion for old films had gone. The neorealist films, the old black and white films, most Italians didn’t like. They preferred comedy, not Roma città aperta and Ladri di biciclette.

Neorealist films offered a connection to Italy for the younger generation, but their attention was more likely drawn to the spectacular American renderings of Roman epics. Adrian had memories of going to see Ladri di biciclette in Sydney with his father: «My Dad took me to see it when I was a kid. Usually we’d go to see the historic ones like The Robe or Ben Hur».

The Italian Legation played a role in the promotion of Italian film at this early stage, anticipating the release of films and reporting back to Rome with details of the film’s reception, press clippings and the duration of screening in Sydney theatres.

---

28 See [s.n.], 1949a: 14; [s.n.], 1947a: 1 regarding the «odiferous cheese and sausage» in the bags of recent arrivals; [s.n.], 1947b: 2.
30 [s.n.], 1948f: 17.
31 Interview with Maria, 1 September, 2013.
32 Interview with Vito, 7 September, 2013.
33 Interview with Yvonne, 15 September, 2013.
34 Interview with Pino, 9 September, 2013.
35 Interview with Adrian, 3 June 2017.
It was not until October 1949 that Luigi Zampa’s *Vivere in pace* (1947) was shown at The Savoy, with Silvio Daneo ([fig. 1](#)). The Minister for Italy and his wife attended the opening night. The Minister subsequently sent back local newspaper clippings and reviews, and in a telegram, noted «the very good hospitality with the public press and the critics» on the gala opening night. He also included a quote from a glowing newspaper review which declared the film to be «one of the ten most beautiful films in the last ten years». *Ladri di biciclette* (1948) was the next big hit at The Savoy. The Minister for Italy sent back his press clippings, and a telegram regarding «good reviews from the critics from the local press». «La Fiamma» placed a review of the film on the front page, noting that «the film is a masterpiece», and declaring that it was a film «all Italians shall have a duty to come and see». «Film Weekly» informed readers that this was «a film that can’t fail with foreign language devotees». The following month, «The Sun» noted the popularity of *Riso amaro* (1949, by Giuseppe De Santis) where it was «packing them in overseas», and informed readers that the «shapely star» (Silvana Mangano) was «all the Ingrid Bergmans, Rita Hayworths and Hedy Lamarrs rolled into one».

By 1949, the success of Italy’s film industry was noted in both the Italian and the local press. «La Fiamma» informed their readers that «Cinecittà rivaleggia con Hollywood». Local theatre critic H.G. Kippax, declared «Italy to be the most important artistic film producing country in the post-war world». The following year, the front page of «La Fiamma» was dedicated to a report on the rise of the Italian film industry, praising films such as Vittorio De Sica’s *Sciuscià* (1946), «films which were alive with interest, carried a punch and came from Italy» ([fig. 2](#)).

---

36 *Vivere in pace* was listed as *Live in Peace*. See [s.n.], 1949c: 7.
39 [s.n.], 1950c: 14, *Ladri di biciclette* was listed as *Bicycle Thieves*.
41 [s.n.], 1950b: 1: «la pellicola è un capolavoro», «un film che tutti gli italiani devono farsi un dovere di andare e vedere».
42 [s.n.], 1950d: 14. According to the [s.n.], 1950e: 8, De Sica’s film screened for seven weeks.
43 Hart, 1952: 32. *Riso amaro* was listed as *Bitter Rice*, which screened for five weeks ([s.n.], 1952: 8).
44 [s.n.], 1949b: 1-2.
46 [s.n.], 1950a: 1.
Fig. 1 - “Vivere in pace” advertisement, «Il Risveglio», 28 ottobre, 1949.

Fig. 2 - “Sciuscià” advertisement, «Il Risveglio», 22 marzo, 1950, p. 5.

Fig 3 - Casa d’Italia, «Vade Mecum», 28 ottobre, 1937, p. 81.
II. LOREN, LA LOLLO E TOTÒ

Cinema was a fundamental way to keep in touch with contemporary Italy and connect with other Italians in Sydney. Guido worked in Port Kembla and Tasmania. When he returned to Sydney, «seeing film was one way of finding out what was going on in Italy, you had the opportunity to catch up on what was going on over there. It was like putting together the pieces of a puzzle... papers, books, films, to find out what was going on» 47.

The migrant press promoted and advertised Italian films which were screened at many informal venues, small suburban church halls, Casa d’Italia (fig. 3), A.P.I.A, and Club Marconi48. Film was a way of drawing in recent arrivals and was also an important social and cultural event where Italians could meet, talk freely and find work49. Single men who were living nearby in the city’s boarding houses in the fifties would also frequent The Savoy, where they could watch Italian films for a few shillings50.

Mario arrived in Sydney in 1951 as a twenty year old, and often went in search of Italian films throughout the city. «In 1955, you’d go to mass at St Francis in Albion Street and on Sunday nights they’d show movies» 51. In the late fifties, St Francis would pair a double such as Guido Brignone’s Noi peccatori (1953) starring Yvonne Sanson, with Norman Taurog’s You’re Never Too Young (1955), a comedy with Dean Martin and Jerry Lee Lewis52.

Comedies with boogie-woogie, such as Piero Costa’s La ragazza di Piazza San Pietro (1958) were also popular53. Joe recalled that «there was film at St Fiacre, but it was the life of science. All the films had moral themes... it was for families» 54.

Australia Hall was a popular city venue with Italians for Saturday night dances and fund raising balls, and film nights in the late fifties with old Matarazzo favourites such as I figli di nessuno (1951). Research by Margherita Sprio has established that Raffaello Matarazzo’s films were an important part of identity formation for first-generation Italian audiences in England55. They also were very popular with Italian audiences in Sydney. Matarazzo’s melodramas such as Catene (1949) and Tormento (1950) were often a drawcard for

47 Interview with Guido, 23 September, 2015.
49 Italians were often told to stop speaking Italian on the streets in the 1940s and 1950s. Telephone calls were monitored, with switchboard operators who would interject and demand that Italians speak English. Interview with Robert, 28 November, 2009.
50 «At the Savoy in Bligh Street, I went to see Gina Lollobrigida for two shillings», interview with Mario, 2 September, 2009.
51 Interview with Mario, 2 September, 2009. See Treveri Gennari, 2018, on Catholic film exhibition.
52 [s.n.], 1958b: 21.
53 See [s.n.], 1962b: 25.
54 Interview with Joe, 29 September, 2009.
55 Sprio, 2013.
Italian church and social groups, while Società Dante Alighieri screened films such as Luchino Visconti’s Senso (1954) at The Maccabean Hall\(^{56}\). Italian film was also shown in the grand art deco suburban cinemas, at The Strand and Marlboro Theatres in Leichhardt, The Odeon in Petersham and The Elite in Haberfield, where there were established Italian communities\(^{57}\). Here, old favourites with Totò, Loren, Lollobrigida and Matarazzo played to eager audiences (figg. 4-5).

In 1955, the first Italian Film Festival was organised as part of a statewide exhibition of Italian art, design, furniture, industry, fashion and cuisine at David Jones department stores. Supported by the Italian Government, «Italy at David Jones» represented a huge promotion of Italy and its commodities in the city\(^{58}\). The Italian Legation orchestrated an agreement with Unitalia Films of Rome and Hoyts Theatres as «a part of the Italian Government’s campaign to show the growth of the Italian film industry»\(^{59}\). While three years had passed before Sydney audiences could see Roma città aperta, the Italian Film Festival (fig. 6) presented pre-release films to enthusiastic audiences\(^{60}\).

At the Paris and Esquire Theatres in the city, patrons were treated to Ettore Giannini’s Carosello napoletano (1954), Luigi Comencini’s Pane, amore e fantasia (1953), Federico Fellini’s La strada (1954), Clemente Fracassi’s Aida (1953), Alessandro Blasetti’s Tempi nostri (1954) and Folco Quilici’s Sexto continente (1954)\(^{61}\). Sophia Loren starred in three of the six films chosen by the Italian government to promote their burgeoning film industry and their homeland, Carosello napoletano, Tempi nostri and Aida. Loren’s performances were key in the promotion of Italian film and Italy, with Aida being the first Loren film to be released into cinemas that year\(^{62}\). By 1955, Sophia was declared to be «Mount Vesuvius, Etna and Krakatoa all thrown into one»\(^{63}\).

Images of the highly desirable Italian film stars Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren, Vittorio De Sica and Marcello Mastroianni filled the screens, and captured the public imagination. Popular comedians such as Alberto Sordi and Totò also featured. By 1955, local film critic Lindsey Browne informed readers that the recent presence of continental film was making «the standards of American and English film-makers look pretty cheap and nasty»\(^{64}\). Newspapers and magazines heavily promoted Italian films and film stars during this period.

\(^{56}\) Interview with Giancarlo, 14 May, 2014.

\(^{57}\) See for example, Il ferroviere (1956) and Gli ultimi cinque minuti (1955) at The Strand («The Sydney Morning Herald», 24 May 1961: 24). See also The Odeon’s (originally The Odeon) advertisement for Due notti con Cleopatra (1954) with Loren and Sordi ([s.n.], 1965b: 23), and [s.n.], 1965a: 19.

\(^{58}\) For details of fashions by Brioni and Simonetta, industrial designs and the espresso bar designed by architect Enrico Taglietti, and displays of a Riva speedboat, Vespa, Isetta and Fiat 500, see [s.n.], 1955d: 9, and [s.n.], 1955f: 3; [s.n.], 1955e: 6.

\(^{59}\) [s.n.], 1955b: 4.

\(^{60}\) My thanks to John Burke, for letting me know that all six Festival films were pre-release.

\(^{61}\) [s.n.], 1955c: 11.

\(^{62}\) Loren was aged 19 and lip-synced to the singing of famous soprano Renata Tebaldi. See Barron, 2018: 146.

\(^{63}\) Raft, 1955: 5.

\(^{64}\) Browne, 1955: 64.
Fig. 7 - Gina Lollobrigida «Australasian Post», 23 September, 1953, p. 6.

Fig. 8 - Sophia Loren, «Il Corriere d’Australia», 2 gennaio, 1958, p. 2.
Gina Lollobrigida, Anna Magnani, Silvana Mangano, Rossano Brazzi, Vittorio Gassman and Mario Lanza featured in the migrant press, and local newspapers and in magazines (figs. 7-8).

As Italian cinema moved from the harsh images of neorealism to the cinematic glamour of the 1950s, the streets of Sydney were being transformed by the Italian presence. While the city had long been shaped by the Italian immigrants, the arrivals from the post-war immigration programme sowed the seeds of a nascent sense of urban cosmopolitanism. During the 1950s, espresso bars, restaurants, tailors, hairdressers, providores and retailers formed dynamic Italian sites throughout the urban streets as the commodities from Italy’s economic boom began to appear throughout the city.

In 1955, the local newspaper informed readers that «the influx of new Australians was the single biggest factor» influencing the recent success of foreign films. Italian films were seen not only by Italians, but by other immigrants, university students, an eager local audience, and by those who regarded themselves as «sophisticates». There was a marked increase in foreign film imports from 1940-1956, from the importation of eight films in 1940 to eighty-five foreign films in 1956.

The film industry journal informed readers that «by far and away Italians are the largest national group with 80,000 people». By 1961, «Film Weekly» highlighted the commercial success of continental film to its readership, as old newsreel theatrettes were converted to continental cinemas throughout the city.

Italian film was also shown all over Australia in film clubs, Italian social clubs, work camps and within Catholic organisations. Here the Italian audience was largely single men, with a few women, members of social clubs, religious groups and workers in the various infrastructure projects of the fifties. David Donaldson was working in continental film distribution in Sydney from 1954 to 1960, and in 1955 he purchased three subtitled 16 mm prints of Luigi Comencini’s comedy *Pane, amore e fantasia* (1953) starring Gina Lollobrigida and Vittorio De Sica. David distributed these prints in all states throughout Australia.

In 1959 to 1960, his three prints of *Pane, amore e fantasia* were constantly booked out with audiences as far afield as Port Pirie in South Australia, the Italian Club in Darwin and Broken Hill, in Leeton, Lismore and Melbourne. David’s 16 mm print of Luigi Zampa’s *L’onorevole Angelina* (1947) with Anna Magnani, was popular within the Capuchin organisation in Adelaide, in Lismore and the Italian Club in Broken Hill.

---

65 See Gina Lollobrigida on the cover of «Australasian Post» ([s.n.], 1953: 1), 6, and Sophia Loren in «Il Corriere d’Australia» ([s.n.], 1958a: 2). See also the scandalmongering «Truth», where it was stated that Anna Magnani had become «synonymous with an unvarnished, unbridled and ungirded brand of cinema sex» ([s.n.], 1954a: 36).

66 [s.n.], 1954b: 12.

67 [s.n.], 1953; [s.n.], 1947c; [s.n.], 1951; [s.n.], 1956.

68 [s.n.], 1955a: 8.

69 [s.n.], 1955a: 8.

70 See [s.n.], 1961a: 25.

71 My thanks to cinephile David Donaldson for providing his Filmart booking sheets for 1959-1960. David was the inaugural director of the Sydney Film Festival from 1954-1957.
III. «THE TALK OF THE TOWN»

The readers of «La Fiamma» were the first to be informed about the highly «scandalous» nature of *La dolce vita* in an article which described «Italy and the ruin of *La dolce vita*»72. Reflecting the conservative nature of its readership, the paper opined that «*La dolce vita* represents shame for Italy, and for Rome»73. *La dolce vita* hit Sydney’s cinema screens in April 1961, giving the Lido an «all-time record first opening night»74. Sydney newspapers and magazines were full of titillating articles about the associated scandals, with photographs revealing the decadence and glamour of the via Veneto75. Eva Comerio wrote a letter to «La Fiamma» questioning «the meaning of this famous film which had wasted rivers of ink of all the critics in the world»76. After seeing *La dolce vita*, Eva «remained blank, disappointed and more confused than before»77. According to the editor, *La dolce vita* was «one great obscenity, intended only to make a lot of money for Federico Fellini and the producer»78. *La dolce vita* screened at The Lido (*fig. 9*), an old newsreel theatrette, for ten weeks, and featured throughout September and October in suburban cinemas all over Sydney (*fig. 10*)79.

Vito began working at The Piccolo Bar in King’s Cross in the fifties and was an avid film and theatre-goer:

*La dolce vita* and *L’avventura*... I saw them fifty years ago. Now fifty years later, they are a masterpiece, like van Gogh. Not many movies stand the test of time. *La dolce vita*, to this day, you can’t touch it. It is so new, so fresh. Some movies are timeless. Some movies like *Belle du Jour*, after such a furore, are very dated. The Gala, The Roma on George Street, The Lido, The Esquire where I saw *Bitter Rice*. You would queue for three hours. There were some, but not too many Italians... Antonioni, Monica Vitti, *Eclipse* and *Red Desert*. They were fantastic films. So real. For Antonioni... *L’avventura*, it was a full house. They had to turn people away...80

While *La dolce vita* was berated as being damaging and defamatory by the editor of «La Fiamma», other members of the Italian audience regarded «*La dolce vita* and the movies of that time», as «opening up Italy to the world. We were on the nose after the war, films and music put us back on the map»81.

When I asked Paul what he remembered about *La dolce vita* in Sydney, he replied:

72 See Terra, 1960: 3 regarding «Italia a soqquadro per *La dolce vita*».
73 Terra, 1960: 3: «La dolce vita costituisce una vergogna per l’Italia e per Roma».
74 [s.n.], 1961a: 8.
75 See [s.n.], 1962a: 6-7; «SEX RACKETS SHOCK», «The World’s Wickepest Street», a tabloid style read on the scandals and louch behaviour on the via Veneto.
76 Comerio, 1961: 2: «che significato ha questo film famoso che ha fatto sprecare fiumi d’inchiostro a tutti i critici del mondo».
77 Comerio, 1961: 2: «io sono rimasta vuota e più confusa di prima».
78 Comerio, 1961: 2: «una grossa porcheria destinata soltanto a far fare un monte di quattrini a Federico Fellini e al produttore».
80 Interview with Vito, 15 August, 2015.
81 Interview with anonymous female, 2 August, 2015. For example, *Nel blu dipinto di blu*, listed as *Volare*, was number one in Sydney for seven weeks in 1958. See Kent, 2009: 109.
In those days, I only thought about girls! With my friends, our attitude was, we were like tourists... After three years, you thought you’d go back, but then you’d postpone it. Movies? I never went to them. I saw all the films in Italy, I never saw ONE Italian picture in Sydney because they were only repeats to me. The Lido and the Metro Continental at the Cross were not part of our itinerary! I went dancing at The Trocadero with the Italians, I was a bachelor... With my Italian clan friends, I’d go to The Stadium and see Nilla Pizzi, Domenico Modugno, Frank Sinatra, Louis Armstrong... The Beatles. My friends and I were boxing fanatics... Coluzzi, D’Agata, Annaloro, also all the wrestling matches, they were very popular in those days.82

Terry arrived in Australia in 1955. She recalled that:

...after marriage, with small children, there was no time for movies... You know, La dolce vita was the talk of the town, and a lot of people walked out... the drugs. It was based on this terrible thing that happened in Ostia. Fellini treated it in a different way. It was a pretty amazing thing! La dolce vita was when Italy was going well, when many people were coming from America to make films.83

IV. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the importance of Italian cinema in maintaining the migrant audience’s contact with Italy, at a time when papers, magazines, letters and books provided precious connections to their homeland. Cinema played a crucial role in creating and maintaining national and cultural identity. Interviews have shown that visiting theatres, clubs and groups where Italian film was shown provided much needed social and cultural support networks for diverse diasporic cinema audiences. Interviewees were reluctant to revisit neorealist film and the trauma of war-time Italy. They preferred to see Italian comedies and melodramas, often at social clubs, cinemas and church halls. Popular comedies with Loren, Lollobrigida, Totò and Sordi, and Matarazzo’s melodramas with Amedeo Nazzari and Yvonne Sanson, circled around from religious groups to Italian social and regional clubs all over the city and suburbs. David Donaldson’s widespread interstate distribution of much-loved old favourites with Anna Magnani and Gina Lollobrigida from the Forties and Fifties such as L'onorevole Angelina and Pane, amore e fantasia in 1959-60, clearly demonstrated the constant demand for the reassuring images of old Italian films with recently arrived migrants all over Australia.

The modern images of La dolce vita set the tone for Sydney in the 1960s, as Italian cinema, film stars, music, fashion and design became the popular new symbols of Italy in the city. The diasporic audience regarded La dolce vita and the films of the 1960s as contributing to a new vision of their homeland, recasting the poverty and devastation of the war, «opening up Italy to the world», and creating a new sense of italianità on the streets of Sydney84.

82 Interview with Paul, 8 September, 2013 and email, 21 November, 2012.
83 Telephone conversation with Terry, 9 August, 2022.
84 Interview with anonymous female, 2 August, 2015.
Fig. 9 - “La dolce vita advertisement”, «Il Corriere d’Australia», 9 maggio, 1961, p. 10.

Fig. 10 - “La dolce vita advertisement”, «Il Corriere d’Australia», 12 settembre, 1961, p. 7.
**Table of Acronyms**

APIA: Associazione Polisportiva Italo-Australiana  
DGAE: Direzione Generale per gli italiani all’Estero

---

**Bibliographical References**

Barr, Mischa  

Barron, Emma  

Battistessa, Franco  

Bertrand, Ina; Giglio, Michael  

Biltereyst, Daniel; Maltby, Richard; Meers, Philippe (eds.)  

Bondanella, Peter  

Bosworth, Richard  

Browne, Lindsay  

Brunetta, Gian Piero  

Burnley, Ian  

Castles, Stephen; Rando, Gaetano; Alcorso, Claudia; Vasta, Ellie (eds.)  

Collins, Jock  


Comerio, Eva  
1961, [s.t.], «La Fiamma», a. XV, n. 35, 9 maggio.

Cresciani, Gianfranco  

Fanchi, Mariagrazia; Mosconi, Elena (a cura di)  
Forgacs, David

Hart, George

Jupp, James

Kent, David

Kippax, H.G.

Kuhn, Annette

La Barba, Morena

Lento, Mattia

Maltby, Richard

Raft, George

Ricatti, Francesco

Rickard, John

[s.n.]
1943, *Report by the Chief Censor on the Work of the Commonwealth Film Censorship for the Year 1943*.
1947c, *Report by the Chief Censor on the Work of the Commonwealth Film Censorship for the Year 1947*.
1948f, *Through the Smith’s Projector*, «Smith’s Weekly», 6 November.
1949e, Vivere in pace, Amusements, «Sydney Morning Herald», 1 December.
1950a, Italian Films, Different, Provoking, Advanced, «La Fiamma», a. IV, n. 90, English Section, 23 giugno.
1950b, Ladri di biciclette, «La Fiamma», a. IV, n. 102, 16 settembre.
1950c, National Box Office Survey, «Film Weekly», vol. 74, n. 1250, 5 October.
1950d, Bicycle Thieves, «Film Weekly», vol. 74, n. 1250, 5 October.
1950e, National Box Office Survey, «Film Weekly», vol. 74, n. 1254, 2 November.
1951, Report by the Chief Censor on the Work of the Commonwealth Film Censorship for the Year 1951.
1954a, Mercurial Magnani is Sex Appeal, «Truth», 11 July.
1955b, Italian Film Festival, «The Sydney Morning Herald», 17 March.
1955c, Italian Film Festival Poster, «Film Weekly Supplement», vol. 89, n. 1479, 17 March.
1955d, DJs Italian Art Exhibition, «The Sydney Morning Herald», 15 June.
1955e, Festival of Italy, «Daily Telegraph», 16 June.
1956, Report of the Commonwealth Film Censorship Board.
1962a, La dolce vita, «People», 3 January.
1962b, [s.t.], «La Fiamma», vol. XVI, n. 98, 8 dicembre.
1965a, Summer Hill Theatre’s advertisement for Totò, «La Fiamma», a. XIX, n. 97, 7 dicembre.
1965b, Oreon’s advertisement for “Due notti con Cleopatra”, «La Fiamma», a. XIX, n. 98, 11 dicembre.

Sprio, Margherita
2013, Migrant Memories: Cultural History, Cinema and the Italian Post-War Diaspora in Britain, Peter Lang, Bern.

Staiger, Janet

Tavan, Gwenda

Teo, Hsu-Ming; White, Richard (eds.)
2003, Cultural History in Australia, University of New South Wales Press, Randwick (New South Wales).
Terra, Italo

Treveri Gennari, Daniela

Treveri Gennari, Daniela; O’Rawe, Catherine; Hipkins, Danielle; Dibeltulo, Silvia; Culhane, Sarah (eds.)

Tuart, Adrienne

Unitalia Film

Verhoeven, Deb