

**The Visible and the Invisible:
Crossing Ethnic and Spatial
Boundaries in Two Immigrants
Neighbourhoods in Rome**

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The Visible and the Invisible: Crossing Ethnic and Spatial Boundaries in Two Immigrants Neighbourhoods in Rome

Summary

How are local and global cultures intertwined? Is migration and subsequently the de-territorialization of culture leading to standardization or is the local context active in shaping new forms of locality? Comparing different social and ethnic networks of individuals living and working in two Roman neighbourhoods, Esquilino and Pigneto, I will try to affirm that the characteristic of the two different local contexts interact with different individuals' lives and social networks, ending up in different styles of diversity and different types of social capital, each of whom is prevalent – even if not exclusive - in one of the two areas.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Relationships, Ethnic Boundaries, Social Networks, Urban Systems

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Introduction

Frederick Barth, in his classic essay "*Ethnic groups and their boundaries*" (1969) brought attention to the fact that ethnic boundaries (such as linguistic or cultural vessels indicators of a certain identity) were no more than *semantic frontiers*. These boundaries are not fixed, and – more importantly – individuals belonging to a specific group can cross these boundaries multiple times during their lives. These boundaries can be seen as ideological and cultural, existing on an invisible level. They stand in contrast to borders, which are visible, making up the physical and social landscape. Both, however, are integral parts of community life and interact on different levels. This paper seeks to describe the nature of that relationship, comparing two different migrant neighbourhoods in Rome, Esquilino and Pigneto. In particular, this paper seeks to address the following questions. Given that

cultures do not exist in a spatial and social vacuum, what is the relationship between territory and cultures of the people living in a certain place? What happens when individuals or families from different cultural groups join autochthonous residents in a neighbourhood? How does their interpersonal relationship develop when they only have access to the material and cultural resources available in that context? To what extent is the result dependent on the culture of the newcomers and existing residents, or on the characteristics of the specific area?

Description of methodology

The two neighbourhoods investigated are examined on two levels: the “fishtank” and the “fish” (Wallman:1984; Wallman and others, in press). On the basis of Wallman’s metaphor the fishtank represents the neighbourhood, while the fish represent the residents and the people who frequent the neighbourhood and may have different social and cultural backgrounds. The study focuses on the way or ways in which individual or inter-family differences are intertwined with the characteristics of the context in which they find themselves. Pigneto and Esquilino, the two neighbourhoods studied, both have a high number of residents of immigrant origin from multiple countries, but that have different historical, urbanistic and social characteristics. Analysing the local context with its *borders* is trying to understand more of the concrete opportunities that facilitate or oppose relationship between groups that perceives themselves as *different* from one another (*boundaries*).

Fieldwork was carried out for a study in the frame of the Sus. Div. project, and consisted of the collection of official data, architectural description, historical and social research (*fishtank*, paragraph 1), and in-depth interviews with residents and people who work in Pigneto and Esquilino (*fish*, paragraph 2).

1 - Esquilino and Pigneto: the fishtank

“...the ethnic boundary canalizes social life – it entails a frequently quite complex organization of behaviour and social relations. The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgement.”
(Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1994:15).

Esquilino, the fifteenth *rione*¹ of Rome (within the 1st municipal district of modern day Rome), was established in 1874 together with the Monti district, outside the official historical centre, in the vicinity of the area chosen for the building of Termini train station. In Latin, the term *ex-quilinus* meant the inhabitants living outside the city walls, the strangers or “newcomers” (as opposed to the *inquilini*, or in-towners). The current administrative zoning coincides with the toponymic definition of the area; for the present research paper it was possible to find small area census data regarding the population and the buildings. However, the data was only available up to the year 1991. The data from the 2001 census are not yet available since they have not been compared with the data from the city registry. In order to observe changes in the area, the analysis includes some population data from 2004, though they are only available for each entire *Rione* and cannot be disaggregated.

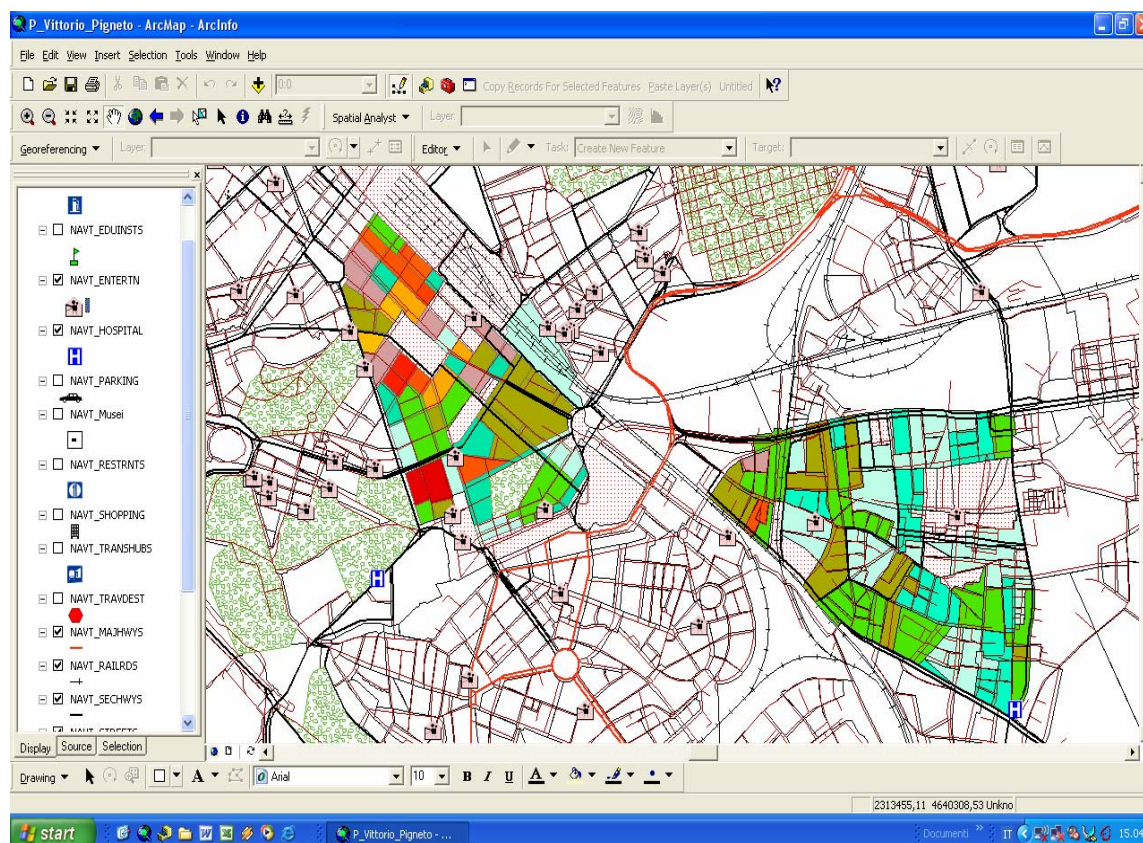
Pigneto, which is part of the larger neighbourhood called Prenestino-Labicano that was established in 1921, is located in the 6th district of Rome; vast and architecturally non-homogeneous, it includes the neighbourhoods of: Casilino, Prenestino, Torrione, Borgata Galliano, Acqua Bullicante, Maranella, the so-called *villini* (or small houses with yards) or “city-garden” neighbourhood and Pigneto itself (Severino:7). Therefore, unlike Esquilino, the official, administrative definitions of the Pigneto area do not correspond to the toponymic or ethno-nymic ones. For this reason it was necessary to process census data for the whole Prenestino-

¹ See note 27. While for the most part the *rioni* are distinguished from one another by traditional celebrations and folklore, occasionally, as with the city census, they are used for administrative purposes in addition to the *municipi*. For the purpose of this paper, *rione* will be left in Italian while *municipio* will be referred to as a district.

Labicano neighbourhood, and to rely on a recent historical reconstruction, as well as on the collection of data through field research, in order to illustrate the characteristics of the different zones within the larger neighbourhood.

The neighbourhoods of Esquilino and Pigneto/Prenestino-Labicano seem to meet at Porta Maggiore (see Figure 1 in this page), the true gate of communication: today Esquilino still maintains its function as a gate between the city's inside and its outside, the periphery of the eastern quadrant of Rome.

Fig. 1 – The 15th *rione* (Esquilino) on the left and the “A” zone (Pigneto) of the 6th district of the larger Prenestino Labicano neighbourhood on the right



In Table 1 there is a summary comparative description of the two areas in terms of history, architecture, social context, in order to point out the differences between Esquilino and Pigneto.

Table 1 – Summary of historical, architectural, social data about the two neighbourhoods

	ESQUILINO	PIGNETO/PRENESTINO
1) Local history ²	<p>Since 1870, Esquilino has been one of the traditional arrival places for immigrants and a commercial area, originally built for newly arrived Government employees in the newly United Italian State (particularly from northern Italy). The area then became a destination for immigrants from poor regions of central and southern Italy (from end of the 19th century until World War I) and later there was a sort of “building fever” in Rome. In Esquilino many buildings 4-5 floors tall were built, all similar to one another, painted yellow ochre, the cheapest colour available, rented to small shop-keepers and artisans). Later among the neighbourhoods in Rome this was one of the destinations where Jews expelled from Libya after 1970 (<i>ebrei tripolini</i>) came to live and to establish clothing shops in the area. Starting in second half of the '70s and continuing to the present day, non-European immigrants have come to settle in the neighbourhood, due to its central position and its proximity to the main railway station (Termini) and to the main public bus transport point</p>	<p>Before 1870 the suburban area was full of vineyards and horticulture; after 1870 it became a low-cost location for the spontaneous settlement of immigrants from poor Regions of central and southern Italy. Starting from Porta Maggiore, the area is a triangle of land marked by the different lines of the railway tracks from the nearby Termini station. Originally these buildings did not follow the building codes or an urban plan, but they were subsequently legalized by the Municipality. The Prenestino Labicano Quarter, the diverse neighbourhoods of <i>isola pedonale</i> Pigneto, <i>villini</i>, and Torpignattara, has been recently defined as an “urban mosaic³”, a “patchwork”, a “kaleidoscope”. It is also almost the only neighbourhood in Rome where an effort was made to establish factories and a concentrated groups of public services, such as urban transport (these structures were built between the two World Wars, today almost no longer in use). After World War II many “neo-realist” films were shot in this area</p>

² Informations presented here origin from different articles reported in the list of work cited, from direct observation, from dialogues with local residents.

³ Severino:2005.

2) Population structure⁴

1991: italian population age structure				
	0-14	15-54	55-74	over 75
Esquilino	12%	57%	24%	8%
Prenestino-Labicano	13%	60%	24%	9%
2004: entire population age structure				
	0-14	15-54	55-74	over 75
Esquilino	10%	55%	24%	11%
Prenestino-Labicano	11%	53%	23%	12%
1991: italian population family structure				
Members	1	2 _ 3	4 _ 5	6 and more
Esquilino	48%	37%	14%	1%
Prenestino-Labicano	33%	44%	21%	1%
2004: only foreigners population age structure				
Members	0-14	15-54	55-74	over 75
Esquilino	13%	70%	12%	5%
Prenestino-Labicano	17%	76%	6%	1%

3) Housing options

Big buildings in Piedmont style; big flats, mostly rented by Italians (whose families owned and lived in the flats for generations) to foreigners at very high rates, so the foreigners adapt by living together in the same apartment in large numbers in order to pay the rent.
Year 1991: 59% owners, 36% renters; 5% other

Very different types of housing varying from zone to zone, mixed in each zone: in the zone called *isola pedonale* the houses are small, often with a ground-floor plus one or maximum two floors; further from the centre 2-3 and sometimes even 4-floor houses, with small gardens. In the *villini* area: British "garden cities" with two-family one-floor buildings

⁴ Data for 1991 from official census; data for 2004 from Rome City office for Statistics.

		Year 1991: 65% owners, 30% renters; 5% other
4) Work options (I=Italians; F=Foreigners; B=both but separated; M=Mixed)	Hotels, bar & restaurants (M), “ethnic” shops (F), museums (I), offices (I), local market (e.g.: clothing: B, fruit & vegetables: M), public areas and garden restoration (directors: I; generic jobs: F or M)	Few local factories (chemical) & services like public transportation (I), small local market (B; M), bar & restaurants (M, B), private building renovations, public areas and garden restoration (directors: I; generic jobs: F or M)
5) Population mix	In 1991 foreign immigrants were 6%, concentrated in two areas (one near a religious college, the other in small hotels near the station). The area appears to be the first, transitional place of arrival. In 2004: foreign immigrants of 120 nationalities make up 20% of the total neighbourhood population. They come from China (20% of total foreigners), Bangladesh (13%) and the Philippines (10%). In recent years, many intellectuals and artists (foreign and Italian) have decided to buy houses in Esquilino	In 1991 foreign immigrants were 2%, concentrated especially in the now pedestrian-only zone, “ <i>isola pedonale</i> ” In 2004: foreign immigrants of 103 nationalities are 11% of the total neighbourhood population. They come from Bangladesh (17% of total foreigners), China (13%) and the Philippines (10%). Fewer nationalities on the whole than Esquilino but with a more even share of each population. Also, as in Esquilino, students, artists and intellectuals have decided to live here, either buying or renting houses (prices have gone up quickly)
6) Daily population movement (in & out)	Tourists, University students, employees, craftsmen, shop-owners & shop-employees in. Public employees, workers in general out.	Employees & workers in general out for work; shop-owners & shop-employees in; few factory employees in; public transport drivers & workers in
7) Transport	Very well connected by bus, urban train, railway, subway; due to recent prohibition of wholesale trade (2003) big vans are not allowed in (Chinese wholesale clothing shops in the area have been converted into show-rooms)	All around the so-called <i>isola pedonale</i> (pedestrian island) area there are buses and streets for cars; an urban train along the Casilina street; railway tracks split the neighbourhood in two parts, joined up only by

		a little pedestrian bridge; overpass
8) Cultural activity	Many different museums (musical instruments, military, ancient Rome, contemporary history, etc); theatres	Cinemas (under renovation); initiatives by private bookshops
9) Schools	2 nursery schools; 2 primary schools; 1 middle school; 3 secondary schools; 1 University Department (oriental languages). One primary school in particular welcomes students of immigrant origin to apply, the other discourages them; the first one offers language support & intercultural activities in co-operation with parents, and about ten years ago began organizing a city festival for "intercultura" (=cross-culture) called Intermundia in the restored piazza Vittorio gardens	6 nursery schools; 5 primary schools; 3 middle schools; 0 secondary schools. There is a centre for "Intercultura" in one primary school supported by the Municipality (Polo Intermundia), with afternoon classes and activities for children and parents
10) Public services & gardens	Central National Public Library; many municipal and health offices and services; small gardens (piazza Vittorio, Villa Wolkonski)	Very active center for elderly people: only one foreign member, an East-European 55-year-old lady; 3 Hospitals (1 public, 2 private); 3 big public parks;
11) Public intervention in the neighbourhood	Important renovation interventions during the last 6-7 years (<i>Programma di riqualificazione urbana</i>); the most important and visible is the relocation of the historical market from the piazza Vittorio to two old barracks in disuse nearby the original location; the gardens in piazza Vittorio have become the "multicultural showcase" of Rome	Diffuse and small renovation interventions (<i>Contratto di quartiere Pigneto</i> , on the area called <i>isola pedonale</i> and nearby); private renovations in the <i>villini</i> area
12) Local political & religious associations and groups	Various pro-foreigner associations or organized foreign communities; also right-wing anti-immigrant associations and groups. Many NGO's have their offices here,	Many churches offer the use of their buildings to foreigners' associations, also for non-christian religious ceremonies (particularly Muslim). There is

	most of them are not neighbourhood-based, their work is addressed to the entire city. Recently a Buddhist temple has been established	a very active “comitato di quartiere” (neighbourhood committee), which is a strong group of local representatives which any residents in the area can join
13) Shops & restaurants	Esquilino has one of the most intense concentration of shops and restaurants owned or run by immigrants, particularly from China, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and different African countries. They are owned and run by different mixes: only Italians; Italians as owners and foreigners as employees or foreigners as owners and employees. Recently there are also shops of foreign owners and mixed employees	There are many shops run by foreigners, but it is a less commercial area compared to Esquilino. Recently many “alternative” shops have been established (fair trade shops, alternative book-shops, ethnic musical instruments shops, targeting an Italian public. There are also cheap restaurants, with mostly Italian or roman cuisine

1.1 - Migration in Esquilino

“Innumerable eyes arriving from everywhere in the world have wandered across this slice of urban landscape, storing the first impressions of a brief stay or of a new life”

(Samgati:2006).

The structural characteristics of the urban landscape of the neighbourhood has made Esquilino “a central point of arrival for commuters, tourists and immigrants” (Carchedi, 2002:14), as well as a commercial neighbourhood, rich in apartments and shops (jewellery stores, bridal shops); along the 1970's a large Jewish community settled here as Libya expelled the *ebrei tripolini*⁵, who established warehouses and wholesale stores, mainly under the porticos around the piazza. These elements created the setting that led to this area becoming the place in which immigrants gained visibility for the first time in Rome, beginning in the 1970s and increasing in

⁵ Jews from Italian origin who lived in Tripoli, Libya, were suddenly expelled from Libya as Colonel Kaddafi went to power; most of them came to Rome.

the 1980s.

The older Italian residents started leaving the area and its large dilapidated apartments; in this situation rents were not excessive, and this encouraged immigrants to settle in the neighbourhood, living in large groups inside big apartments in order to split the costs. In the 1980s the immigrants were people from the Maghreb countries (with a predominance of Tunisians and Moroccans), who were partially replaced by immigrants from the Indian subcontinent in the late 80s and early 90s (particularly Pakistanis and Bangladeshi who today are present in sizeable numbers not only as workers in the local Esquilino market, but also as owners of the stands, as well as Indians). The newest arrivals are the Chinese, a source of concern and contention for the Italian residents who began complaining immediately and still complain this group's aggressive business practices, the excess of wholesale activities (which, in theory, should now have moved outside the circular highway surrounding Rome called the "*Grande Raccordo Anulare*", in compliance with the new law). Italians also object to what they see as the insularity of the Chinese community and culture.

1.2 - Migration in Pigneto

"You can pray God using different names: God, Allah, Vishnu...still he will not listen"

(writing on a wall in Pigneto)

Unlike the Esquilino neighbourhood, where, beginning in the mid-1980s the presence of immigrants began to become quite visible, in Pigneto this presence was not immediately perceived, even though according to the data in the 1991 census one can see how in some parts of the current pedestrian precinct the number of foreign residents almost reached the same percentages as those of the Esquilino area (see Figure 1⁶). The data for 2004 from the City of Rome referring to the entire

⁶ In Figure 1 the two neighbourhoods are compared, broken down according to census zones,

neighbourhood (and therefore not to the small zones), indicate that the immigrants residing in the Prenestino-Labicano area currently represent a group that is younger than the foreign population of Esquilino (Fig. 2), and allow to say that the immigrant population in Pigneto, while less visible than in Esquilino, includes a higher population of families with children who are minors.

Figure 2: 2004: only foreigners population age structure

Members	0-14	15-54	55-74	over 75
Esquilino	13%	70%	12%	5%
Prenestino-Labicano	17%	76%	6%	1%

In 1995 empty premises of the Snia Viscosa company on via Prenestina were occupied as volunteer centres for cultural and social activities, intended for immigrants as well as Italians. Previous work in the area had damaged an underground water table, thereby creating an artificial lake hidden in the Snia park. Immigrants from various countries began to congregate around this, over the years. Before it was evacuated in 2004, it had come to “host” almost one thousand people, most of them from Romania, both of gypsy origin and non. Romani residents were distinguished by the local population from other immigrants who live in the neighbourhood as uniquely unwilling to integrate in the local system, representing a sort of *symbolic boundary*:

“Many young people from Senegal live in rented houses in Pigneto, maybe fifteen per room, paying 200 Euro per person, on via Campobasso. Others, the men and women who come from China, rent apartments on via Fanfulla da Lodi and on via Grosseto. The majority of the Arab population lives on via della Marranella. For the men and women of the jungle

coloured according to the percentage of foreign residents out of the total resident population. The colours from red to orange and yellow are the areas that were found to have the highest incidence of foreign residents, fading towards brown, green and blue which indicate the areas where the incidence was the smallest.

[the part of the occupied park behind the Ex-Snia factory] *it is harder to find housing, since these people do not want to build a community, they live with a sense of impermanence, they are not in Italy and they do not want to return to Romania, at least not immediately. (...) They are the model of the immigrant who comes from abroad and does not want to integrate himself, and therefore the proof that the neighbourhood tolerates any form of immigration as long as the immigrants chooses to live together, in peace, in tranquillity and without problems⁷.*"

For the residents of Pigneto, Italian and foreign, the inhabitants of the lake area exemplify "outsiders", not so much understood as foreigners but rather as people who hold themselves apart. This is unlike the various other groups of immigrants that have integrated themselves in the area and therefore have justly become "locals".

2 - Global/local citizens into town – the "fish"

"...some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied."
(Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1994:14).

2.1 Background

This chapter is based on eleven interviews conducted during field research in the two neighbourhoods of Esquilino and Pigneto in order to demonstrate the way or ways in which individual differences and/or differences within a single family are intertwined with the characteristics of the context in which they find themselves. Information collected during the interviews are about the "household", meaning that while the interviews were conducted with individuals, they represented and spoke about their close and enlarged social networks. The interviewees are both Italian and non-Italian citizens who either live or have been living before or work in

⁷ Giuseppe Scandurra, *Deconstructing SNIA*, article published on the internet at the address. www.transform.it/mappe/documenti/non_in_publicaz/Snia.doc

one of the two neighbourhoods for many years, and were selected by relying on neighbourhood associations or on personal relationships with the researcher.

For the purpose of this paper, the focus – speaking about the analysis of the interviews - will be put on: a) the way in which the visible and invisible neighbourhood boundaries were crossed or not; b) the kinds of relationships that the interviewees have with other people (e.g. primarily ethnic-specific or mixed); c) the particular relationship with the neighbourhood and d) the primary type of social capital (bonding/bridging) for each individual, to point out similarities and differences between life in the two areas.

We will try to set a definition in terms of how *global* or *local* each of them can be perceived in terms of identity, on the basis of their different relationships to co-nationals, Italians and other foreign residents, and on the basis of how they rely on ethnic-specific or mixed networks.

Figure 3 describes some demographic characteristics of the interviewees, and whether they live and/or work in the neighbourhood.

Fig. 3 – Interviewees and what they do in the two areas

Esquilino		Pigneto		
E1	KGM, Male, 46, Bangladesh	Lives & works	P1 AS, Male, 48, Pakistan	Lives & works
E2	YZ, Male, 39, China	Lives & works	P2 VM, Male, 56, Argentina	Lives & works
E3	YZH, Female, 29, China	Works	P3 MD, Male, 35, Senegal	Lived, works occasionally
E4	AA, Female, 31, Italy	Lives	P4 CA, Male, 52, Chile,	Lived, works
E5	FV, Female, 45, Italy	Lives & works	P5 TR, Female, 28, Italy	Lives & works
			P6 RM, Male, 33, Italy	Lives

2.2 - Interviews

Interview E1

K.G.M. has been living in Italy for about 23 years. Before leaving his country he had begun to study law; his family belongs to the middle class in a small town in the south of Bangladesh. His decision to emigrate to Europe was part of a strategy to improve the conditions of his extended family. Now two of his brothers with their

families are now also in Italy and work with him in five jointly owned and jointly managed stores, including a deli, a fish store, and a shoe store.

He came directly to Italy, and from 1983 he lived in the Esquilino neighbourhood, near piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, in a small boarding house on Via Cairoli near Termini Station where other Bangladeshi were living. This made it possible to send savings back to family members in Bangladesh, and to maintain connections and provide help to compatriots in Italy. Between 1990 and 1996 he went to live on Via Prenestina, in search of more stable and less expensive housing situation. From 1994 he lived there with his wife, who he had married in the meantime in Bangladesh, and his first daughter who was born there.

He moved back to living in the piazza Vittorio with his wife and children (the second child was born in Italy) to be closer to his increased commercial activities:

“For living the Esquilino area is not so nice, it’s necessary to live here because I am here all day, the business is the reason, I have various stores especially in the Esquilino area. (...) As a place to live, comparing Esquilino and Prenestina, I was much more relaxed there, it was much nicer there for living...the people were calmer, there was respect; they did not pay much attention to whether you were foreign or Italian. In this area [Esquilino], for various reasons, the Italians do not think well of the foreigners, they think we have stolen their place, their work, their social life.”

Politically and socially very active, he spends time with Italians for work (his accountant, public employees for work issues) or for political activities (volunteers from anti-racism associations). But his contacts are, for the most part, co-nationals, both close relatives and people that he learned to know here in Italy.

The local school, named “Di Donato”, where his children go, has provided him an opportunity to meet Italian and foreign parents, with the activities carried out at *Polo Intermundia*⁸.

⁸ There are *Poli Intermundia* (intermundia centres) in each of the city’s districts. They are intercultural centres, often located within school buildings, frequented by the children of immigrants, financed by the City and dedicated to conducting activities such as Italian language

Asked about the possibility of deciding to move to another neighbourhood, he says:

“It is difficult to change now, because when we built this area...I said it before, we foreigners built this part, via Principe Amedeo, via Ricasoli, via La Marmora, this side. Now, if we move to another area, it will be hard. When we leave this area, it means that we will also be leaving Italy”.

Interview E2

Y.Z. is in Italy at least since 1989. He is originally from the Zhejiang region, one of the areas of China that most Chinese immigrants in Italy come from.

During those years, the Chinese Government began adopting a series of new laws that ended penalties for those who emigrated abroad, simultaneously facilitating and promoting commercial relations between China and the rest of the world. Y.Z. found himself, like many other young people, putting his entrepreneurialism to the test.

Since arriving in Italy around 1989, Ying has moved many times: Florence, Venice, Teramo, Ascoli Piceno and finally Rome. The goal was to make his family self-sufficient (while in Florence he got married with a Chinese woman he met in Italy, and they have two children) and to begin his own business, a job he felt he was cut out for. He knew that it could be possible to open a clothing store in an area of Rome where many other vendors from China had already set up their stores or show-rooms. This has already made some local neighbourhood committees and local newspapers speak out in protest against the “Chinese invasion”, leading the Head Councillor of City Commerce to prohibit wholesale activities⁹ within the circular highway surrounding Rome (the Grande Raccordo Anulare).

Y.Z. and his four-person family have lived in the Esquilino neighbourhood since 2004, a few minutes by bus from their store which looks out from the porticos

classes, other language classes, tutoring, meetings, parties and social events.

⁹ The prohibition of wholesale trade within the City sought to target Chinese activities, since the majority of shops run by Chinese owners were active in wholesale.

of Piazza Vittorio. But it cannot be said with certainty that Y.Z. is present *mentally* as well as *physically* in Italy. The majority of the Italians with whom he happens to interact can be divided into two categories: clients of the shop and suppliers for the shop. The exceptions are the parents of his children's friends from school. His friends are Chinese and he has some relatives in Italy, although they are in other cities.

In order to create friendships with Italians and other foreigners he has to look to the networks of his two children. Although they have attended schools in the area for only two years, they already have several Italian and other, non-Italian and non-Chinese friends.

He chose the Esquilino neighbourhood for employment reasons and because he already knew about it before arriving in Rome through what some call "the chessboard of opportunities¹⁰". This neighbourhood is known by word of mouth as a good place to do wholesale business.

As far as relationships with neighbours are concerned, Y.Z. does not have any friendships beyond those with his co-nationals. As a result of this isolation, he only hears a weak echo of the debates filling numerous pages of local news in Italian papers, often with titles such as "the Chinese invasion of Esquilino", or "the new Chinatown", and he does not feel too much pressure, at least not on himself:

"Yes, it may be; anyway I am completely legal, I see that the police did some inspections a little while ago, but I am not worried. They did not stop me, but it did happen to others. Some inspection is good, but not always. Otherwise Italians will think that all foreigners should be arrested..."

If he could, Ying would move to the EUR¹¹ neighbourhood of Rome:

"It is cleaner there and the houses are newer than they are in this area, and the

¹⁰ See Ceccagno:2003.

¹¹ EUR is the name of a neighbourhood in the south-western District of Rome. It is an acronym that stands for Roman Universal Exhibition. It should have been a celebration of the Mussolini Regime and rationalist architecture during the planned Universal Exhibition that was to be held in Rome in 1942. The exhibition was cancelled because of the war, but the neighbourhood was finished afterwards and is today a thriving area for office, space, museums, residences. .

neighbourhood is more peaceful. The airport is nearer and Termini [train] station is also easy to reach, that is why I like it there. Here at piazza Vittorio the houses are too old, without balconies, I do not like them as houses; as shops is another thing. If I could choose, I would go there. For the tranquillity."

Modern houses, tranquillity, convenience for reaching the airport and the train station, these are the ingredients that a residential neighbourhood should have for one who sees himself temporarily residing in Italy, who keeps his luggage always ready to "shuttle" back and forth between Italy and China. He feels that it is likely he will to return to China some day, when things improve there; in a dozen years, he says, the situation in China could be better than the one in Italy.

Interview E3

Y.Z.H. lives on Via Tiburtina with her mother and father, a sister and a brother, her husband and their two children, but her relationships are mostly in the area around piazza Vittorio, which someone calls "Chinatown". She spends a lot of time in Esquilino. She arrived in Italy in 2000, and she entered the Esquilino neighbourhood because of family and community ties; a sister of her owns a shop here, and from 2002 she used to work in that shop; from September 2006 Y.Z.H. organizes Chinese classes for children at the "Di Donato" school.

"My University degree is in Chinese Language and Literature. I teach pronunciation, history, culture, vocabulary and so on; the Chinese children who were born here, they do not understand well our language. They cannot write well; they cannot speak well."

She runs two different classes: one is on Monday and Friday between 5 and 7 p.m., after regular school time; the children come from the Esquilino neighbourhood. The other one is on Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and the children come from EUR, Fiumicino, Ostia, far from here (but on the suburban underground line).

Y.Z.H. says that almost all the shops and restaurants owned by Chinese in Rome are concentrated here, also because of the proximity to the Termini station; most of her friends and close relatives work in the area. But her houses are very expensive, and what is good for work – many people around – could be not so

appreciable to live. Her children go to school near her home; her parents look after them while she's working, and they bring them to school.

It seems like there are two separate lives that Y.Z.H. is living: the private life in Tiburtina, the public one in Esquilino. Of course it is not possible to split the two sharply: but in her words, Esquilino is never boring, is “good place for cultural exchange, is very old and traditional, full of history”; while if asked where else she would like to live, she says that EUR is more tranquil. She would like to live in Esquilino, particularly in order to facilitate talking to the parents of her pupils, who work all day long and rarely have time to speak to her about school achievements of their offspring.

The school Di Donato and the Polo Intermundia represent also the only opportunity for Y.Z.H. to establish relationships with non-Chinese in Esquilino, apart from her sister's shop clientele; activities with the association of the parents of the Di Donato put her in the situation to have Italian and other countries' friends. Will she have time to speak to her children's teachers in Tiburtina? Or will her parents do it instead?

Interview E4

A.A. was born and raised in Rome. Her mother is Italian, her father is from Lebanon; she has a brother who lives abroad. She grew up in the S. Giovanni neighbourhood, not very far from Esquilino; now she has been living in piazza Vittorio for about 4 years, together with her partner; they occasionally host a friend for some periods. Her mother is still living in S. Giovanni, after the divorce from A.A.'s father; her grandmother and an aunt are living not so far in Rome.

She still has relationships with close friends from the high school period: the way to reach the school was through the Esquilino neighbourhood, and this is one of the reasons that pushed A.A. and her partner to look for a house there. She says that the neighbourhood is a unique place:

“It gives me the idea of movement; here people come and go all day long, children of

different ages play at every moment of the day, you can always find people doing something. It is a lively place."

But there are also some of the old Italian residents who are worried because of the Chinese shops: she reports to have quarrelled twice with some of them because they argued that all foreigners should go away from the neighbourhood. But asked if she has relationships with migrants living or working here, the "multicultural showcase" of Rome, she says not. Sometimes she went to buy clothes in Chinese shops, but she was treated badly, so she went there no more. Only in the weekend she spends her time in the neighbourhood, when she does the shopping for food and clothes; sometimes in the evening she goes for an *aperitif* on a roof-garden of an international hotel with her partner, her friends who come from other neighbourhoods, her companions of the female soccer team, and there it is possible to meet tourists from different parts of the world. Sometimes she goes to the *Ambra Jovinelli*, a well-known roman theatre in the neighbourhood, and occasionally to a local association to watch videos.

Interview E5

F.V. was born in Naples, and at the age of 14 her parents decided to move to Rome. She lived with her parents in *Rione Monti*, not very far from Esquilino, where her mother still lives, and spent all her school life in the near. She still has strong relationships with her former schoolmates, but less strong with the people she learned to know at University. F.V. learned about Esquilino because she has been working about ten years at the Brancaccio, a well-established theatre five minutes walk away from her present accommodation. During that period she started a relationship with a man, had a child (now 9-aged), but then separated from her partner. When the job in the theatre came to an end, she tried to sell her house to buy a big home suitable for living and for establishing a Bed & Breakfast; and at that moment she came across an opportunity near piazza Vittorio, and took it. She is now living there since 2000 with her child, and another child aged 12 for whom she

is her foster mother, and his mother from Ucraina. In her words, the school where her child goes has been a *gateway* to the neighbourhood; but she admits to be very fond of social relationships, which she easily starts and she's not able to put an end to. She likes very much the neighbourhood, which she describes as *"always in movement"*. And she has a quite local way of life: she spends almost all the time here, even in her free time and for the shopping; she also runs a book-shop called "Esquilibri" together with other seven female friends from different countries who she learned to know in Esquilino.

She appears to be the only one among the interviewed in Esquilino who keeps strong relationships with Italian relatives and friends, but was also able to establish new friendships both with Italian and migrant residents in the neighbourhood.

Interview P1

A.S. has been in Italy for about 16 years. He comes from a city in Northern Pakistan, a mountainous region inhabited mostly by Pashtun people:

"But I am a mixed Pakistani, a mix of all the provinces of Pakistan; I speak four Pakistani languages! Some people tell me "you are Punjab", others "you are from the North", and others still say "you are definitely Southern"...others cannot believe that I am from the North, as though I could not speak four languages!"

He came to Italy directly from Pakistan by himself, without his wife and children, who have remained in his country. The first born son is now in his last year of university there, obtaining his engineering degree; the second oldest, his daughter, is sixteen years old; the third, a son, is twelve years old.

His migration history is not one of "success", from a certain point of view; but in the more difficult moments, he was helped both by his co-nationals and by Italian friends from some volunteer organizations. His permit to stay expired some years ago after a period without a job, and was no longer renewable according to the law, even if A.S. was still waiting for a lawsuit to be addressed. At that point he

decided to return to Rome, where thanks to contacts from his previous “Roman period” he hoped to be able to re-establish his legal situation. He chose to settle in the Pigneto area where he already had friends.

He does not have relatives in Italy and compensates by having many friends. It was in Pigneto that his more intense and stronger relationships were formed.

“Everyone respects me. In Pigneto I saw something: there is no racism like the other places I have seen; Pigneto is an area where Italians – young, old, all of them –mix with the foreigners. There is respect (...) those who live here are tranquil, they help one another. If help is needed, okay, I will help you, let us go together. I really like it here”.

He says he has good relationships with everybody. Compatriots from Pakistan go to his pub, as do young Italians who go to the “Enrico Toti” school nearby and come to visit him to use the inner room of his pub to play some music. There is even some interaction with the other foreigners in the neighbourhood; a woman from Ecuador has been sharing his house and his life in Italy for some time.

“No longer having any documents, it is better if I stay put here, in order not to have any problems. If I move around to other places they stop me. If you do not have documents you spend four hours in a police station. They will not send me back to my country because they all know my situation - that I filed a lawsuit - but I loose four hours for an inspection. At least here no one checks on me because they all know me, even at the police station, at the carabinieri headquarters, they all know me”.

He would move to another neighbourhood only if he finds a better job and above all a legal job, useful for renewing his permit to stay. In other words he would make the sacrifice of moving to another neighbourhood only if his situation with his legal documents were to change). Asked where he would go he cannot think of a precise place; it is only a hypothetical possibility, not a concrete idea.

“I’ll tell you, for me it is easy to mix here; so it becomes difficult to leave as well. It would be as if I was leaving my house, the one in my country, because in the meantime I have gotten to know everyone here”.

Interview P2

V.M. left Argentina to go to Italy in 1979. He had various jobs, got married and had one child in 1974 and in 1975 he separated from his wife. With his new companion in 1979, when he was almost 30 years old, he fled from Argentina to escape political oppression and, like many Argentines who had relatives in Italy, he went to Rome.

"I live ...I have a way of life that is totally day-to-day, due to 14 years of oppression that I experienced in Argentina. Every day you would go out on the street knowing that it would be very unlikely that you would return, or rather, that everything that is habit, savings, plans for the future, did not exist."

After about ten years living and doing several jobs in another neighbourhood, he and his companion came to learn of the Pigneto neighbourhood, which she liked a lot, and convinced him to move there. Pigneto offered both job opportunities in the area of apartment renovations, and opportunities to meet Argentines and other Latin-Americans, with whom it was possible to eat, play chess, dance. In other words, in Pigneto it was possible to create a social life with co-nationals and other exiles, probably in a phase in his life when his nostalgia and longing for the country that he had been forced to leave was at its strongest. After a few years, they experienced financial difficulties and moved to Calabria, then in Argentina. In the meantime he and his wife separated, and after six months he decided to return to Italy to take care of his elderly mother who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease; when he returned he decided to settle once more in the Pigneto area.

The relationships that Vincenzo has are ethnically mixed, both at work and in the public and social life of the neighbourhood:

"I'm talking about the experience as a South-American or a Latin-American, as I prefer to define myself, which is less factious...I always felt as though I were an American"continentalist", not an Argentinean, on the contrary, I was always annoyed by the 'Scaramouches'; for example, I have a 'Chilean' business partner and a 'Paraguayan' business partner".

Vincenzo's skill in social relations seems to be the result of his predisposition and out-going attitude on one hand, and of the concrete opportunities available to enter neighbourhood life on the other. In addition, he needs no type of advertisement for his business: word of mouth – together with his skill as a renovator – functions wonderfully, allowing him to always find jobs, for which he also hires other people. Pigneto had also a "homey feeling" that Vincenzo and his companion, when she was there, responded to. It is possible also that Vincenzo's out-going nature and his ease with human relations are fundamental elements that favour his interaction and exchange with everyone. But certainly the unique conformation of this neighbourhood allowed them to reconstruct aspects of life in Argentina which the two of them had left unwillingly, without having the possibility of coming to terms with the separation between their current reality and the place in which they were born and raised. It is as though Pigneto had become a haven – though neither safe nor tranquil – in which they were protected from any sense of complete impermanence and uncertainty.

Interview P3

M.D. arrived in Italy from Senegal 8 years ago; he had short periods in Milano, Brescia, Roma, Firenze, then Germany, at the end Rome, Pigneto.

For about 2 years he had no proper job, so he worked as a street vendor, sharing a house with many other people from Senegal, to spare money while waiting for the permit of stay. Then he got to know youth from social centre "SNIA", located in an old abandoned factory on the via Prenestina nearby, to attend Italian language courses. After this, he says that "*doors of Italian society opened up for me*", and he got engaged in the activities of the social centre and of the *Comitato di Quartiere* (Neighbourhood Group). He has two close relatives in Italy: a brother who lives in Collatina, and a cousin who lives in Torpignattara with his wife; they meet seldom, because Italian life style leaves not much free time; he meets with co-nationals especially during holidays, or at the call centres to call home.

In Senegal he did statistical surveys, so he had the chance to go around the

country and to meet people, but almost all the co-nationals he knows in Italy, he met here.

He is actually a cultural mediator in a centre for refugees and asylum seekers, and occasionally volunteers for an association hosted by the local fair trade shop.

After about 7 years living here, he has recently moved out Pigneto, and lives now with his Italian wife and their baby near *piazzale Flaminio*, in the wife's grandfather's house. He was forced to move because the house owner attacked him and bet him up; he wanted to take up a legal action, but had no contract; so he had to go away. After that his mother-in-law proposed them to live in that flat, so they accepted; now they are no longer paying a rent, in order to spare money for their life project between Senegal and Italy. They would have liked to live in Pigneto, but it is not possible any more, due to the high prices of the average rent. Now they are sparing money, they have a project to promote ethic tourism with Senegal. He says that he prefers to come and go between Italy and Senegal; Italy is his wife's country, and he's tied up with it, but he thinks he can have a better relationship with Italy if he keeps away from time to time. Life is difficult here, but in this neighbourhood he finds that social life is incredible: "Pigneto is the best". Here he can speak with co-nationals, in opposition to *piazza della Marina* (where he is living now) where only offices are to be found .

Interview P4

C.A. left Chile for political reason, and has been living in Italy for more than 30 years now; he used to live in Pigneto for about 20 years, then moved to Ostiense, where he's actually living by himself. Four years ago, he has chosen again Pigneto to rent a small studio for his handicraft activity: he restores old and modern furniture. Here he has maintained contacts which allow him to take jobs for his activity.

The neighbourhood has changed a lot in the meantime, many immigrants came to live here because of the cheap rents. More recently, students moved in too, due to the fact that University is not so far. One can "breathe" the mood of a small

village here, even if some changes are taking place and prizes keep raising very quickly, leading to a change of the residents.

He thinks that Italians and immigrants live well together in the neighbourhood; there are not so many problems. But recently, as the situation is changing so quickly, people living here are experiencing an increasing pressure.

He claims to have friends from different countries with whom he spends a lot of time together in the neighbourhood; his relevant social networks are here, not in Ostiense. During and after work, he goes to local bars where he spends time with friends from other Latin American countries, from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Senegal, and Italy of course. During the day he says that Italian and immigrant children play together in the small garden in front of the local school; problems come up in the evening, when a growing number of young people come here from other parts of Rome to spend time in bars and other locals, “*over-crowding*” this small village and making noise at sleep hours. A particular thing he appreciates about Pigneto is the different opportunities that it offers to live his social life in different ways: he can go to the Grauco, a small cinema *d’essai* managed by an Argentinean exile, or he can go to locals owned by Pakistani, or again there are parties on the street organized by the Municipality; he has a good opinion of the local active groups (particularly the *Comitato di quartiere*, the neighbourhood group) but does not want to be involved directly too much.

Interview P5

T.R. Has been a fair trade shop keeper in Pigneto for 3 years, and since more than one year she also lives in the neighbourhood. She already knew the place because some close relatives live here.

She likes very much living here, she finds a particular atmosphere, a sense of community that makes it special with reference to other places. But she adds that generally speaking there isn’t a good image of the new shops – like the one she

works in - that opened in the last two, three years; the old people try to preserve a sort of historical identity, they don't like all these new pubs, bars, restaurants and so on... Despite all, people coming in the shop to buy are mostly from the very close neighbourhood, or from the very next areas nearby.

She entered the boundaries of this local community thanks to the local associations, especially the *Comitato di Quartiere* and the social centre SNIA. Now she has many mixed friendships, and she thinks that the arrival of many immigrants has never been a problem. Still, she wouldn't speak about complete "*integration*"; there is an open minded attitude, a situation of peaceful coexistence, but not deep integration. Migrants from Africa, particularly from Senegal, from Latin America, from Bangladesh: everyone has its particular places; they can go to the same places often, but contacts exist only in shops in her opinion.

Local associations, communities, or single active individuals do more for the neighbourhood than public intervention; they are sensitive to the transformation of local identity.

Interview P6

R.M. was born and raised in a marine suburb of Rome, where he has been living until he went in a small town in a Region of central Italy to attend University. After that he came back to live with his mother after his parents got divorced. To gain independence, he and his partner – whom he met at University – started looking for a house of their own, but due to the high prizes they weren't able to find one, until he inherited the house of his grandparents in Pigneto. He did not chose to live there, but was happy with the opportunity to have a house in the neighbourhood, and thinks that is a good place to live: "*here is more easy to know people. Social life is more informal*".

He's now living in Pigneto with his partner for about 3 years.

It takes him about 30 minutes to go to work either by public transportation or with a scooter; so he's able to live neighbourhood's life only at evenings and weed-

ends. Anyway, most of this time he likes to be there, either for shopping, and for meeting with friends, who often come to Pigneto to meet in locals and bars. He also meets migrants here, but he says that he hasn't met them at first in the neighbourhood. As R.M. is a volunteer in an association dealing with migrants and refugees, he started to know migrants while involved in the activities of the association, which is based in another neighbourhood in Rome, and then discovered that some of them were living next to him.

When asked to whom he will ask for help if he would find himself in a difficult situation, he answered first friends of the association and close friends from school and University time, then neighbours; he did not mention relatives.

3 - Findings and suggestions

In Figures 4 and 5, we briefly summarize the different types of relationships that the interviewees in the two areas reported, to see if any local patterns emerge.

Fig. 4 – Relationships of interviewees in Esquilino

How did they learn about the area? | Type of relationships (primary) | Primary social networks?

	How did they learn about the area?	Type of relationships (primary)	Primary social networks?
E1-KGM	Word-of-mouth by co-nationals	Ethnic-specific	Family, co-nationals
E2-YZ	Word-of-mouth by co-nationals	Ethnic-specific	Family, co-nationals
E3-YZH	Word-of-mouth by co-nationals	Ethnic-specific+mixed	Family, co-nationals
E4-AA	Went to school there	Ethnic-specific	Partner, family
E5-FV	Worked there	Mixed+ethnic-specific	Friends from the neighbourhood and from schooltime

Fig. 5 – Relationships of interviewees in Pigneto

How did they learn about the area? | Type of relationships (primary) | Primary social networks?

	How did they learn about the area?	Type of relationships (primary)	Primary social networks?
P1-AS	Word-of-mouth by mixed acquaintances	Mixed	Friends from the neighbourhood
P2-VM	Word-of-mouth by mixed acquaintances	Mixed	Friends from the neighbourhood
P3-MD	Word-of-mouth by co-nationals	Mixed+ethnic-specific	Family (brother, Italian wife), co-nationals
P4-CA	Word-of-mouth by mixed acquaintances	Mixed	Friends from the neighbourhood
P5-TR	Relatives	Mixed+ethnic-specific	Relatives, friends from the neighbourhood
P6-RM	Relatives	Ethnic-specific+mixed	Association, friends, neighbours

It seems quite clear that people living and/or working in Esquilino tend to be part of family or co-national networks: these tend to be stronger than neighbourhood networks, even if we have to consider that the majority of the co-nationals met in the migration context. Only FV (Interview E5) seems to have stronger ties with the neighbourhood, but that can be also a result of her declared capacity and willingness to build friendships and to be social, no matter where she lives. In terms of the *fishtank*, Esquilino is also the planned neighbourhood, a place for public interactions, a place to establish shops, dedicated to public life. According to the rhetoric of the Municipality, it is the “multi-ethnic showcase” of Rome.

In Pigneto, on the contrary, the majority of the interviewees reports having mixed relationships and, more importantly, rely more on friends or neighbours than on distant relatives. Pigneto is also the spontaneously built neighbourhood, working-class and industrial, residential and more tranquil place, where you can become “local” more easily, if you as a newcomer respect the identity of the area.

The findings indicate that the two neighbourhoods seem to have different attitudes towards population mixture and cultural *métissage* or creolisation (see Appendix 1). This is evident in the ability of each neighbourhood to maintain, to a certain extent, its own means of managing diversity and new residents. This does not mean that the neighbourhoods are stagnant, but that change is gradual and anchored in the neighbourhood characteristics tied to its “borders”. Modelling Pigneto and Esquilino, respectively, demonstrates that they fit relatively well into Wallman’s (1984) conceptualisation of open and closed systems. They can also be classified, and contrasted, in terms of heterogeneity and homogeneity (Wallman, 1984), *bridging* social capital and *bonding* social capital (Putnam, 2000), at least until external factors (gentrification, public interventions, unexpected and rapidly on-set turmoil) intervene, complicating and modifying the whole picture.

Conclusions: borders and boundaries

In recent years, there has been a great deal of debate among anthropologists and sociologists regarding on the emergence of delocalized cultures as a result of

contemporary international migration. This discussion, which has focused primarily on “ethnoscapes” (Appadurai:1996), globalized diasporas (Clifford:1997; Gilroy:1993), the global traffic of culture and its human consequences (Bauman:1998), could lead to the conclusion that current migration patterns will result in the standardization, or homogenisation, of global culture. A more recent contribution by Gilroy (2004) accounts for conviviality of cultures, which means that people in postcolonial cities from different cultural backgrounds act together in the local contexts. In this paper, we tried to give a small and local ethnographic contribution to understand how the local context is crucial in shaping social and cultural life of both residents and newcomers. The relationships and reciprocal influence between the “physical-social-cultural” context (with its borders) and different styles of interaction (boundaries) between “imagined communities” (Anderson:1991), keeps shaping and modifying the local system, allowing the researcher to find different “styles” of diversity.

The theme of borders and boundaries helps us to conceptualize how groups come in contact with one another through migration, globalization, and cultural interaction. We have to speak for both of the two sides: a) the transnational migrant side and b) the autochthonous side.

In terms of the transnational migrant side, living in Esquilino could not mean that one had to cross a physical and cultural boundary; it looks like a transit area, a place where it is easier to keep relationships with relatives living in other countries (Putnam’s *bonding* social capital:2000) than establish new ones with neighbours speaking another language. Living in Pigneto, instead, means having to cross a physical and a cultural border every day, to be part of the local community; after which one can rely on multiple social networks (Appadurai:1996¹²; Putnam’s *bridging* social capital:2000).

In terms of the autochthonous side, Esquilino is a kind of metaphor for the new Italian multi-ethnic society, conceptualized as a permanent public arena where

¹² See in particular the chapter “The production of Locality”.

“cultures” come to know each other. Some like it, some do not, and their “ideological” fight takes place here, particularly against the Chinese “invasion”. Pigneto, a previous working class neighbourhood, locally-oriented, is perceived as a place where cultures mix (*fusion*); this image contributes to the interest of the people to move in, and it is a cause for the rapid gentrification which is going on.

The cultural dynamics found in Esquilino and Pigneto could be explained in terms of distinctions drawn by McGrew (1992): homogenisation/diversification; and juxtaposition/creolisation. In relation to homogenisation/diversification, the study demonstrates the way in which the cultural dynamics of globalization are assimilated into the local context, contributing to production of new locality.

In relation to juxtaposition/creolisation, we see how social or cultural practises come into contact through global migration, which may reinforce boundaries between groups or strengthen existing prejudices. It may also shape new and hybrid values and ideas, in a word, produce cultural *métissage*.

Appendix 1 - Points of contrast between Esquilino and Pigneto		
Esquilino		Pigneto
more ethnic-specific; "bonding" social capital	Migrant/Host Networks	more mixed; "bridging" social capital
planned	Local History	spontaneous
more singles	Household Structure	more families
older	Age Structure	younger
big flats, cohabitation, crowded	Housing Options	various, extended family-type
less	Tenure Options	more
more Italians-only or Foreigners-only	Work Options	more ethnically mixed
public founded and directed to public places	Interventions for Change	private/public founded, private/public orientated
more ideologically polarized	Local Associations	more locally orientated
more "in" (workers, students, tourists, shop-owners)	Population Movement	more "out" in the day (workers, employees); in the night: "in" (locals)

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