

part of the living process of the affairs of their home country (or never were) and are not subject to its laws and consequences' – and even seem relatively uninterested in the country, given the record of generally low turnouts.

This volume represents a pioneering study of the Italian vote from abroad, with a sound empirical analysis of the electoral campaigns of 2006 and 2008 in Australia. The authors focus specifically on Australia, the country with the largest Italian community in the constituency that comprises Africa, Asia, Oceania and Antarctica and that elected two candidates to the Italian Parliament on both occasions, namely Marco Fedi and Nino Randazzo. The analysis of the two elections is framed in the history of the Italian experience in Australia on one side, and the evolution of Italy's citizenship policies towards its expatriates on the other. Some reference is made to the scholarly debate on political transnationalism and Diaspora studies, but the authors do not consistently pursue a dialogue between their empirical study and the recently burgeoning analysis of countries' policies to manage 'diasporas' abroad, often for the purpose of promoting their national interests in the international arena. A more systematic interaction with the theoretical literature on how States try to create nationalism among their expatriates would have provided the reader with a better understanding of why, according to the authors, the Italians in Australia 'have become pawns of greater political and nationalist games of Italian political elites'.

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Evicted from eternity: The restructuring of modern Rome, by Michael Herzfeld, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2009, xiii + 392 pp., £19.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-226-32912-3

Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld has a longstanding preoccupation with the cohabitation of past and present in modern societies. His first book, *Ours once more: Folklore, ideology and the making of modern Greece* (1982), examined the role of history and tradition in the production of Greek national identity; he subsequently wrote an ethnography of shepherds in contemporary Crete. He has also done fieldwork in Thailand, exploring southern Europe and Southeast Asia in a comparative framework. Given these interests, it is perhaps inevitable that Herzfeld should train his gaze on Italy, and particularly on Rome. Like Greece and Thailand, the past is ubiquitous and insistently present in the *bel paese* – and nowhere more so than in the Eternal City.

Evicted from eternity provides a snapshot of Rome at the turn of the millennium, as it undergoes a moment of crisis and dramatic transformation. While always a global city – as the seat of an ancient empire and a world religion, as well as a tourist mecca – Rome has only recently had to contend with globalisation, with the pressures and paroxysms of the international market economy. Herzfeld provides a window on these upheavals through a richly detailed portrait of Monti, one of Rome's oldest quarters, wedged between Stazione Termini and the ancient heart of the city. An urban 'village', home to traditional artisans and small shopkeepers, Monti has undergone a massive wave of gentrification in recent

decades, resulting in an influx of outsiders and the eviction of many long-term (often elderly) residents – a displacement without parallel since the days of Mussolini's *sventramenti*. The crisis became particularly acute in 2000, when the centre-left administration of Mayor Francesco Rutelli aggressively expropriated large tracts of the neighbourhood in the name of the Jubilee Year celebrations. A tragic, almost ironic, standoff has ensued between competing conceptions of patrimony. The neo-liberal state has claimed the mantle of historic preservation, protecting the city's architectural heritage against the encroachment and abuses of contemporary life. However, these preservationist moves also have the effect of destroying local identities and communal solidarities. This is ultimately a conflict over cultural capital: between the official and the vernacular, the national and the local, the macro-historical and the familiar. In Herzfeld's terms, it is also a contest between the 'civic' and the 'civil' – between a managerial and bureaucratic mindset and a worldview grounded in human relationships and quotidian experience.

The gentrification of Monti in turn serves as a setting in which to explore the moral universe of the Montigiani and their responses to these economic and social changes. Here Herzfeld emphasises the centrality of human imperfection to the Roman worldview – the recognition of 'the necessity of political compromise, the ineradicability of corruption, the improbability of altruism. . .' (p. 54). In his view, this conviction stems from the doctrine of original sin, a refraction of the Catholic Church's historically dominant presence in the city. The belief in flawed human nature informs a profound cynicism, particularly towards civic and ecclesiastical authorities. Regulations are not viewed as equitable and disinterested laws, but as instruments serving vested interests; the payment of fines is a necessary and unavoidable expense, a secular equivalent to the purchase of indulgences to remit minor sins. Imperfection informs interactions between individuals. Because there are no absolutes, the Montigiani engage life with a profound scepticism; in pursuing their interests, they prefer negotiation, collusion and accommodation to inflexible positions. Allegiances, identities and solidarities shift constantly, and the few who refuse to 'play the game' are derided as hopeless naïfs, morally culpable in their innocence. Imperfection is reflected even in the urban landscape, where crumbling ruins attest to the power of time and the impermanence of human creation. As Herzfeld poetically puts it, 'Nothing here is perfect; everything, even failure, is magnificent; and prose must reflect the gnawing putrescence that strangely enhances the city's aging beauty, veining its robust surfaces with splinters and fractures that intimate the fragility and contingency of its social life' (p. 7). Against such a backdrop, it is unsurprising that corruption and extortion remain rampant and unavoidable daily realities.

In making this case, Herzfeld's argument clearly intersects with other attempts to explain Italy's peculiar moral economy – in particular, Edward Banfield's *The moral basis of a backward society* (1958) and Robert Putnam's *Making democracy work* (1993). While dispensing with the teleological and normative tendencies of these works – which equate southern Italian localism with 'backwardness' and 'amorality', in contrast to the 'transparent' practices of the modern state – Herzfeld does end up making a similarly essentialising case. In addition, while the tightly focused portrait of a single Roman neighbourhood is one of the book's great strengths, one wonders how universal this characterisation is – are all Romans relativising cynics? Are all Italians? Are all Catholics? At the very least, this might serve to explain the popularity and endurance of the country's current Prime Minister (who, incidentally, is rather conspicuous in his absence here). From a historical perspective, one might also question how pervasive

Catholic theology remains amongst the Romans of today: secular, cosmopolitan, twenty-first century Rome is a far cry from the medieval hamlet ‘liberated’ by Piedmontese troops in 1870.

Evicted from eternity is perhaps most compelling as a straightforward ethnography. Herzfeld has an intimate understanding of – and a profound love for – the people of Monti, their ways and their city. The writing is consistently evocative: Rome is described as a ‘city of saucy impertinence and robust scandal’ (p. 9), its urban landscape ‘a lunatic archaeology’s scrambled detritus’ (p. 2), its inhabitants filled with ‘salty humor... warm gregariousness... and the towering strength and self-confidence with which they meet [life’s] disappointments as well as its excitements’ (p. xi). Herzfeld has a keen ear for the cadences and intimacies of Romanesco dialect, and revels in the local cuisine, ‘a living tribute to manual dexterity and quick wits rather than to monumental recipes moldering in leather-bound tomes’ (p. 13). Anyone familiar with the Eternal City will instantly recognise this riotous energy, which courses through the book itself.

References

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Piero Gobetti and the politics of liberal revolution, by James Martin, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 222 pp., £52.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-230-60274-8

Until recently, Piero Gobetti has been a little known figure in the English-speaking world. References to this firebrand young liberal and anti-Fascist intellectual are usually confined to footnotes in the better-known tale of Gramsci’s early activism among the Fiat workers in Turin, or the wider story of the rapidly tightening censorship of the public sphere in the early days of Fascism. However, this is beginning to change with a spate of recent publications. James Martin’s book is an excellent English-language introduction to Gobetti and places the ideas of this ‘revolutionary liberal’ – who has, controversially, been both claimed and rejected by the liberal, socialist, communist and republican traditions in Italy in the 95 years since his death – within the context of the broader liberal tradition for the first time. In doing so, Martin shows how Gobetti’s ideas have implications that go beyond the Italian context, and that of the turbulent post-war climate in which they were developed.