

BUILDING *SISTEMAZIONE* ABROAD: MEANINGS OF HOME IN VENETO MIGRANTS' HOUSES IN BRISBANE

L. Faggion
R. Furlan

*This study investigates how cultural meanings of home are produced, negotiated, and associated with domestic space among Italian migrants from the Veneto region who settled in Brisbane, Australia. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews conducted in Australia and Italy and a focus-group discussion in Brisbane, the research explores how migration trajectories, settlement decisions, and everyday domestic practices shape migrants' understandings of "home." Findings show that respondents conceptualize home as both "there" and "here": the hometown in Italy remains a primary symbolic reference, while the current Brisbane house functions as the present locus of dwelling and belonging, making home simultaneously multi-scalar and pluri-local. Earlier Australian dwellings were largely excluded from the category of home and remembered as provisional, instrumental accommodations with limited emotional value. In contrast, the current house was narrated as the definitive material outcome of permanent settlement and interpreted through the culturally resonant concept of *sistemazione*, linking home to stability, family formation, and secure employment. Respondents also framed the house as the "fruit of toil," condensing decades of intensive labour undertaken within Queensland's expanding economy and reflecting a work ethic shaped by rural and wartime childhoods in Italy. The home further emerged as a site for expressing pride in Italian cultural identity, while also carrying traces of earlier experiences of assimilationist pressure and intolerance. Finally, domestic spaces—especially the living room and kitchen—were central to maintaining family unity, and the house symbolized security both as a robust structure and as an owned asset that provides reassurance in old age. Overall, the findings position migrants' houses as culturally dense artifacts through which settlement, identity, labour, and family relations are materially organized and continually reaffirmed.*

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INTRODUCTION

Home is one of the most widely used yet conceptually complex terms in environmental, architectural, and migration scholarship. It refers simultaneously to dwelling, attachment, memory, emplacement, identity, domestic routine, and ontological security, while also carrying meanings that are historically contingent and socially differentiated [Becker, 2003, Blunt and Dowling, 2006, Després, 1991, Hollander, 1991, Lewin, 2001, Mallett, 2004, Moore, 2000, Relph, 1976, Sommerville, 1992]. For migrant populations, home becomes even more layered: it may designate a remembered homeland, a present house, a network of kin relations, or a set of practices through which belonging is repeatedly enacted across distance [Baldassar, 2001, Becker, 2003, Lucas and Purkayastha, 2007, Portes et al., 1999]. Migration, therefore, does not simply shift people from one place to another; it reworks how place is inhabited, valued, narrated, and materially reproduced [Armstrong, 2000, Armstrong, 2004, Hage, 1997, Levin, 2010].

These questions are especially salient in the case of postwar Italian migration to Australia. The Italian presence in Australia is historically significant, socially diverse, and regionally differentiated, with Veneto migrants representing one of the important streams within broader postwar mobility [Baldassar and Pesman, 2005, Cresciani, 2003, Douglass, 1995, Jordens, 1995, Jupp, 1996, Pascoe, 1987]. Their settlement unfolded within changing Australian political and economic conditions marked by industrial expansion, gradual multicultural reform, and uneven experiences of assimilation, exclusion, and cultural recognition [Castels et al., 1988, Ellis and Christine, 2010, Furlan and Faggion, 2016b, Jordens, 1995, Jupp, 1996, Murphy, 1993]. Housing occupied a central place in this process. For many migrants, the house was not simply shelter; it was an achievement, an index of social mobility, a locus of family life, and a material expression of continuity with values carried from Italy [Furlan, 2015b, Furlan, 2015c, Pulvirenti, 1996, Pulvirenti, 2000].

Existing research on Italian-Australian housing has shown that migrant houses can preserve cultural traditions, embody transnational ties, sustain social capital, and operate as built heritage [Faggion and Furlan, 2018, Furlan, 2015a, Furlan, 2015c, Furlan, 2016, Furlan and Faggion, 2015a]. At the same time, broader work on migrant domesticity and housing demonstrates that dwelling form matters for settlement trajectories, consumption practices, and the making of belonging [Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2007, Levin, 2010]. Yet a more focused interpretive account is still needed of how migrants themselves connect house, home, labour, memory, permanence, and identity. Such an account requires moving beyond formal description of dwellings to examine the meanings through which houses become socially consequential.

This article addresses that need by investigating how Veneto migrants in Brisbane understand home through the houses they inhabit and through the migration trajectories that made those houses possible. The argument is that the migrant house is best understood not as a static container of culture but as a relational and temporally layered artifact. It condenses remembered hometowns, postwar labour, settlement decisions, moral aspirations, family obligations, and strategies of aging in place. In this sense, the house materializes what may be called *sistemazione*: a culturally specific settlement ideal through which stability, ownership, respectability, and intergenerational continuity are jointly organized [Pulvirenti, 1996, Pulvirenti, 2000]. The paper contributes to three conversations. First, it extends scholarship on meanings of home by showing how home remains simultaneously “there” and “here” in migrant narratives. Second, it advances research on migrant housing by interpreting domestic architecture as a medium of social reproduction rather than only a built form. Third, it situates Italian-Australian houses within wider debates on transnationalism, place-making, and heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The literature on home repeatedly emphasizes that home cannot be reduced to the physical dwelling alone. Classic and contemporary studies describe home as a nexus of spatial practice, identity, familiarity, memory, privacy, and security [Blunt and Dowling, 2006, Després, 1991, Lewin, 2001, Mallett, 2004, Moore, 2000, Sommerville, 1992]. Després [Després, 1991] and Mallett [Mallett, 2004] show that the meaning of home spans material, affective, and symbolic registers, while Moore [Moore, 2000] and Relph [Relph, 1976] insist that home is embedded in wider contexts of place and experience. Becker's work on older immigrants demonstrates that displacement and re-placement intensify the symbolic labor through which home is reconstructed [Becker, 2003]. Sommerville [Sommerville, 1992] similarly argues that home includes both roof and roots, combining material shelter with existential anchoring.

For migrants, this complexity is heightened by mobility, memory, and comparison across settings. Home may remain attached to an origin location even when everyday life is firmly established elsewhere [Lucas and Purkayastha, 2007]. The notion of home as an interpretive category rather than a fixed object is therefore important. Hollander's insistence that meanings are conditional and context-sensitive is useful here, because migrants do not speak of home in a single voice or at a single scale [Hollander, 1991]. Rather, home is assembled through relationships among people, places, routines, and narratives.

Transnational scholarship has shown that migrants often sustain dense practical and symbolic connections across borders [Baldassar, 2001, Portes et al., 1999]. These connections may be maintained through visits, remittances, kinship, association membership, foodways, and the built environment [Baldassar, 2001, Furlan and Faggion, 2016b, Hage, 1997, Thompson, 2005]. Lucas and Purkayastha [Lucas and Purkayastha, 2007] capture this dynamic through the idea that home may be both "here" and "there," while Hage [Hage, 1997] demonstrates that migrant home-building in Australia is also a claim to presence and legitimacy within the national space. Housing is therefore not peripheral to migration; it is one of the key sites where belonging is stabilized, displayed, and negotiated [Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2007, Levin, 2010, Pulvirenti, 1996, Pulvirenti, 2000].

Research on Italian migrants in Australia is particularly instructive because housing has long been intertwined with projects of settlement and family advancement. Pulvirenti's analyses of *casa mia* and *sistemazione* show that home ownership among Italian-Australian migrants carried ethical and gendered meanings tied to work, respectability, and proper family life [Pulvirenti, 1996, Pulvirenti, 2000]. Thompson's work on migrant women's relation to the suburban home further underscores that the house can be both resource and discipline, offering opportunity, stability, and social standing while also concentrating responsibilities of care [Thompson, 1994]. These studies suggest that the migrant house is a social project rather than a neutral asset.

Studies of Italian migrants' houses in Australia have established that these houses often encode cultural traditions in plan, use, ornament, and social function [Faggion and Furlan, 2018, Furlan, 2015a, Furlan, 2015c, Furlan, 2016, Furlan and Faggion, 2015b]. They are not simply replicas of houses in Italy, nor are they mere adaptations to Australian suburban norms. Instead, they emerge from selective translation, producing hybrid but culturally meaningful domestic forms [Furlan, 2015a, Furlan, 2015c, Furlan, 2016]. Furlan and Faggion show that such houses can serve as reservoirs of memory, continuity, and social capital, while also acquiring heritage value within multicultural Australia [Furlan and Faggion, 2015a, Furlan and Faggion, 2015b, Furlan and Faggion, 2016a]. Related work on migrant place-making and interpretation also suggests that built environments are key media through which unfamiliar contexts are rendered legible and habitable [Armstrong, 2000, Armstrong, 2003, Armstrong, 2004].

This perspective is strengthened by wider scholarship on the social life of domestic objects and spaces. Burnett [Burnett, 1978] situates housing historically as part of larger social transformation, while Chapman

[Chapman, 2005] argues that durable emotional attachment to material artifacts is central to how people value their environments. Supski’s study of kitchens and Krase’s work on ethnic change in urban settings both show that ordinary domestic spaces can become dense carriers of cultural continuity and adaptation [Kruse, 2006, Supski, 2007]. Mecca and Iozzi [Mecca and Iozzi, 2000] likewise demonstrate that migrant heritage is preserved not only in institutions and archives but in everyday material worlds.

The present study adopts an interpretive and hermeneutic orientation because meanings of home are not directly observable as objective properties of buildings; they are disclosed through narratives, practices, memories, and situated interpretations [Armstrong, 2003, Armstrong, 2004, Furlan and Faggion, 2015a, Madison, 1988]. Hermeneutic analysis is particularly appropriate where the research problem concerns how people make sense of place, migration, and domestic life across time. Rather than treating the house as a mere variable, the analysis treats it as a meaningful artifact whose significance emerges through the relationship between biography, cultural repertoire, settlement trajectory, and lived practice. On this basis, the study asks three questions:

1. How do Veneto migrants distinguish between houses, dwellings, and home across the migration trajectory?
2. How is the current Brisbane house connected to the culturally resonant ideal of *sistemazione*?
3. Which domestic spaces and material features are most important in sustaining identity, family unity, and security?

Table 1: Key analytical strands informing the study

Analytical strand	Core proposition	Representative references
Meanings of home and place	Home combines material dwelling, attachment, memory, security, and contextual interpretation.	[Becker, 2003, Blunt and Dowling, 2006, Després, 1991, Hollander, 1991, Lewin, 2001, Mallett, 2004, Moore, 2000, Relph, 1976, Sommerville, 1992]
Transnational and migrant home-making	Home may be simultaneously anchored in origin and destination; mobility reworks place attachment.	[Baldassar, 2001, Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2007, Hage, 1997, Levin, 2010, Lucas and Purkayastha, 2007, Portes et al., 1999, Thompson, 1994, Thompson, 2005]
Italian migration to Australia	Settlement is shaped by postwar migration, multicultural change, religion, associations, and labor mobility.	[Baldassar and Pesman, 2005, Castels et al., 1988, Cresciani, 2003, Douglass, 1995, Furlan and Faggion, 2016b, Jordens, 1995, Jupp, 1996, Murphy, 1993, Pascoe, 1987]
Housing, ownership, and <i>sistemazione</i>	The house is a moral and social achievement linked to work, ownership, and family consolidation.	[Furlan, 2015b, Pulvirenti, 1996, Pulvirenti, 2000]
Built form, heritage, and cultural continuity	Migrant houses preserve and reinterpret cultural traditions through domestic architecture and use.	[Armstrong, 2000, Armstrong, 2003, Armstrong, 2004, Burnett, 1978, Chapman, 2005, Faggion and Furlan, 2018, Furlan, 2015a, Furlan, 2015c, Furlan, 2016, Furlan and Faggion, 2015a, Furlan and Faggion, 2015b, Furlan and Faggion, 2016a, Kruse, 2006, Mecca and Iozzi, 2000, Supski, 2007]

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Italian migration to Australia intensified after the Second World War and took shape within national programs of labor recruitment, industrial expansion, and suburban growth [Cresciani, 2003, Furlan, 2015b, Jordens, 1995, Pascoe, 1987]. Veneto migrants formed part of this broader movement but brought with them distinct regional histories, family strategies, and rural backgrounds [Baldassar and Pesman, 2005]. In Queensland, as elsewhere in Australia, early settlement often involved difficult work, temporary accommodation, and gradual accumulation of savings before home ownership became feasible [Douglass, 1995, Furlan, 2015b, Pulvirenti, 1996, Pulvirenti, 2000]. The broader Australian economy was changing during these decades, creating opportunities in construction, manufacturing, transport, and related sectors that enabled upward

mobility for some migrant households [Ellis and Christine, 2010]. At the same time, these opportunities were mediated by social boundaries, linguistic pressure, and the uneven transition from assimilationist expectations to multicultural recognition [Castels et al., 1988, Jordens, 1995, Jupp, 1996, Murphy, 1993].

Within this setting, the house became a privileged site of settlement. Italian migrants frequently pursued ownership not only for economic prudence but because the house condensed family aspiration, cultural respectability, and long-term security [Pulvirenti, 1996, Pulvirenti, 2000]. Previous scholarship on Italian houses in Brisbane has documented the spatial specificity of these dwellings and their role in maintaining tradition [Faggion and Furlan, 2018, Furlan, 2015a, Furlan, 2015c, Furlan and Faggion, 2015b, Furlan and Faggion, 2016a]. The present article builds on that line of inquiry by concentrating specifically on meanings of home as articulated through the lived experience of Veneto migrants.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a qualitative, multi-sited design that combines in-depth interviews conducted in Australia and Italy with a focus-group discussion in Brisbane. This design was selected because meanings of home are distributed across memory, biography, social practice, and comparison between places; they cannot be adequately captured through decontextualized survey measures. Multi-sited qualitative inquiry makes it possible to trace how narratives of dwelling connect origin and destination, past and present, and family memory with material domestic space [Armstrong, 2004, Furlan and Faggion, 2015a, Madison, 1988].

The analytical strategy is interpretive rather than positivist. It seeks explanation through understanding the meanings actors attach to houses, settlement, ownership, labor, and domestic practice. This orientation is consistent with hermeneutic approaches in design and migration research, where the task is not only to describe spatial form but to interpret how built environments become meaningful in lived experience [Armstrong, 2003, Madison, 1988]. The design also aligns with qualitative work on migrant housing and older immigrant home meanings, which emphasizes depth, context, and the social construction of dwelling [Becker, 2003, Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2007, Levin, 2010, Lewin, 2001].

The empirical corpus comprises three complementary sources: (1) in-depth interviews with Veneto migrants and/or closely connected family members in Brisbane; (2) in-depth interviews conducted in Italy to recover origin-based meanings, hometown attachments, and comparative understandings of settlement; and (3) a focus-group discussion in Brisbane used to elicit shared memories, contested meanings, and collective reflections on domestic life. This triangulated structure enabled the study to move beyond singular personal narratives and to examine both individually lived and socially shared meanings of home.

Interviewing centered on migration trajectories, early accommodation experiences, pathways to home ownership, family formation, house design and use, relationships to hometowns in Italy, the role of work in making a house possible, and domestic practices surrounding hospitality, food, and intergenerational life. The focus group complemented the interviews by revealing points of convergence in language—especially around permanence, sacrifice, and *sistemazione*—while also highlighting variation in how participants ranked origin and destination as home.

Analysis proceeded in four stages. First, all interview and focus-group materials were read repeatedly to identify recurrent narrative patterns. Second, an initial open coding phase generated descriptive codes linked to place attachment, temporality, provisional dwelling, family life, labor, ethnic identity, domestic rooms, ownership, and aging. Third, these descriptive codes were consolidated into interpretive themes through constant comparison across sites and narrative positions. Fourth, the resulting themes were interpreted in dialogue with the literature on home, transnationalism, migrant housing, and domestic culture.

To strengthen analytic rigor, the study used three procedures: triangulation across interviews and focus-group materials, comparison between Italy- and Australia-based narratives, and iterative movement between empirical material and conceptual framing. The aim was not statistical generalization but theoretical and interpretive depth. Reliability was pursued through transparent coding and careful thematic consolidation, while validity derived from the coherence of themes across different forms of evidence and from their explanatory fit with participants' migration trajectories. Analytical coding framework is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Analytical coding framework

Coding domain	Indicative concerns	Interpretive purpose
Scalar home	hometown, Italy, Brisbane, "here," "there"	To identify whether home is singular, layered, or pluri-local
Temporal dwelling	first accommodation, rental, boarding, permanent house	To distinguish provisional dwellings from definitive settlement
Moral economy of housing	toil, saving, ownership, sacrifice, respectability	To interpret <i>sistemazione</i> as a settlement ideal
Domestic sociality	kitchen, living room, guests, family gatherings, food	To examine how rooms sustain kinship and cultural continuity
Identity and recognition	being Italian, assimilation pressure, pride, display	To analyze the house as a medium of ethnic visibility and belonging
Security in later life	solidity, property, old age, inheritance, reassurance	To understand the house as both shelter and future protection

The study followed standard ethical principles for qualitative research: participation was voluntary, informed consent governed interviews and focus-group participation, and confidentiality was preserved in the interpretation and presentation of findings. Because narratives of migration and family history can make households identifiable within close-knit communities, the analysis privileges thematic synthesis over direct quotation and avoids unnecessary personal detail.

FINDINGS

The first major finding is that home is understood as a layered, rather than singular, geography. Participants repeatedly oriented home toward their hometowns in Veneto, which remained the deepest symbolic reference for origin, kin memory, and early socialization. Yet this did not displace the significance of Brisbane. Instead, the current house in Brisbane was narrated as the place where life had been made, family had been raised, and permanence had been achieved. In this sense, home was neither fully detached from Italy nor reducible to a nostalgic homeland. It was experienced as a pluri-local relation in which "there" and "here" coexisted with different valences.

This finding resonates with literature showing that migrant home is often multi-scalar and stretched across national space [Baldassar, 2001, Lucas and Purkayastha, 2007, Portes et al., 1999]. However, the present material indicates that the coexistence of homes is not symmetrical. Italy tended to function as origin, memory, and symbolic truth, while Brisbane functioned as the locus of present dwelling, responsibility, and everyday reproduction. Home was therefore divided by function rather than by exclusive allegiance. This differentiation helps explain why respondents could maintain strong attachment to Italy while also speaking of the Brisbane house as indispensable to who they had become.

A second major finding concerns the distinction respondents drew between earlier Australian accommodations

and the current house. Initial dwellings in Australia were remembered as necessary but incomplete: boarding arrangements, rented premises, or modest first houses were frequently narrated as temporary solutions adopted under pressure of work, cost, and adaptation. These places provided shelter, but they were not invested with the same emotional and moral density as the present home.

This distinction is analytically important because it shows that not every lived dwelling becomes home. The difference lies not in occupancy alone but in whether the dwelling is understood as durable, self-directed, and integrated with family life. Here the study converges with scholarship that treats settlement housing as formative in migrant trajectories [Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2007, Levin, 2010], while also echoing work on place attachment that distinguishes residence from rootedness [Moore, 2000, Relph, 1976, Sommerville, 1992]. The current Brisbane house became home precisely because it marked the end of provisionality. It represented control, continuity, and settled intention.

The third and most powerful theme is the centrality of *sistemazione*. Respondents used the house to signify that they had finally become settled in the fullest sense: employed, respectable, family-oriented, and secure. The house condensed years of disciplined work, sacrifice, saving, and gradual advancement. It was described not merely as acquired property but as the visible outcome of a moral biography. The present dwelling therefore embodied the “fruit of toil,” a phrase that captures how labor was transformed into a stable material world.

This theme extends Pulvirenti’s account of Italian-Australian home ownership by showing that *sistemazione* remains analytically useful not only for understanding tenure choice but for interpreting the house as a cultural and ethical achievement [Pulvirenti, 1996, Pulvirenti, 2000]. The meaning of the house was inseparable from memories of hard work, frugality, and family duty. Respondents’ rural and wartime childhoods in Italy intensified these meanings, making the house in Brisbane stand as evidence that instability had been overcome. The finding also aligns with broader historical accounts of postwar Italian migration and Australia’s changing economy, in which labor discipline and economic restructuring created the conditions for mobility and eventual property ownership [Cresciani, 2003, Ellis and Christine, 2010, Furlan, 2015b].

The current house also operated as a stage on which Italian identity could be expressed with dignity. Participants described the home as a place where cultural continuity was rendered visible through hospitality, food preparation, decoration, order, and modes of family gathering. Domestic space thereby functioned as a site of cultural affirmation rather than private withdrawal. The display of care in the house signaled pride in being Italian and in having built a respectable family environment abroad.

At the same time, these affirmations were shaped by memories of earlier intolerance and pressure to assimilate. The house took on added significance because it offered a controlled space in which cultural practices could be maintained without external scrutiny. This finding speaks to scholarship on multiculturalism, migrant home-building, and ethnic visibility in urban space [Castels et al., 1988, Hage, 1997, Jupp, 1996, Kruse, 2006, Thompson, 2005]. It also strengthens previous research showing that Italian migrants’ houses in Australia act as repositories of continuity and built heritage [Faggion and Furlan, 2018, Furlan, 2015a, Furlan, 2016, Furlan and Faggion, 2015b, Mecca and Iozzi, 2000]. The house was not simply a background setting for identity; it was one of the principal media through which identity was materially composed and socially communicated.

Among the most meaningful spaces in the house were the kitchen and living room. Participants associated these rooms with everyday togetherness, intergenerational exchange, visiting, and the practical reproduction of family unity. The kitchen was especially significant because it linked food, care, routine, and cultural transmission. The living room, by contrast, often represented display, formal hospitality, and the public face of domestic respectability. Together, these rooms enabled the house to function as both intimate family environment and socially legible statement of accomplishment.

This finding is consistent with research that emphasizes the cultural and gendered importance of domestic interiors [Supski, 2007, Thompson, 1994]. It also connects with scholarship on emotionally durable objects and spaces, in which attachment develops not only through symbolic meaning but through repetitive acts of care and use [Chapman, 2005]. In this case, rooms accumulated meaning through recurrent gatherings, shared meals, celebrations, and forms of presence that reaffirmed family continuity. The architecture of home mattered not because space mechanically determines social life, but because rooms afforded particular modes of encounter, memory, and social recognition [Furlan, 2015c, Furlan and Faggion, 2016a].

A final theme concerns security. Respondents understood the house as security in two interrelated senses. First, it was a physically solid structure, valued for robustness, order, and durability. Second, it was an owned asset that reassured residents about old age, dependency, and the future of the family. The significance of ownership therefore exceeded economic calculation. Ownership provided emotional reassurance, moral independence, and a sense that one's lifetime of labor had been converted into something lasting.

This meaning is especially important in later life, when migration histories are assessed retrospectively and questions of inheritance, care, and belonging become more urgent [Becker, 2003, Lewin, 2001]. The house offered not only present comfort but retrospective justification: it made visible that migration had produced tangible security. In this respect, the house reconciled mobility with permanence, and struggle with settlement. Summary of principal findings is given in Table 3 and the interpretive model of the migrant house as a culturally dense artifact is shown in Figure 1.

Table 3: Summary of principal findings

Theme	Empirical meaning	Conceptual implication
Pluri-local home	Italy remains symbolic home; Brisbane is the lived site of dwelling	Home is multi-scalar and differentiated by function
Provisional vs. definitive dwelling	Earlier accommodations are remembered as instrumental, not fully home	Settlement requires permanence, control, and family integration
<i>Sistemazione</i>	House marks moral completion of migration through work and ownership	Housing is an ethical and social achievement, not only tenure status
Domestic cultural display	The house materializes Italian identity, dignity, and continuity	Home is a medium of recognition and heritage
Kitchen and living room	Rooms sustain kinship, hospitality, and intergenerational transmission	Domestic architecture supports social reproduction
Security in old age	House signifies solidity, independence, and future reassurance	Ownership links material shelter with ontological security

DISCUSSION

The findings support and refine the proposition that home is best understood as a relational achievement rather than a singular place. In line with prior literature, the study shows that home incorporates memory, identity, materiality, and security [Blunt and Dowling, 2006, Després, 1991, Mallett, 2004, Moore, 2000]. Yet it also

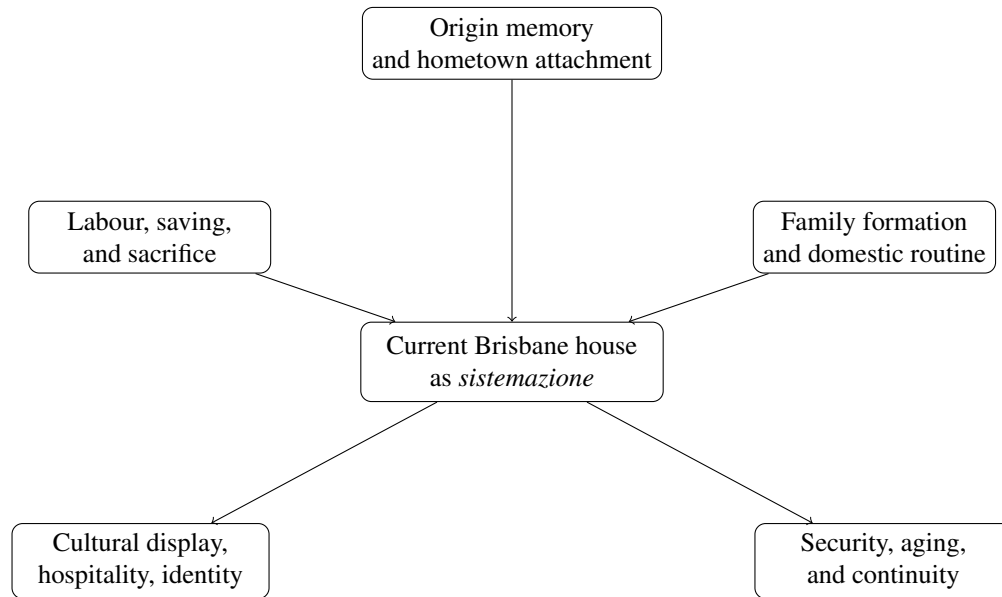


Figure 1: Interpretive model of the migrant house as a culturally dense artifact

clarifies that, for Veneto migrants in Brisbane, these dimensions are unevenly distributed across locations. Italy persists as symbolic origin, while the Brisbane house anchors practical life and long-term settlement. The contribution here is to show that pluri-local home is not an abstract transnational condition but a domestically organized one. It is through the house that multiple scales of belonging are held together.

The paper also deepens scholarship on migrant housing by demonstrating that permanence matters as much as form. Earlier Australian dwellings did not become home simply because they were occupied. They remained transitional because they lacked the temporal, moral, and relational density later attached to the owned house. This distinction is important for housing research, which often focuses on tenure or typology without fully theorizing how a dwelling becomes existentially consequential [Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2007, Levin, 2010]. The present study suggests that the transformation of dwelling into home depends on three converging conditions: permanence, moral investment, and family-centered use.

A further contribution concerns *sistemazione*. Existing work has shown that this concept links housing to mobility, gender, and ownership among Italian-Australian migrants [Pulvirenti, 1996, Pulvirenti, 2000]. The present analysis extends that insight by showing that *sistemazione* also organizes retrospective meaning. It allows respondents to narrate migration as intelligible and justified: decades of labor, sacrifice, and adaptation culminate in the house as a stable moral world. The concept is therefore not only a historical aspiration but an interpretive key through which settlement is remembered.

The findings also underscore the importance of reading domestic architecture as social infrastructure. Kitchens, living rooms, and other ordinary spaces were critical to family cohesion, hospitality, and the maintenance of Italian identity. This supports prior work on Italian transnational houses and on the cultural significance of interiors [Faggion and Furlan, 2018, Furlan, 2015c, Furlan and Faggion, 2016a, Supski, 2007]. It further suggests that heritage should not be confined to monumental or officially recognized sites. Migrant houses can be heritage-bearing environments precisely because they hold together labor history, domestic practice, intergenerational transmission, and everyday forms of cultural dignity [Armstrong, 2000, Furlan and Faggion, 2015b, Mecca and Iozzi, 2000].

More broadly, the article speaks to Australian debates on migration, multiculturalism, and belonging. The

house emerged partly as a response to insecurity: to early experiences of marginality, to the pressures of assimilation, and to uncertainty about the future. In this sense, the home was both refuge and claim. It provided protection, but it also asserted a legitimate place within the social landscape of Australia [Castels et al., 1988, Hage, 1997, Jordens, 1995, Jupp, 1996, Murphy, 1993]. This dual role helps explain why the migrant house carries such weight in memory and identity.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the houses of Veneto migrants in Brisbane should be understood as culturally dense artifacts through which migration, settlement, labor, identity, and family life are materially organized. Home, in this account, is neither singular nor purely sentimental. It is a pluri-local formation in which hometown attachment to Italy coexists with the Brisbane house as the present site of dwelling and security. Earlier Australian accommodations are remembered as necessary but provisional, whereas the current house represents the definitive outcome of settlement. The concept of *sistemazione* is crucial to this shift, because it ties the house to ownership, moral worth, family consolidation, and the successful conversion of work into permanence.

The study contributes to scholarship on home by showing how multiple scales of belonging are domestically mediated, and to migration research by demonstrating that housing is central to how mobility is made socially durable. It also contributes to architectural and heritage studies by interpreting the migrant house not only as built form but as a medium of memory, continuity, and recognition. Future work could extend this research comparatively by examining second-generation interpretations of parental houses, regional differences among Italian migrants, or the changing significance of these homes under contemporary conditions of aging, inheritance, and suburban transformation.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

L. Faggion, Charles Darwin University; laurafaggion35@gmail.com.

R. Furlan, Lusail University.

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