

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS / NOTE E CURIOSITÀ

### RADIO MAKING WAVES IN THE ITALIAN DIASPORA: PUBLIC SPHERE, MEDIATISED SPHERICULES AND DIASPORIC PUBLICS

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**Abstract**

*The deterritorialised publics of diaspora are conceptually quite different from the homogenous nationally bound public originally conceived to participate in Habermas' public sphere. However, with globalisation and parallel advances in media technologies the qualities of diasporic communication increasingly come to resemble miniature, globalised but culturally specific public spheres. The Italian diaspora's use of radio in Australia provides a valuable case study of the ways in which mediatised public sphericules can promote multi-layered diasporic affiliations. The Italo-Australian diasporic public sphericule highlights media involvement in the formation of subnational, transnational and international cultural communities, while also highlighting the home and host nation participation and policing of these transnational formations.*

### **An Italo diasporic public sphere?**

Italian media in Australia have become a commonplace part of the cultural landscape. Their increased availability represents an increase in international information flows particular to our time and pertinent to diasporic community strengthening. It also represents an increased awareness of cultural differences and diverse heritages as dispersions of a people from a single territory across the globe become a more widespread, even common, phenomenon.

With media providing the conduit for most diasporic communication, connecting people to the homeland, to the diaspora internationally and to subnational minority communities, media itself become a fundamental means of providing commonality of content and ritual vital to communities lacking a shared space, place and time. In being able to access similar information, being able to discuss community history, culture, aspirations and ideals, being able to consume the same content, diasporic communities are able to forge a public not dissimilar to national publics.

To clarify this point, I propose a re-examination of the traditional notion of the public sphere and a redefinition of the concept for the postmodern mediated cultural climate. Originally put forward by Habermas, the public sphere describes a discursive space of rational discourse conducted by active citizens, set against a democratic state. As an abstract ideal, it also denotes a sphere where access, information and critical debate are unrestricted and all points of view are, as on the surface of a sphere, equal from the centre (or equally peripheral) (Habermas, 1989[1962]). 'The public needs, in short, a way to shape and become itself' (Gitlin, 1998: 168). And it is here that the media are recruited by the state to shape the contours of the national public, bringing national culture into being. As Turner (1997: 342) explains: 'There is no "natural" reason why all of us who live on this island continent should share the same government, the same institutions, common values or characteristics'. As Benedict Anderson (1991) has noted, the idea of nationhood has become essentially naturalised, although at least in part defined by the boundaries of the

(national) media audience. In premising the media as perhaps the most crucial site of the contemporary public sphere, the health of such an ideal becomes contingent on the effectiveness of the media in fulfilling its objectives of disclosure, open debate and establishing common public interest. It is in this vein that theorists have begun to point pessimistically to the fatal encroachment of the archetypal public sphere, with media commercialisation and audience fragmentation commonly cited as its primary predators (Poole, 1989: 15,18; Gitlin, 1998: 171-173). Furthermore, new communications technologies, combined with globalising configurations of people and capital, have primed the emergence of niche and minoritarian audiences, wherein some theorists lay claim to the ultimate demise of modernist public commonality (van Dijk, 1999). In Gitlin's essentially cynical view, this fragmentation of media and audiences will lead inevitably to the dissolution of the public. He asks: 'A public sphere or separate public sphericules? Does the proliferation of the latter, the comfort in which they can be cultivated, damage the prospect of the former? Does it not look as though the public sphere, in falling, has shattered into a scatter of globules, like mercury?' (Gitlin, 1998: 173).

However, rather than triggering a decline in public discourse, such media sphericules may instead amplify diverse discursive spaces and contribute to broader public discussions, even as they subvert and infiltrate the public sphere's traditional (national/ majoritarian) boundaries. It is important to realise that, even in its classic sense, the realisation of a Habermasian public sphere has always privileged a particular hegemonic discourse at the expense of minority voices. Thus, I would argue that what has been ruptured is not the collective public sphere in its entirety but rather the notion that any one sphere can subsume a monolithic public. It is this idea of singularity and homogeneity which has been displaced to make room for a plurality of spheres. This may actually facilitate the idealistic notion of democratic inclusiveness and representativeness. The postmodern shift in the conceptualisation of the public sphere is aptly explained by Poole who offers a redefinition of the notion:

The concept of a public sphere no longer designates a potentially universal arena of discourse, where freedom of information and discussion defines the conditions of rational agreement. It has now become, not singular and universal but plural and particular. It is a space within which any group begins to come to an understanding of what it is, what its unifying needs and aspirations are, and of how it might best operate in the world in order to satisfy these needs and fulfil these aspirations. The idea that there is a unitary public sphere defining the conditions of rationality as such is in this view a reflection of the extent to which one group (class, alliance) has successfully appropriated for itself the conditions of communications and expression and has excluded subordinated oppositional voices. (Poole, 1989: 18)

In accepting this more heterogenous approach to the public sphere(s), Cunningham has reappropriated the metaphor of the sphericule – proposed by Gitlin to illustrate the fatal shattering of the public sphere – to describe instead the increasing prevalence of transnational spaces within, between and beyond nations and their role in generating publics which escape strict geopolitical confines. Cunningham suggests that 'thinking of public sphericules as constituted beyond the singular nation-state, as global narrowcasting of polity and culture, assists in restoring them to a place... of undeniable importance for contemporary culturally plural societies and any media, cultural and communications studies claiming similar contemporaneity' (Cunningham, 2001: 133). Globalising media platforms therefore become implicated, not in the destruction of the public sphere, but in the fostering of multiple publics united by some common element, across vast distances.

Ethno-specific mediatised sphericules, as Cunningham terms them, are of primary importance in staging spaces for imagining diasporic publics that transcend the nations in which they find themselves. That

is, they provide ‘a central site for public communication in globally dispersed communities, stage communal difference and discord productively, and work to articulate insider ethno-specific identities – which are by definition “multi-national”, even global – to the wider host environments’ (Cunningham, 2001: 135).

Such globally networked sphericules are thus also intimately connected to the local and even the domestic, for if ‘ethnicity is initially experienced at home, [it is] reaffirmed in the public space [which is vital] in the construction of group identities and the sense of belonging in a community’ (Georgiou, 2001: 313). Therefore, the traditional dichotomy between private and public must also be reshaped to ‘capture the continuity of the private and public space – the space where identities are reaffirmed’ (Georgiou, 2001: 312). What emerges is the idea of multilayered sphericules which link and overlap various spaces including private, local, national, transnational and global elements.

The Italo-mediatised public sphericule available in Australia is a primary public space for diasporic Italian identities to be informed and played out. Its media have become increasingly pervasive, fulfilling the multiple obligations of communicating Italian and Australian polity and culture to Italo-Australians while also creating a space where the Australian and international diasporic experience of Italians can be negotiated using common terms of reference and language. The radio programming available to Italo-Australians encapsulates the variety of media sources available in the mediatised sphericule in terms of space – local, national, transnational, international – and type – state-funded and commercial – and thus also allows associated theoretical tensions to be explored. Likewise, the exploitation of state-bound radio airwaves for diasporic production and listening simultaneously emphasises the degree to which deterritorialised, transnational spaces remain to some degree contingent on national cultural policies, often reliant on content from one or another national public sphere, even as these media infiltrate and subvert other state-bound publics.

### **Contextualising the Italian Diaspora**

The history and circumstance of Italian dispersion is reflected in the culture(s) of Italians abroad, distinguishing these Italo-expatriates from their peninsular counterparts. It was an emigration in search of fortune elsewhere, concentrated in time and localised in space, waves of mass emigration occurring between 1876 and 1976 with southern Italians – the most common to emigrate – constituting approximately 70% of post-war emigration (Ginsborg, 1990: 211). Most Italians immigrated to countries periodically seeking labour, with initial waves largely headed to the Americas (the US, Argentina and Brazil) and industrial European nations and later including also sizable migrations to Australia and Canada (Cresciani, 2003: 19; Ginsborg, 1990: 211).

As is well known, this Italian mass emigration occurred in a national context characterised by deep regional divisions in a state that had barely begun to realise its modernist nation-building necessities. In fact, while Benedict Anderson (1991) cites the pivotal role of print media in imagining the modern nation, in Italy true nation-building would have to wait for the electronic mediums of radio and television and their notable role in cementing and diffusing a national consciousness beginning with the national language (spoken by only two percent of Italians at unification and reaching almost total penetration only during the last fifty years) (Firenze Mvsei, 2003: 25). This regionalism also contributed to patterns of chain migration from particular regions and towns, a combination which has seen Italians abroad tend to harbour strong local and regional affinities in the negotiation of their diasporic identities.

Since this migration, the newly wealthy Italian state has sought to interpellate its diaspora as a differentiated extension of the primary nation state. As part of its desire to maintain strong links with its large community of expatriates and their descendants, for whatever motives, it is actively and fiscally involved in the promotion of the Italian culture overseas (Camareri, 2004; Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2005). One important constituent of this cultural propagation was the

development of an international arm of Italy's public broadcaster RAI which transmits Italian television and radio by satellite across the world.

### **Australia's Italians and Multiculturalism**

Thirty years after the cessation of Italy's largest wave of immigration to the "lucky country" (Castles, 1992: 35), Italians are now a well-entrenched minority component of Australian society. This Italian diasporic community is also mostly southern-Italian in flavour with the majority of migrants arriving from Sicily and Calabria; however sizable communities from the central and northern regions of Abruzzo, Campagna and Veneto also migrated here (Castles, 1992: 42). The Italo-Australian community gains its public face in Australia through community associations and social clubs in addition to the essential role of minority media. The concentration of Italian migration to Australia within a fairly limited twenty year period following the Second World War, formed by people from similar socio-economic backgrounds migrating for comparable reasons, serves to create a substantial commonality within this Italo-Australian community of first generation migrants – the target audience of most Italian language minority media.

Italian media in Australia, being primarily in the Italian language whether locally or internationally produced, fortunately has a reasonably sized market to exploit unlike some of the smaller ethnic groups. The Italian language (or likely one of its regional variations) (Cresciani, 2003: 143) is the second most-spoken language in Australia after English, with Italian being spoken in the home by 353,603 people (DIMIA, 2003: 39)<sup>1</sup>. Likewise, Italians remain to date the largest, albeit aging, non-Anglo Celtic ethnic community in Australia. According to the most recent Australian census, there are currently 218,718 Italian-born residents, while in total 800,256 people claimed Italian ancestry (DIMIA, 2003: 5, 63).

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<sup>1</sup> Almost certainly an underestimate of all Italian speakers for it is likely to exclude the sons and daughters of Italians who speak Italian in familial, but not everyday situations, and later-generation students of the language.

However, despite Italians being the most numerous non-Anglo Celtic ethnic group in Australia, immigration policies have ensured that no single minority community in Australia constitutes more than five percent of the total population (DIMIA, 2003: 55). No one Non-English-Speaking-Background (NESB) community has therefore reached 'critical mass' in terms of being able to operate significantly as a self-contained community in the nation (Cunningham, 2001: 135). At the same time, Australia also represents in proportional terms the world's second largest immigrant nation after Israel with 40 percent of Australians being born – or having at least one parent born – overseas (Cunningham, 2001: 135); it is a country which is home to more than 150 ethnic groups speaking over 100 different languages (DIMIA, 2003). Australian minorities therefore make interesting case studies for their communities and identities are "'de-essentialised" adapted to conditions where ethnicities and sub-ethnicities jostle in ways that would have been unlikely or impossible in the respective homeland settings or where long and sustained patterns of immigration have produced critical mass of singular ethnicities' (Cunningham, 2001: 135).

It is not surprising that interactions with the dominant culture of Australia influence the cultural identities of Italian minorities, their ethnicity becoming the product of exchanges between their Italian and Australian histories and experiences. Taking Stuart Hall's anti-essentialist perspective, cultural identities themselves can be seen to 'come from somewhere, have histories, but like everything which is historical they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power' (Hall, 1990: 225).

In this way Italians abroad, like other migrant communities 'no longer define themselves in terms of a singular vectorial link to the place of origin. Not only has the dream of returning to the native land been deferred, but also the sense of being centred in one place, where personal meaning can find an ordered relationship with social structures has been displaced' (Papastergiadis, 2000: 121). One can



find many comments to this effect in the autobiographical accounts of diasporic experience; Italo-Australian writer Archimede Fusillo's first visit to his parents' Italian hometown produces just such a realisation. He remarks, 'for all the tendrils that wanted to bind me to this place, I was not of the place. I was, like my parents themselves after an almost 20-year absence, (though I did not realise it at the time), an outsider. ...I am from it but not of it ...in a sense, cast adrift between two worlds' (Fusillo, 2004: 56-57). This experience is typical of many Italian emigrants and their children who have now been residents in Australia and elsewhere abroad for more than thirty years, often in a sort of self-imposed exile. In this time many have considerably loosened their ties to the distant (contemporary) homeland, having however developed strong connections within their local Italian communities and forged solid identities as ethnic minorities.

Thus, given a diasporic culture distinct from the national culture at the outset and the evolving nature of home-host hybridity, it becomes clear that any form of public culture which seeks to address this community effectively and inclusively must incorporate material from the Italo-Australian community itself – as well as Australia, Italy and the diaspora more generally – in order to best create a productive space which informs the realities these minorities face. Such a public element of cultural expression is furthermore vital. Without underestimating the formative role of the home environment in initially constructing ethnic identities, such minority cultures must also find sanctuary in the public sphere to assure their longevity. Myria Georgiou similarly argues that without a sort of 'baptism' of identity in the public, 'ethnic identities are doomed to die away as people socialize beyond the familial, domestic, ethnic environment' (Georgiou, 2001: 313).

### **The Italo-Sphericule and Radio: SBS and ReteItalia**

The media available to the Italian diaspora have steadily increased exponentially with globalisation and its associated technologies. Even excluding the most globalised medium, the Internet – which has had little direct impact on the aging first-generation's media consumption

and represents a reality beyond the scope of this essay – Italians in Australia today can easily access an array of information in Italian manifestly ‘more comprehensive than ever’ (Randazzo, 2000: 191). Commentators have even boldly claimed:

It is as clear as fine morning daylight that the Italian language media in this country has never enjoyed a wider acceptance, has never reached a wider readership and/or audience, has never responded better to community expectations and demands, has never been more complete in its news coverage, more updated as to technology and contents, more entertaining and more informative than at the present time. (Randazzo, 2000: 191)

To give a brief sketch the available media include: a commercial Italian-minority media group which publishes two daily Italian language newspapers, *La Fiamma* produced in Sydney and *Il Globo* in Melbourne (since 1946 and 1959 respectively) and also broadcasts an all-Italian narrowcast radio station across Australia; the Australian state-funded, national multicultural broadcaster SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) and its Italian radio and television programming; an Italian language Pay-TV station, supplied directly by RAI International, the Italian state-funded satellite; and finally an English language periodical – *Italy Down-Under* – presumably aimed at engaging the Australian-born generations of Italo-Australians, most of which do not speak Italian (Pitronaci, 2002: 35)<sup>1</sup>.

Italian radio in this landscape is representative of the sources, quality and scope of programming available to this community. Eclipsed by television and outrun by the Internet, radio as a medium appears to have its literal invisibility translated to conspicuous neglect in contemporary academic literature. This has been attributed to the fact that in comparison to ‘other areas of the media industries, radio is less capital intensive and less glamorous. It is more commonplace, taken-

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<sup>1</sup> Despite reasonably high language transmission across generations, with statistics showing 41 percent of Italian speakers are born in Australia (DIMIA, 2003).

for-granted, invisible' (Moran, 1995: 147). Ironically, precisely these features have allowed radio to be exploited by minority voices who lack capital and often also glamour and who nonetheless can more easily reach their publics through a commonplace medium that saturates everyday life and requires little effort and media literacy in both vocation and consumption (Georgiou, 2001, 313; Moran, 1995: 147).

Radio has thus been adopted by the Italian community as one of the primary vehicles of its public culture. The two stations nationally available in Australia include the state-sponsored SBS which broadcasts two one-hour news and culture radio programs daily and ReteItalia, a commercially funded narrowcasting station broadcasting in Italian 24 hours a day. The SBS is internationally unique: no other country has a public broadcaster which transmits programming in so many languages. Consisting in both a national television station and two national radio stations, the broadcaster provides radio programming in more than sixty-eight of Australia's minority community languages and an exceptional mix of Australian-produced and international programming drawn from over 400 national and international sources (SBS website, 2004). ReteItalia conversely operates under a commercial open-narrowcasting licence for special interest groups and therefore targets Australia's Italian community specifically. It provides advertiser-funded, all-Italian language programming both produced in Australia and sourced from Italy's public broadcaster RAI, with the Italian community's considerable numbers ensuring such a venture is both viable and vital.

Unlike television which generally relays Italian programming produced for Italy's national audiences – diasporic in consumption but not production – the lower costs associated with radio programming mean that both these radio stations can provide a more active space for local expression. In this vein, SBS radio's Italian program has moved considerably away from simply acting as a facilitator for resettlement and/or link to the homeland. Instead the SBS radio Italian program also serves to negotiate actively a space for the Italo-Australian community to create its own voice, a space in which Italo-Australians

can imagine themselves collectively. The program's journalistic focus openly seeks to 'discover and capture this intangible, multifaceted, ever-changing, "Italianess" that somehow characterise[s] us [the Italo-Australian community]' (Caluzzi, 2000: 201). Head of the SBS radio Italian program, Manuela Caluzzi, emphasises how community introspection has become an important part of its broadcasting. She explains: 'We [speak] to its political leaders, its artists, its scientists, its writers, its academics, its people. Ideas, activities, problems, issues, everything and anything that was somehow connected to the Italians in Australia [has become] the focus of our attention' (Caluzzi, 2000: 201). Programs can vary from the cinematic release of *Love's Brother*, an Italo-Australian-themed and produced film, to the attempted restoration of a heritage farmhouse with an Italo-Australian background. In grounding a common discourse for the community members, the Italo-Australian public sphere can amalgamate the interests of local Italian community groups and forge a common discourse of minority community interest.

Given the luxury of 24-hour Italian broadcasts, ReteItalia is able to provide a greater variety of programming including various participatory platforms. These mostly take the form of talkback and call-in programs airing daily in the mornings and also occasionally in the early afternoons and provide a literal space for this public to voice its concerns and opinions. If we consider particularly the idea that talkback presumably provides equal opportunity for expression to any caller (which my own ethnographic experience of ReteItalia's talkback would tentatively corroborate), these programs may even represent an instance of that elusive egalitarian element of the ideal public sphere.

In offering an intra community focus, both journalistic and participatory, Italian language radio allows the Italo-Australian community a space for the community to debate and inform itself through means and manner not dissimilar to those thought to constitute the typified public sphere. This subnational emphasis is crucial for the community's ability to identify itself on the local level, expressing this public's unique cultural character which is influenced

by the particular nature of the Italian diaspora and the hybrid experience and consciousness of Italo-Australians. Content produced in Italy 'with its peninsular sensitivities and backgrounds [cannot easily] mirror the cultures of the Other Italy, with different backgrounds and sensitivities' (Paroli, 2000: 216), which have been evolving away from Italy for at least thirty years in most cases. In informing and discussing itself publicly, it can then engage and inform the larger national and diasporic discourses of which it is a fraction. I argue not that this local programming can or should exist in isolation but that its dialogues are nonetheless fundamental to the construction of a relevant public sphericule for this community.

The mediated diasporic sphericule also provides space for circulating relevant information from sources outside of the community itself. To this end, both SBS and RetelItalia provide ample opportunity for media-facilitated return to the distant homeland by incorporating Italian news agendas and sources into their programming. Additionally, both stations also provide plenty of airtime for nationally relevant Australian/host discourses, news and information. This combined broadcasting of home and host polity and culture is emblematic of the multiple epistemological desires of Italo-Australians. The SBS embodiment of these needs coincides with its charter obligations to facilitate integration and cultural maintenance in the minority communities which it serves. It thus fulfils both community and government prerogatives in its merger of the Australian and Italian national public spheres into its journalistic discourses, exemplified clearly in each of its news bulletins. The twenty-minute newscasts which air at the beginning of the twice-daily program always mix news from Australia, the homeland and the world and therefore also fuse media agendas created in the Australian, Italian and international public spheres, illustrating the markedly hybrid quality of the sphericule in parallel to the hybrid community. Both Italian and Australian (national) issues are explored through original content in the feature programming which dominates the remainder of its broadcast time. And although the mediated feedback SBS radio provides its listeners lacks the timeliness and authenticity of the live broadcast direct from Italy, the SBS Italian program has

compensated by providing original programming of Italian polity and culture tailored for its Italo-Australian audience through a vast network of Italian contacts with journalists, experts and other primary sources (Caluzzi, 2000: 201). A prime example of this was a powerfully moving interview with the relative of an Italian hostage captured following the recent war in Iraq: SBS's Italian contacts provided original journalistic content to an internationally pertinent story rather than simply re-broadcasting the story from the Italian media.

Additionally, the SBS Italian program 'look[s] out for Italian visitors to Australia: business people, artists, tourists and quickly, quickly drag[s] them to [their] microphones. [They] search for new arrivals to discuss aspects of expatriation and of the old and the new country' (Caluzzi, 2000: 201). The gamut of Australian political and cultural affairs is equally engaged with at SBS radio's Italian program; host-national issues are translated into the language of the audience, appropriate Italian-speaking interviewees located resourcefully across a range of areas (no easy feat!). One wonders how SBS can manage to find Italian-speaking experts offering comment on kangaroo culling or on a union disagreement in Tasmania and yet these very voices can be heard, sometimes searching for Italian words, sometimes surprisingly fluent, on the SBS airwaves.

ReteItalia has considerably more programming time and space to treat Italian and Australian news equally but separately. During the day, from 9 am EST until 5 pm EST<sup>1</sup> it broadcasts Australian news on the hour, sourced mostly from subscription to the news pool service, Australian Associated Press (AAP) (Ercole, 2004). Its daytime news is thus predominantly focused on Australian news agendas with only sporadic mention of Italian and international news, partly because 'in Europa è notte, in Italia è notte; e poi, ci concentriamo, visto che siamo quà, a seguire l'attualità Australiana' (Ercole, 2004: int.).

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<sup>1</sup> Australian EST (Eastern standard time); naturally times alter depending on Daylight Savings in Australia and Italy.

Likewise, during the day while Italy sleeps, the station produces programs which range from talkback to poetry recital, from soccer to opera, covering a massive variety of topics to inform and attract its primary market of first-generation Italo-Australians. These combine Italian, Australian and Italo-Australian topics and given the amount of available broadcast time, the station is able to provide its audience with a relatively comprehensive coverage of key areas of Australian legal and health issues (for example, providing regular call-in programs to experts in relevant fields), circulating information drawn from the Australian public sphere into the sphericule of the Italian community. The nostalgia this station exploits is also evident: its music programming deviates only intermittently from 1930's-1970's Italian popular music (the era of its listeners' Italian youth). However, the Italian realities it reflects also have more contemporary expressions which surface – unembellished – when Italy awakes in the Australian evening.

A stipulated agreement between ReteItalia and RAI International provides the Australian narrowcaster with direct access to contemporary Italian polity and culture produced in Italy and beamed by satellite to the diaspora across the globe. This branch of RAI represents the particular desire of the Italian state to disperse its culture abroad to the diaspora, a luxury not available to Australians until its Oceanic satellite expansion in 1995 (RAI International website, 2004). Two daily 45-minute news bulletins are among the programs which are broadcast live from Italy in Australian prime time, airing at 8 am EST (Midnight Italy) and 6 pm EST (10 am Italy). The Australian diaspora is thus provided with a real-time connection to a primary broadcaster of the Italian public sphere, a clear illustration of the time-space disjuncture electronic media can provoke in the contemporary experience of diasporic existence. From 7 pm to 6 am ReteItalia relays RAI International directly, including news and programming from the three national RAI radio stations – RAI1, RAI2 and RAI3 – representing different ideological biases in the Italian political spectrum. If media constitute even a fragment of our experience, the commonality that these live broadcasts provide their Italian counterparts in Italian communities across the diaspora is

indicative of the potency of satellite television in its capacity to 'continuously and actively negotiate conventional limitations in space and time' (Georgiou, 2001: 313). In the case of the Italian diaspora in Australia, the satellite radio access is perhaps even more suitable than the RAI International television satellite channel which broadcasts a schedule to suit its much larger audience in Latin America and consequently relays much of its programming in timeslots inconvenient for the Australian audience (Paroli, 2000: 214).

RAI International also produces its own varied programming, repackaging Italy's current affairs and cultural articulations specifically for a global audience. These range from soccer to cinema and include journalistic coverage as well as light entertainment and music programs.<sup>1</sup> In addition, RAI International also provides programming for the diaspora to communicate internationally. Its broadcasts, centred and transmitted transnationally from Italy, call on Italians abroad to find means of expression through their airwaves. For example:

Il programma radiofonico "Italia chiama Italia" distribuito in tutto il mondo via satellite ... è nato con l'obiettivo di offrire ai tantissimi italiani che vivono all'estero uno spazio in cui, prima di tutto, potessero confrontare le proprie esperienze, discutere dei problemi e delle esigenze che incontrano le comunità sparse ai quattro angoli della terra. Per la prima volta ... si è pensato ad un programma di approfondimento giornalistico dedicato esclusivamente agli italiani all'estero. E il successo è stato immediato: le lettere e le telefonate che giungono dall'America, come dal Canada, dall'Australia e dal Sudafrica testimoniano che di quello "spazio" c'era davvero bisogno. (RAI international, 2004: URL)

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.international.rai.it/radio/programmi/index.shtml> for a more detailed description of programs specific to RAI International.



This international decentralist aspect of diasporic media production and consumption is further illustrated in the expressly diasporic news service *Ital News* produced in Switzerland by Radio Svizzera in collaboration with an Italian news agency. Broadcast on ReteItalia at 11 am EST each weekday, it airs news specifically for and about the Italian diaspora, granting space to glimpse the noteworthy events occurring in the global Italian community (Ercole, 2004). In any single bulletin one can hear about the recent publication of an Italo-American author in San Francisco or Italian exhibitions occurring in Argentina, for example. In pushing the local events of the scattered Italian communities into a sort of global space such a service explicitly fosters a sense of diasporic intimacy with counterparts internationally. The international production and consumption of these programs thus contributes to 'rhythms [which] resonate transnationally to mark out non-terrestrial spaces that stretch intercontinentally' (Karim, 2003: 10), forging a common public interest in a globally dispersed people.

This combination of mediated public discourses available through radio to the Italian diaspora – that is the mixing of local, community based 'ethnic' programming, transnational media imported from the home country and diasporic media somewhat de-centred in its production and global consumption (Karim, 2003: 11) – is in the case of the Italian diaspora inextricably linked, each informing one another in the production of a dialectical public sphericule. In doing so, they reflect the public interest imperative of the theorised public sphere, producing agendas of discourse through the commonality of ethnicity despite the differences of place. As such, Italian diasporic radio creates and constitutes a sort of 'third space' occupying the gap between and beyond the geographical sites of diasporic identification. That is, 'the diasporic site becomes the cultural border between the country of origin and the country of residence – Homi Bhabha's "third space". This is the zone of intense, cutting-edge creativity born out of the existential angst of the immigrant who is neither here nor there' (Karim, 2003: 5).

The reliance on commercial means of distributing this programming, represented in this case-study by radio station ReteItalia's solely commercial funding base, argues also against instinctive, anti-commercialisation of public spheres. Commercial funding often makes viable the diasporic distribution of media to communities that fall short of being fully fledged markets (Cunningham, 2001: 137). Without its commercial funding, ReteItalia would never have been born (Ercole, 2004), thus depriving its audience of its diverse, temporal and spatial connections and contributions to the Italian public sphericule which are not replicated elsewhere in the available media. Moreover, this would signify the removal of the most pervasive of the electronic media of this diaspora, a station heard in almost every Italian household in Australia, switched on all-day, every-day by many of its listeners, even if attended to distractedly (Ercole, 2004). Its existence has also had positive repercussions for the Italian and Australia state contributors to the sphericule: it provides a local outlet for RAI International, a satellite broadcaster otherwise deprived of listeners and it has freed the SBS radio Italian program to 'diversify and to enrich our program so as to reach beyond our original constituency, mainly made-up of older, first generation migrants' (Caluzzi, 2000: 201). In this diaspora, commercial and public service broadcasting exist in a symbiotic relationship which enhances the quality of the sphericule rather than impinging on it, an argument against any 'reflex anti-commercialism' of the public sphere (Cunningham, 2001: 137).

In the development of the diasporic sphericule, the state and states of the diaspora have not disappeared although diasporas provoke reconsideration of any notion of national isolation and homogeneity (Papastergiadis, 2000: 102). The SBS here makes a powerful claim: SBS radio positions itself as a 'medium for inclusion because without SBS radio one quarter of the Australian community could be left in isolation. SBS radio is a bridge linking them together' (SBS radio website, 2004: URL). At the same time, as its old motto reminds us, it is also a medium for 'bringing the world back home': its locally produced, language-specific, hour-long programs narrowcasting home and host information on a broadcasting stage, thus fragmenting mass

audiences even as it unifies them under the banner of multicultural communication. This is a unique example of state-funded broadcasting which, in keeping with the ideology of multiculturalism, seeks to contribute to the 'unitary' national public sphere by translating its nation-building imperatives, including national news and government announcements, into the languages of its fragmented public. Thus, from the outset, SBS radio has been charged with the dual function of expanding the Australian public sphere to a multilingual audience while simultaneously contributing to the sphericules and spheres of minority and diasporic communities. Its inbuilt imperatives would thus appear to undermine Gitlin's fears that sphericules and spheres cannot co-exist as at SBS both massification and fragmentation logics seem to survive in the one station and more remarkably, even in each one-hour program.

RAI International represents, on the other hand, the home nation's desire to incorporate the diaspora into part of an extended national public. That it is able to do so by infiltrating the nations of its diaspora through local and national media sanctioned by state policy such as radio reminds us that similarly to SBS, national policies are not necessarily exclusive of diasporic sites and in the instance of radio, even provide necessary consent. Thus, the role of both the Italian and the Australian states in endorsing spaces for the Italian diaspora cannot and should not be ignored (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000: 29-31), despite the transnational and global publics which are forged with diasporic media permeating previously state-bound informational realities.

### **Concluding Notes**

Previous work discussing diasporic sphericules has focused on the links media forge between migrant groups and their home culture however the case-study of the well-entrenched Italian diaspora and its use of radio in Australia highlights the truly complicated cultural affiliations diasporic media foster. The diasporic public sphericule shaped by diasporic media in all its forms can potentially constitute vibrant and multilayered spaces for the circulation of discourses which

incorporate local, national and international communities. The mediatised sphericules represent in microcosm the characteristics of the discursive public sphere except that, instead of being set against the state, they are denationalised and deterritorialised like the cultures invoked by the diaspora. Moreover the public sphericule combines spaces for the community to imagine itself at once locally (or subnationally), transnationally and internationally and circulate corresponding discourses to a common diasporic public, forging and informing an Italo-diasporic interest and authenticating the Italian diaspora's cultural uniqueness as well as its ties to the distantly remembered and contemporary home culture.

Thus, using radio, the local minority community can reach out to the international diaspora through its mediatisation; the media, particularly electronic media, being the primary location for this discursive 'space'. Through the mediatised sphericule, the diaspora can internationally diffuse the discourses of its 'third space' positioned between the home and host nations, discussing itself with the diasporic community at large. Moreover the individuals of diaspora can find themselves a public home, their differentiated realities reflected and their in-between identities cultivated through such mediatised spaces. At the same time, in engaging the discursive agendas of the home and host nations, these sphericules strengthen and add a differentiated element of minority and diasporic dialogue to the wider more generic/national public spheres which surround them. In other words, in this case they add a space for the Italian community to create an Italo-Australian public discourse and public voice likewise promoting Australian national public discourses within the Italian community.

The nation-bound spheres of home and host countries thus represent an important ingredient of the sphericule, suggesting a complacent co-existence between national and diasporic spheres rather than mutual exclusivity and antagonism, negating Gitlin's fears of the dissolution of the public sphere in proper. Furthermore, nation states continue to play some policing role in how diasporic media access their publics through media and cultural policy which denies any prophesised

disappearance of the state or its public: transnational publics and cultures are emerging as a new cultural layer notwithstanding, and yet dependent upon those nations and national cultures themselves.

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