

Refiguring Italian Cultural Quarters:  
*Il Ghetto di Venezia. 500 anni di vita*  
[*The Venice Ghetto. 500 Years of Life*]  
(Film by Emanuela Giordano, 2015)  
and *Primavera e Autunni [Springs and*  
*Autumns]* (Graphic Novel by Ciaj Rocchi  
and Matteo Demonte, 2015)

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1. *Introduction*

This piece briefly summarizes the contents of part of a University course in cultural geography held at the University of Padua in the 2015/16 academic year, with the aim of suggesting a possible didactical contextualization for two recent creative works devoted to very different examples of “cultural quarters” in Italy (the Venetian Jewish quarter and so-called “Milan’s Chinatown”). The very first notion of comparing the docufilm *Il Ghetto di Venezia. 500 anni di vita [The Venice Ghetto. 500 Years of Life]* (2015) and the graphic novel *Primavera e Autunni [Springs and Autumns]* (2015) originated from a purely formal appreciation of them. The works, in fact, both present pieces of creative cartography of the cultural quarter, which have particularly stimulated our imaginations as cultural geographers (Figs 1 and 2). Subsequently, a deeper analysis of the complex implications of these informed and carefully arranged creative works led us to consider them precious resources for the teaching of cultural geography. Creative works became crucial given that we built upon them educational projects that refer to complex, transcalar, and multidimensional relations between cultural processes and spaces. In the initial part of this article, therefore, we draw on recent international and Italian literature on ethnic spatial concentration to contextualize the two works presented here.

2. *Debates on ethnic spatial concentration*

In the context of renewed debates over the accommodation of diverse societies in Western multicultural cities, there has been a resurgence of

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reflections on the theme of the spatial concentration of minority ethnic groups<sup>1</sup>. Some of these reflections are devoted to critically analysing how a presumed troubling drift towards residential clustering, spatial self-segregation, or even “ghettoisation”, has gained prominence in the political agendas of many cities. Some studies show how “the segregation problem” has mythical properties in common with the rhetorics of the so-called “neighbourhood effect”<sup>2</sup>. Other reflections suggest that the default assumption of an existing strong correlation between ethnicity, location and socio-economic inclusion has become part of a too simplistic discourse on the role of the spatial dimensions of integration<sup>3</sup>. Further reflections are devoted to the study (and criticism<sup>4</sup>) of the currently pervasive tendency towards a “mixing policy”, which is an urban policy aimed to counter concentration and segregation in many different ways: 1. by desegregating (multi)ethnic concentrated neighbourhoods/buildings and dispersing their residents via public housing projects or so-called “real estate mobbing”; 2. by diluting the presence and mitigating the visibility of migrants/minority groups in residential and public spaces via the introduction of new high-quality urban functions that attracts autochthonous and more affluent city users or residents; 3. by imposing limitations to ethnically connoted commercial activities in order to prevent their proliferation; and 4. by installing newly projected mixed neighbourhoods. Additional reflections are devoted to those processes by which “the segregation problem” is transformed into “the segregation resource”. *Why not ghettos?* is the provocative question Sandro Cattacin<sup>5</sup> and others have posed to describe the

<sup>1</sup> The Italian national legislation (L.N. 482/1999) lists as “minorities” only a number of historic linguistic minorities that have resided for centuries in particular areas of the national territory. This list does not include Hebrew (which is not the habitual spoken language of a linguistic community but the idiom of a cultural tradition of a religious minority historically rooted in Italy), probably due to the absence of a precise territorial rootedness for this language (see Toso F., *Le minoranze linguistiche in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2008). The term “minority”, thus, is not used to address more recently arrived international migrants. Moreover, the use of the term “nationality/citizenship” to characterise diversity is more suitable in the Italian context than the terms “race” and “ethnic group”, which are preferred in other national contexts, but generally are not employed to indicate diversity of different national/cultural backgrounds in public, official Italian discourse. For more about this matter and an overview of Italian immigration, institutional models of integration (reasonable, indirect and implicit integration) and spatial aspects such as the relative absence of segregation and the role of public spaces, see Magnani N., “Migration, New Urban Ethnic Minorities and the Race/Ethnic Relations Approach in a Recent Immigration Country: The Case of Italy”, in *Research in Urban Sociology*, 8, 2007, pp. 63-96.

<sup>2</sup> See Finney N. and Simpson L., *Sleepwalking to Segregation? Challenging Myths about Race and Migration*, Bristol, The Policy Press, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> See Van Ham M. and Tammaru T., “New Perspectives on Ethnic Segregation over Time and Space. A Domains Approach”, in *Urban Geography*, 37, n. 7, 2016, pp. 953-962.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance, Ruiz-Tagle J., “The Broken Promises of Social Mix: The Case of the Cabrini-Green/Near North Area in Chicago”, in *Urban Geography*, 37, n. 3, 2016, pp. 352-372.

<sup>5</sup> Cattacin S., *Why Not “Ghettos”? The Governance of Migration in the Splintering City*, Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers in International Migration and Ethnic Relations, 2, 2006, School of International Migration and Ethnic Relations Malmö University.

resources that disadvantaged ethnically segregated neighbourhoods offer in terms of material and symbolic utility for the people living there, at a time of economic crisis and strong decline of the welfare state in Western societies. Indeed, reflections on the internal and external views on “the ghetto”, as well as on the potentialities and limitations of urban ethnic clusterings, have been seen at least since the 1920s, when the Chicago School (and in particular Louis Wirth<sup>6</sup>) highlighted the sociological significance of the American “non Jewish ghettos”, i.e. the areas of ethnic concentrations of the major immigrant-receiving cities of the US. By positioning contemporary marginalized clusterings as “aggregated neighbourhoods” rather than “segregated” ones, Cattacin states that in contemporary democratic and open societies, “ghettos” have a role which should be less focused on external exclusion or segregation and more on the internal re-appropriation of sense from the inhabitants of these places. The ethnic concentration, thus, is seen as suspended between a dynamic and voluntarily adopted ethnic enclave that functions as a launch pad for full socio-economic inclusion, and an externally imposed and stigmatizing segregation from which there seems no escape<sup>7</sup>.

An alternative way to consider ethnic concentration as a resource is the well-established and still-growing trend towards the spectacularization of “ethnic landscapes”<sup>8</sup>, or the branding of “ethnic/cultural quarters”. In this case, the (mono)ethnic concentration is maintained (at least until gentrification processes displace the most fragile members of the ethnic minority), while the reputation of the neighbourhood dramatically changes since the quarter becomes attractive precisely for its ethnic flavour. With London’s Banglatown as a paradigmatic example of how to transform “the ghetto” into an attractive “cultural quarter” by marketing ethnic diversity as a key locational strength and promoting ethnicized patterns of consumption<sup>9</sup>, the branding of culturally diverse/ethnic quarters (and its criticism) is currently a developing tendency in Europe and around the globe. The development of migrant districts into conspicuous attractions and the strategic use of ethnic diversity are considered “proactive” urban policies, which replace forms of “reactive” approaches that address diversity only as a

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<sup>6</sup> Wirth L., *The Ghetto*, Chicago, Phoenix, 1928.

<sup>7</sup> Wood P. and Landry C., *The Intercultural City. Planning for Diversity Advantage*, London, Earthscan, 2008, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> Shaw S., Bagwell S. and Karmowska J., “Ethnoscaping as Spectacle: Reimagining Multicultural Districts as New Destinations for Leisure and Tourism Consumption”, in *Urban Studies*, 41, n. 10, 2004, pp. 1983-2000.

<sup>9</sup> See: Keith M., *After the Cosmopolitan? Multicultural Cities and the Future of Racism*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2005, pp. 216-221; Briata P., *Sul filo della frontiera. Politiche urbane in un quartiere multi-etnico di Londra*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2007; Shaw S., “Marketing Ethnoscaping as Spaces of Consumption: ‘Banglatown London’s Curry Capital’”, in *Journal of Town and City Management*, 1, n. 4, 2011, pp. 381-395; Alexander C., “Making Bengali Brick Lane: Claiming and Contesting Space in East London”, in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 62, n. 2, 2011, pp. 201-220.

problem<sup>10</sup>. More generally, cultural diversity as a resource has become an irremissible part of a dominant neoliberal narrative of the “creative city”.

### 3. *The Italian context*

In Western cities, ethnic concentration manifests itself in many different variations. This is also due to very different national contexts. As for the Italian case, with rare exceptions, a common trait is the absence of ethnic concentration in specific quarters. At the scale of quarters, only in rare cases do the number of foreigners exceed 20% of the total residents. Very high levels of concentration are more easily found in single multiethnic buildings or apartment complexes<sup>11</sup>. The most diffuse form of ethnic concentration in Italy seems to be linked to commercial activities<sup>12</sup>. It's worth noting, then, that 45% of foreigners in Italy live in municipalities of less than 20.000 inhabitants. Moreover, since Italian migration has always been characterized by superdiversity, it is rare to find urban clusterings where only one homogeneous national group of immigrants lives. Interestingly, a survey about the recent wave of urban ethnography related to migratory phenomena emerging in Italy<sup>13</sup> includes the following main themes of interest: migrant multi-sited experiences, everyday multiculturalism, initial processes of gentrification, re-territorialization and home-making, liminal spaces or “cosmopolitan canopies”, and securitarian policies (with a focus on public spaces). Segregation, indeed, is not a main social phenomenon or a topic for Italian migration studies. Nonetheless, recent works by Paola Briata have shown how, even if Italy presents a peculiar situation, Italian urban policies are growingly thought to implicitly be imitating the dominant Western trend of the mixing policy as the main response to (a presumed) drift towards segregation<sup>14</sup>.

As for the branding of multiethnic quarters, a pioneering study by Italian sociologist Giovanni Semi<sup>15</sup> was devoted to the Quadrilatero Romano in Turin, where he studied how the area was increasingly becoming a place for

<sup>10</sup> Schmiz A., “Staging a ‘Chinatown’ in Berlin: The Role of City Branding in the Urban Governance of Ethnic Diversity”, in *European Urban and Regional Studies*, published online before print 2016, (doi:10.1177/0969776416637208).

<sup>11</sup> See Cancellieri A., Marzadro M. and Ostanel E., “Hotel House, Cita e ‘Via Anelli’. Risorse, percorsi e rischi di tre condomini multietnici”, in *Sociologia urbana e rurale*, 107, pp. 35-52. For a contribution in English see Cancellieri A., “Towards a Progressive Home-making: The Ambivalence of Migrants’ Experience in a Multicultural Condominium”, in *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, published online first November 2015 (doi: 10.1007/s10901-015-9489-7).

<sup>12</sup> Briata P., *Spazio urbano e immigrazione in Italia. Esperienze di pianificazione in una prospettiva europea*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2014, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> Cancellieri A., “Etnografie urbane e differenza. Potenzialità e percorsi di una *new wave* italiana”, *Lo Squaderno. Explorations in Space and Society*, 24, 2012, pp. 13-19.

<sup>14</sup> Briata P., *Spazio urbano e immigrazione in Italia. Esperienze di pianificazione in una prospettiva europea*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Semi G., “Il quartiere che (si) distingue. Un caso di «gentrification» a Torino”, in *Studi Culturali*, 1, n. 1, 2004, pp. 83-108.

the marketing of an appealing cultural difference by means of ethnographic work and a geosemiotic analysis of ethnic signs. Significantly, while Davide Papotti was introducing the issue of ethnic landscapes in Italian geography and showing their very low impact<sup>16</sup>, American sociologist Jerome Krase was trying to compare through visual semiotics the “invasion” of diverse (Chinese, Mexican, etc) ethnic signs in the historical US Little Italies with the emergence of ethnicized (commercial) landscapes in the Big (real) Italy<sup>17</sup>. Interestingly, at the beginning of the 2000s, Krase found it very difficult to see such landscapes in Rome, where he based his research, and finally concentrated on the Esquilino neighbourhood as the “strongest semiotic parallel”, asking rhetorically: “when will ‘Chinatown’, ‘Little India’, or ‘Little Africa’ become part of the (Italian) tourist landscape”? Like spatial segregation of minority groups, tourism/leisure-oriented cultural quarters, indeed, are not a prominent phenomenon in Italy.

#### 4. Creative works on Italian “cultural quarters”

In this piece we would like to point out two recent creative works, or cultural products, which address extremely different variations on the theme of ethnic spatial concentration/cultural quarter in Italy in original and productive ways.

The first product is the docufilm *Il Ghetto di Venezia. 500 anni di vita* [*The Venice Ghetto. 500 years of life*] (2015, Tangram Film, Italy/France 54’), directed by Emanuela Giordano in collaboration, among others, with the Committee “I 500 anni del Ghetto di Venezia”. This Committee has been recently formed by the Jewish Community of Venice and the Municipality of Venice (together with other subjects) “to foster the Jewish heritage of the site and guarantee its future as a key religious, cultural and artistic site open to people worldwide” (quoted from the website [www.veniceghetto500.org](http://www.veniceghetto500.org)). The docufilm, released concurrently with the event/thematic year of the five hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Venetian ghetto, reconstructs the history of the oldest ghetto of Europe (where the very word ‘ghetto’ originated) “thanks to the memories and to the testimonies of excellent witnesses, custodians of the memory and of the complex evolution of the Jewish community in Venice” (quoted from official film synopsis). The narrative track follows the path of discovery of a teenage Jewish boy from New York, who is sent to Venice to learn about the origins of his mother’s family<sup>18</sup>.

The second product is the graphic novel *Primavera e Autunni* [*Springs*

<sup>16</sup> Papotti D., “I paesaggi etnici dell’immigrazione straniera in Italia”, in Varotto M. and Zunic M. (eds), *Studi in onore di Giovanna Brunetta*, Padova, Dipartimento di Geografia “Giuseppe Morandini”, 2002, pp. 151-66.

<sup>17</sup> Krase J., “Seeing Succession in Little and Big Italy - Encountering Ethnic Vernacular Landscapes”, in Frers L. and Meier L. (eds), *Encountering Urban Places: Visual and Material Performances in the City*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 97-118.

<sup>18</sup> See the film trailer at <<http://eng.tangramfilm.it/portfolio-items/ghetto-venice-500-years-life/>>.

and *Autumns*], authored by Ciaj Rocchi and Matteo Demonte (ed. BeccoGiallo, 2015). Designed by descendants of the first mixed Chinese-Italian families that settled in what is now journalistically known as “Milan’s Chinatown”, this graphic novel reconstructs fifty years (from the 1930s to the 1970s) of the history of the oldest Chinese community in Milan through the biography of Wu Li Shan, travelling vendor of silk neckties and then leather businessman who built his entrepreneurial career and family at the “Quartiere degli Ortolani” (around via Canonica-Sarpi), the area where Chinese migrants (mainly from Zhejiang) have settled since the 1920s<sup>19</sup>.

Whereas the recreational attractiveness of London’s Banglatown has recently been journalistically compared to the vibrancy of some Italian cosmopolitan locations (such as the Carmine quarter in Brescia), academic comparative studies have clarified how terms such as “Chinatown” or “Banglatown” have to be properly understood and used in the Italian context<sup>20</sup>. The so-called “Milan’s Chinatown” is not an institutionalized leisure/tourism-oriented district. There is neither a Chinese gate, nor ethnicized architectural decorations or bi-lingual road signs. The focus here is neither residential nor related to ethnic economy (e.g. restaurant business), but to the clustering of wholesale trade activities (mostly clothing and shoes) ran by Chinese entrepreneurs<sup>21</sup>.

With regard to the branding of Jewish quarters, as a growing literature shows, the staging of Jewishness and the construction of a Jewish landscape in specific city areas (including areas where a Jewish community no longer exists) is expanding Europe-wide and beyond<sup>22</sup>. The very specific case of the Venetian Jewish ghetto has been analysed by historian Simon Levis Sullam<sup>23</sup> as a “rediscovery” of artistic heritage concurrent with a rebirth of the memory of the Holocaust, which marked the initial revitalization and the following processes of “museumification” and “monumentalization” of the

<sup>19</sup> See the book trailer at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGvpTtBR7e8>>.

<sup>20</sup> See Briata P. and Fioretti C., “Banglatown a confronto: i ‘quartieri etnici’ Spitalfields a Londra e Torpignattara a Roma”, in *Ananke*, 77, n. 1, 2016, pp. 12-21 and Hatziprokopiou P. and Montagna N., “Contested Chinatown: Chinese Migrants’ Incorporation and the Urban Space in London and Milan”, in *Ethnicities*, 12, n. 6, 2012, pp. 706-729.

<sup>21</sup> Briata P., *Spazio urbano e immigrazione in Italia. Esperienze di pianificazione in una prospettiva europea*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2014, pp. 23-28.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance Gantner E.B., “Interpreting the Jewish Quarter”, in *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 23, n. 2, 2014, pp. 26-42 on Berlin and Budapest; Jakubowicz A., “Cosmopolitanism with Roots: The Jewish Presence in Shanghai before the Communist Revolution and as Brand in the New Metropolis”, in Hemelryk Donald S., Kofman E. and Kevin C. (eds), *Branding Cities: Cosmopolitanism, Parochialism and Social Change*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, pp. 156-171 on Shanghai; Shaw S., Bagwell S. and Karmowska J., “Ethnoscaping as Spectacle: Reimagining Multicultural Districts as New Destinations for Leisure and Tourism Consumption”, in *Urban Studies*, 41, n. 10, 2004 on Kazimierz.

<sup>23</sup> Levis Sullam S., *Il Ghetto*, in Levis Sullam S. and Brusò F., *Il Ghetto/Piazza Barche*, Padova, Il Poligrafo, 2008, pp. 9-40. Levis Sullam S., “Reinventing Jewish Venice: The Scene of the Ghetto between Monument and Metaphor”, in Waligorska M., Wagenhofer S. (eds), *Cultural Representations of Jewishness at the Turn of the 21st Century*, Fiesole, EUI HEC Working Papers, 2010, pp. 13-25.

Venice ghetto during the 1980s and the 1990s. The idea of the ghetto as part of a traditional multicultural face of Venice (and a new multicultural face of Italy) has been advanced by institutional local discourses in the 1990s, but it has been confined to the sphere of high culture rather than “cultural consumption” of ethnic diversity. Nonetheless, the “staging” of cultural diversity, the touristification of the site and its growing gentrification are emerging contested issues.

It has been said that because of its peculiar features (for instance, the absence of a national politics of multiculturalism or assimilationism), Italy is, and could more largely be, a laboratory for innovative urban policies addressing cultural diversity, as well as a laboratory for the production of creative (research-based, literary, filmic, artistic, etc.) narratives of emplaced diversity. If the pessimistic and hostile narratives of the mass media seem to feed policy agendas and public opinion much more than the alternative accounts of academic research, then the role of constructive initiatives directed to wider publics, such as those presented here, seem crucial for delivering a *usable* knowledge about cultural diversity<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, we suggest that both *The Venice Ghetto. 500 years of life* and *Springs and Autumns* seem to stimulate the “promotion” instead of “commodification” of the cultural quarter. This attitude could perhaps be seen as a beneficial outcome of the relative absence of commercial spectacularization of ethnic diversity in Italy. In what follows we would like to trace a brief list of aspects that, in our view, these two cultural products share.

– *Creative cartographies and convergent media*. As previously mentioned, the works we analysed share the presence of pieces of creative cartography. The mapping of Otherness<sup>25</sup>, indeed, is a much contested practice, and these works open up creative ways of doing it. The creative use of the cartographic language is particularly pervasive within *Springs and Autumns*, where maps function simultaneously as informative, cognitive, symbolic, and aesthetic signs<sup>26</sup>. *The Venice Ghetto. 500 years of life* uses an animated cartoon-like cartography to geovisualize the changing morphology of the ghetto and to dynamically spatialise the presence of Jews in Venice across time (in particular, after the opening of the ghetto in 1797). It is worth noting, then, that there is an evident convergence between the two works from a formal point of view. Deriving initially from an animated film project, the graphic novel *Springs and Autumns* (made by two filmmakers) clearly resembles a videoboard, while the docufilm uses the language of animation (with illustrations by Felicita Sala and Gianluca Maruotti, and animation by

<sup>24</sup> Briata P., *Spazio urbano e immigrazione in Italia. Esperienze di pianificazione in una prospettiva europea*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2014, p. 88.

<sup>25</sup> See Rossetto T., “The Map, the Other and the Public Visual Image”, in *Social and Cultural Geography*, 16, n. 4, 2015, pp. 465-491.

<sup>26</sup> For an introduction to comic book cartographies see Peterle G., “Teaching Cartography with Comics: Some Examples from BeccoGiallo’s Graphic Novel Series”, in *J-Reading. Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography*, 1, n. 4, 2015, pp. 69-78.

Mathieu Rolin, Estelle Chaloupy and Marion Chopin) for the reconstruction of all the scenes set in the ancient past.

– *Refiguring from inside*. These two narratives do not only visually portray but also consciously re-figure the cultural quarter. As observed by Gantner (2014: 29), external images play a crucial role in the contemporary and consumerist re-infusion of “Jewishness” in Jewish quarters. *The Venice Ghetto. 500 years of life*, instead, includes an internal narrative by the Venetian Jewish community, of which only thirty people still live in the ghetto. Obviously, it should be carefully contextualized within the complex interplay between the different actors (Venetian Jews, old and new non-Jewish inhabitants, visitors and more recently settled Chabad-Lubavitch Jews) that live in and produce the meaning of this shared space. As Antonella Di Trani<sup>27</sup> has recently posited, different actors reclaim the Venetian ghetto through the construction of a specific discourse. Anyway, the docufilm results in an interpretation of the site which appears very tactful. Indeed, it seems to contribute to the idea of the 500th anniversary as “an occasion for in-depth knowledge, scientific discovery and civil engagement, above all with reference to what is topical in the specific contents of the anniversary”, such as the present co-existence of diverse identities and cultural backgrounds in our societies, as Levis Sullam puts it<sup>28</sup>.

In *Springs and Autumns*, a similar contextualization of the different components of the Chinese community in Milan (first settlers and migrants arrived in the recent decades) should be carried out. However, sinologist and migration sociologist Daniele Cologna, who has long studied Chinese people in Milan, has emphasized how the novelty and importance of this graphic novel rests in the fact that it provides a rare internal narrative: “we need to see this story” as it is narrated by the insiders, he states<sup>29</sup>. The comic’s language, with its drawn and written, visual and textual/narrative hybrid form, seems to productively meet this need to visualize insiders’ narratives to embrace their perspective.

Clearly, these two creative products do not contribute to the current global

<sup>27</sup> Di Trani A., *Le Ghetto de Venise, anthropologie contemporaine d'une ancienne enclave urbaine*, Thèse d'anthropologie préparée à l'EHESS sous la direction d'Alban Bensa, dissertation 12 October 2015 (Abstract available at <<http://iris.chess.fr/index.php?481>>).

<sup>28</sup> Interview released by Simon Levis Sullam (University of Ca' Foscari, Venice) on March 24, 2016 to *ytali*, available at <<https://ytali.com/2016/03/24/venezia-il-ghetto-e-oltre-il-ghetto-parla-simon-levis-sullam/>>. For some incisive considerations on the comparison between the Venetian Jewish ghetto and the general theme of spatial concentration of diverse people between segregation and cosmopolitanism (in addition to an history of the Venice ghetto), see: Calabi D., *Venezia e il ghetto. Cinquecento anni del "recinto degli ebrei"*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2016, pp. 175-179. For an history of the idea of the ghetto see Duneier M., *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> An intervention by Daniele Cologna (University of Insubria, Varese) and a detailed account of the process of creation of the graphic novel can be found at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AvGGBNbcyk>> (video of the first presentation of *Springs and Autumns* at the Triennale di Milano, on 25 Novembre 2015).



trend of establishing ethnic theme parks. In the same way, however, they provide the general audience with a fascinating and attractive image of the cultural quarter, wisely playing between rigorous knowledge and aesthetic gestures while refiguring those spaces from inside. This is particularly strategic in the case of Milan's "Chinatown", which is still subject to stigmatisation and marginalisation, if not clampdown (rather than being seen as an economic asset for the city). In a diverse way, this is also a useful strategy for the Venetian Jewish ghetto since the docufilm provides and disseminates an informed and lived, rather than a consumeristic and staged, portrait of it.

– *Time-space narratives.* Both the film and the graphic novel present a narrative track anchored to historical accounts and biographical experience. By reconstructing the life of more or less ancient historical minorities, both the works refigure the cultural quarter as *a dynamic space rather than a frozen landscape*. Consequently, they interrogate the audience not only on the past and present perception of those places but also on their future existence and perception.

– *The cultural quarter as a prism.* In many ways the two works not only refigure some specific districts of Venice and Milan, but they treat these areas as prisms through which the history of spaces at different scales (cities, nations, and even continents) refracts. In this way they also feature a great complexity of relationships, networks, transcalar relations, and parallelisms across time in which the ghetto/cultural quarter is always imbricated. For instance, by dramatically evoking Atlantic crossings of ships of Jews escaping from Europe to the United States, the film implicitly hints to current Mediterranean migrations. As for the graphic novel, the "prism-effect", for instance, is vividly rendered by the continuous cross references between historical events in the city of Milan, in Italy and in China.

– *Clustering as interchange.* Both *The Venice Ghetto. 500 years of life and Springs and Autumns* feature and visually display past stories of openness and interchange occurring within the segregated space. For example, the first describes the relationship between Jews of different languages and provenience originally residing in the ghetto and the fair relationship between Jews and the Government of the Republic of Venice. The second shows how the lives of the first Chinese migrants and Italians were interwoven in various spaces, life rhythms, and collective events (work, school, public space, leisure, holiday, wartime, Italian economic boom, etc.). Indeed, both show past forms of intercultural exchange and what we now call "everyday multiculturalism".

– *Beyond the academy, engaging the public.* It is worth noting that both the works include the contribution of academic scholars (interviews with scholars within the docufilm and a written contribution by Daniele Cologna in the

appendix of the graphic novel). We would like to point out the willingness of academic scholars to take part in such initiatives, thus endorsing such “third mission” activities. While the academy has somehow given “scientific legitimation” to these products (the docufilm, for instance, has been projected at the international conference *The Ghetto Reconsidered: Minority and Ethnic Quarters in Texts and Images* held at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, 1 and 2 March 2016), we believe that, more generally, academics should enhance their engagement in participating in and disseminating works that integrate academic knowledge but are authored by extra-academics for the general public<sup>30</sup>.

To conclude, we would like to concretely suggest that these two works be employed within geography teaching about cultural diversity and space. With this piece we aimed to both endorse such initiatives and contribute to their dissemination among the Italian and international community of geography scholars, and teachers in particular.

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<sup>30</sup> See Varotto M. and Rossetto T., “Geographic Film as Public Research: Re-Visualizing/Vitalizing a Terraced Landscape in the Italian Alps (*Piccola terra/Small land*, 2012)”, in *Social & Cultural Geography*, 17, n. 8, 2016, pp. 1140-1164.



Fig. 1 – Creative cartographies from *Il ghetto di Venezia. Cinquecento anni di vita*, directed by Emanuela Giordano, 2015 (composition of video stills by the article’s authors)



Fig. 2 – Creative cartographies from *Primavera e Autunno*, by Ciaj Rocchi and Matteo Demonte, 2015, ed. BeccoGiallo, printed by Cierre, Verona (Excerpts from the graphic novel. By permission of the authors).