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**Italian creations: Elaborations of collective identity in Milan, Italy.**

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**in**

**The Department**

**of**

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## **Abstract**

Italian Creations: Elaborations of Collective Identity in Milan, Italy.

James MacDougall

This work is an Anthropological study of local elaborations of Italian national identity based on fieldwork primarily undertaken in Milan, Italy from May through August 1997. In this work I examine ways in which a localized network of individuals variously construct a sense of intimacy within the collective identity of an Italian national community and the ways in which national identity intersects with affiliation with other collective identities. These are considered in relation to the contradictions within Italian society that belie the nation-state model, which proposes a congruity between a uniform population and the institutions of governance. These contradictions include the proposed oppositional dichotomy between the people and the state, of a northern and southern Italy, of various regional distinctions as well as the separatist politics of the Lega Nord. Further the local elaborations of Italian identity are considered in relation to 'non-Italian' engagements, such as with the European Community, American cultural presence and immigration from around the world into Italy. The contingent and inconsistent ways in which individuals situate themselves within a variety of collective identities is compared to the contradictory ways in which the same individuals represent identities as coherent categories. Ultimately it is proposed that an individual sense of a national identity is no more necessarily uniform than that of the nation itself.

## **Dedication**

I would like to thank professors Vered Amit-Talai, Marie Nathalie LeBlanc and Joe Smucker for their invaluable guidance, assistance and patience throughout the many stages of this work. Thanks to all my fellow students for their insights and moral support. Particular gratitude goes to Mark Paulse, Kimiko Hawkes, Annie Lachance and Valerie Shamash . My appreciation goes to all the people who participated in my field research in Italy and whose words and lives appear in this text (although their names have been changed to protect their confidentiality). Special recognition must go to my wife Nicoletta Gilardoni without whose collaboration this project would have been unlikely if not impossible. Finally, I thank my parents Charles and Marilyn MacDougall for their encouragement and support throughout the years.

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## **Introduction:**

The subject of this paper is the articulation of Italian national identity outside of institutional (state) channels. That is to say it is a local investigation into the saliency of such an identity in the course of daily routine. From a state perspective an Italian may be defined by citizenship, and thus 'Italian' is in theory an all-inclusive category. However, the nation, as it is imagined in daily life, carries with it assumptions that define 'Italian' in limited (if flexible) ways. While the state promotes the idea of a uniform Italian nation comprised of a population sharing interests, the nation as a category also lives within the deeds, thoughts, emotions and words of individual Italians and thus is not monopolized by the state. The goal of this work is to offer some insight into the ways in which a specific social network of Italians in the region of Lombardy, Italy, incorporate national identity at a personal level.

The modern nation-state has provided a model, employed variously throughout the world, which binds institutions of governance (state), with notions of collective identity (nation) and territory (the nation-state physically located). This formula has served, and continues to serve, as an ideal rather than an accurate representation of social circumstances, however, changes in the production and distribution of goods, flows of currency, the broadening of economic markets, the expansion of communication networks and the movement of people, challenges the maintenance of this model. The world of nation-states is constructed with the assumption that each nation-state acts as an entity in a system of relations with other nation-states. While this was never absolutely the case, it appears that the affairs of business, labour and government are becoming increasingly integrated on a trans-national basis. All three aspects of the nation-state

formula: the political, the territorial and collective identity, are subject to the influence of 'globalism'; the de-nationalization of banks and economies is apparent, but what consequences do these changing affairs have for national identity? Issues of inclusiveness/exclusiveness with direct consequences for individual rights and obligations are often embedded in notions of collective identity. (For instance notions of collective identity were central to the reunification of the two Germanys as a single citizenship. Meanwhile being born in Germany as yet does not automatically grant an individual citizenship status).

For these reasons investigations into the articulations of collective identity are of particular interest at this time. The economic and political integration of the member nation-states of the European Community, of which Italy is one, presents a unique arena within which to investigate issues of collective identity. The community has redrawn notions of citizenship, social rights and responsibilities, and national economy, within a political body that overrides the nation-state while maintaining nation-states as constituent bodies at the same time. For instance even as the EC calls for increasing integration in production, currency, labour laws, environmental laws and so forth, one curiously finds some of the strongest support for the EC from nationalist and/or ethnic oriented movements within member states. A case in point being the separatist parties of northern Italy dominated by the *Lega Nord*. Italy's own history as a nation-state and its internal cultural and social distinctions adds another layer of complexity to constructions of a national identity of interest to the social scientist investigating this issue

I approach the subject of Italian national identity from two related, if sometimes conflicting angles: 1) I look at Italian national identity as representation. What images and

symbols are employed by people to represent an Italian identity as though it were a coherent and edified phenomena? Where might people draw boundaries between an 'us' and a 'them' ? 2) Under what circumstances is an Italian identity observed to be significant? How might a person actually respond in circumstances in which their identity as an Italian is evoked? Thus I am considering identity in both its categorical and contingent aspects. The first consideration necessarily involves situating personal representations in broader social discourses (i.e. The statement "Italians don't make good soldiers" articulates with broader discourses on patriotism, the relationship of the state to the nation and the history of Italy under fascism). The second issue involves identifying actual behaviour (i.e. An individual claims that Italians only like fresh produce, but buys frozen vegetables regularly). As 'Italian' is conceived of in terms of being a national identity, understanding the unique relationship between nation and state in the modern nation-state is fundamental to this project.

It is my understanding that there is no definitive Italian identity or conception of nation. Rather, notions of such will vary depending upon particulars of personal and social circumstances. At the same time however, it is my goal to identify some common set of symbols that are recognized as being definitively Italian by the individual Italians who contributed to my research. I also will discuss the fact that not all discourses on the Italian nationality and nation are equally expressed in formal politics. For instance, it is only recently that longstanding notions of social and cultural (and in some cases racial) differences between northern and southern Italians have formed the basis for explicit political agendas.

This work consisting of seven chapters in addition to the conclusion, breaks down as follows: Chapter one introduces methodological considerations as well as a description of the setting within which my fieldwork took place. In this chapter I will explain my orientation towards the topic of Italian national identity explaining where my field research took place, and why the setting is relevant to the topic of nationalism and collective identity in general. This will include some discussion of the interviewing process; contextualizing the social network I was a part of, as well as situating various media, (primarily television, popular magazines and newspapers), within the social setting where my research took place.

Chapter two, deals with theoretical considerations of nationality, nation, and the nation-state including attempts to define and distinguish these terms. Here I discuss the historic relationship between anthropology and nationalism and the implications this has for an anthropological approach to the study of nation and national identity. The subject of typologies of nationalism is discussed through the examples of the debate surrounding 'ethnic' and 'civic' nationalisms. Finally specifically anthropological theory as it relates to the study of nation, national identity and the nation-state is presented.

Chapter three consists of an extensive review of the history of Italian unification with an understanding of history in two senses: as actual events that shape the present and as a narrative of the past that is created in the present. This chapter renders a concise review of Italian political and social landscape at the time of my fieldwork in the summer of 1997. The aim of this chapter is to provide the necessary background to understand contemporary context within which my fieldwork took place as well as narratives about

the nation and national identity that are implicit in the ethnographic content of the following chapters.

Chapter four and five encompass two general contrasting perspectives on Italian national identity. While, chapter four problematizes the conception of a cohesive and uniform Italian national identity that is the implicit ideal in the nation-state model, chapter five conversely reconstructs the local representations of 'Italian' as an immutable category. Chapter four thus commences with a discussion of the oppositional dichotomy of the 'people' (nation) and the state that was represented both locally and in various media productions (films, newspapers, and magazines). This section is followed by reflection on discourses that speak of 'the two Italys' of north and south. Finally the relevancy of regional distinctions that characterize Italy in terms of diverse identities are positioned within the issue of a national identity.

Chapter five focuses on discourses that construct Italy and an Italian national identity as something collective, and in effect catalogues the stereotypes that were the constituents of an imagined community from the localized perspective within which I participated. Herein is an articulation of the personal/local with the "shared experience of unknown others (Anderson 1983 cf Banks 1996; 127)". I begin by considering how Italy is imagined in relation to a 'European modernity'. I then discuss and depict the shared self-constructed stereotypes that the people I encountered and lived with recognized as representing the boundaries of a specific Italian identity (even if they did not unanimously agree with the specifics of their delineation). Finally I return to the self-conscious relationship between self-defining categories and ways they conjoin with how

non-Italians (particularly Europeans and Americans) are perceived to categorize the Italian.

Chapter six focuses on the confrontations between representations of the cohesive Italian identity, as depicted in chapter five, with changing social realities. Its focus is on the maintenance of boundaries between an Italian 'us' and a foreign 'them'.

Finally, chapter seven relates an example of an alternative collective identity to the Italian nation which has emerged as economic and political conditions have been fused with historical and social narratives that have defined Italy. Its focus thus is on the separatist movement in northern Italy and the rhetoric of difference presented by the political party, the *Lega Nord*. Again I weave the local responses and views on this with the broader political and social events that mark the *Lega Nord's* actions and rhetoric.

I will conclude by briefly re-examining issues raised about the saliency of national identity in light of the ethnographic material derived from my field research undertaken in Milan and presented in the body of this work.



## **CHAPTER ONE. METHODOLOGY AND SETTING**

In this chapter I will discuss the methodological considerations that went into my fieldwork on Italian national identity as well as presenting the context (or setting) within which the fieldwork took place. In approaching the subject of Italian national identity from an anthropological perspective there were a number of methodological issues that I had to contend with. First, defining the 'field' was not self-evident. Second, I felt it necessary to consider history as it relates to Italian identity, both as what happened in the past that shaped the present, but also as a narrative told in the present about the past. Third I had to situate specific representations of Italian identity into broader contexts of established social discourses. Finally I had to distinguish between representations of a cohesive Italian identity and situations in which issues of identity were involved in behaviour

**The Field:** In the case of my research into Italian identity the field is not defined as a locality so much as "the field of relations which are of significance to the people involved in the study (Olwig and Hastrup 1997 cf. Barth 1992)." Thus the field is not defined by a physical space so much as by channels of ideas, symbols and practices that relate to the subject of Italian national identity. National identity is not something that is observed directly. That is to say that the subject of my research, Italian identity, is an abstraction that is both socially codified in stereotyped imagery, but also is manifested through behaviour. The subject of my research could in theory encompass a social collectivity of an immensely large scale; Italy has an official population of 57.7 million (Mignone 1998) (and this does not include all those who identify themselves as ethnically Italian living in other nation-states). Methodologically it is of course an impossibility to encompass this totality in a research project of this nature (if one could even delineate the boundaries of who and who not to include as Italian). Thus my focus is on modes in which belonging to a collectivity is made meaningful to a network of individuals. In this way what I

investigate is exemplary of a process rather than an attempt to edify a definitive and universal Italian identity

**The place of history:** It has become much more common to find ethnographic accounts incorporating the historical background of the subject that is researched, since 1950 when Evans-Pritchard pointed out that anthropology was in fact “a special kind of historiography (1962:26 cf. Tonkin, McDonald and Chapman 1989:4)” calling for a greater awareness of the need for history in anthropological projects. Anthropologists now commonly ask such questions as “How did the present create the past?” inspired by the developmental theories of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm. But there is also recognition that the social reality is a consequence of actual past events. As Olwig and Hastrup write, “If cultural constructions, rather than cultural entities, are our object of study, studying the historical context within which they have been generated will help us understand their significance today” (1997:9).

My research into Italian national identity has involved familiarizing myself with the various schools of thought on Italian history from the Risorgimento (pre-Italian nation-state) through to the present day. This has been invaluable towards understanding the complexities (contradictions, ambiguities) that arose while investigating Italian national identity. This issue is discussed further in chapter three.

### **To-and -Fro: From the Personal and Intimate, to the Collective and Public & the Role of Media.**

Nations are built out of notions of shared language, ideas, interests and essences.

Newspapers, radio and more recently television have played a significant role along with the educational system, state bureaucracy and military service, in providing a means to develop discursive commonalities within the Italian nation-state (Lyttelton 1997).

However, collective identity is a complex field consisting of many voices, competing, contradicting and reaching diverse audiences being interpreted in diverse ways.

In order to better understand the contexts within which personal statements and actions were being made, I felt it was necessary to pay attention to the media environment that people engaged with, (which did not consist exclusively of Italian productions). This meant a particular attention to media as it ‘naturally’ entered the household. That is to say I looked at the same television programs, listened to the same radio broadcasts and read the same newspapers as those I lived with. In particular this meant I read the mainstream *Corriere della sera*, and less frequently *La Repubblica* and the extreme left *Il Manifesto*, and watched many American films, Italian talk shows, variety shows and news/documentary programs. However, I also familiarized myself with the general media landscape (for example discovering state broadcaster RAI 3 was ‘leftist’ while Canale 5 was of the ‘right’), to orient myself in the local media environment, as media is filled with conflicting and competing discourses from different ideological and theoretical, class and gendered backgrounds.

Having done ethnographic research into Quebec nationalism, Richard Handler states that fieldwork as a research experience is heterogeneous. meaning that information comes from many sources with their own particular biases and assumptions built in to them. In constructing his ethnography he draws “from ideological formulations to casual conversations, from public statements to remarks gathered during private interviews”:

I (Handler) asked people to reflect in self-conscious fashion on their national and cultural identity. By knitting together ideas taken from disparate sources I have not meant to suggest that the result corresponds to a seamless cultural whole. But the inclusion of contemporary nationalistic statements side-by-side with “clerical conservative” formulations, along with the mixture of remarks by professional ideologues with those of ordinary citizens, has made it easier to identify certain similarities and differences among a range of nationalist ideologies.” (1988:32)

Given that media is a major source of 'external' or 'foreign' ideas and images it also serves as an arena in which the security of national identity may be shaken and stirred (Eriksen 1997:114). Italian writer L. Curti notes:

In every country the media pose the problem of the shifting boundaries between the national and the foreign, otherness and sameness, repetition and difference. *Italia TV* shows sharply how different countries mingle and blend on the national screen, in a flow of fictions (Curti, 1988:16-17 cf. Morely and Robins 1995:132-133)

I attempted to ascertain the specifics of this in my household at two levels: 1) What were the messages pertaining to Italian identity and the 'foreign' that were presented in the programs and print articles and 2) What subjects did people respond to and what sort of reactions did they elicit? What representational elements in media converged with individual constructions of Italian identity and the 'foreign'.

I had to constantly move back and forth between the personal statements and responses that related to issues of identity boundaries and more socially diffuse discourses. For instance, Rosa (see appendix I) would criticize American culture as 'coarse' in contrast to more sophisticated Italian culture and values, but loved to watch American made-for-television films, in which 'American values' were transparently expressed. On the one hand I could situate Rosa's disdain within a larger societal discourse about American society (see Mignone 1998: 393-397), on the other I could acknowledge her own preferences for these American 'morality tales' about family and love.

During the course of my research I often found myself shifting mentally from the particular things I saw and heard, and trying to link them to a larger discourse. For instance I noticed that people I was acquainted with commonly spoke of the pacifistic

nature of the Italian people as a whole. When I asked questions about the war, it was explained how relatives had resisted to the best of their ability while being enveloped in the machinations of the fascist regime. Fascism and military violence were always spoken of in terms of aberrations from the “Italian norm”. The norm was represented to me by the resistance of the Italian partisans who sought to overthrow fascist rule and by images and tales of reluctant soldiers. I compared this discourse which emerged in conversations, to ideas expressed in popular films such as *Mediterraneo* or *La Tregua*, and passages in school textbooks on W.W.II, that commented on the same issues. There was an apparent pattern which portrayed the Italian soldier as a victim of the war. I elaborate on this theme in chapter four, suffice to say that there were ideas that were expressed in everyday life that could be linked to socially recognized ‘discourses’. In other words Italians who had never met, employed the imagery of the “soldier as victim”. This image, whether accepted, criticized or otherwise interpreted contributed to the “imagined community” by being shared and recognized publicly.

My analysis thus takes the form of weaving the personal views and events of the social network I was a part of in Milan with the more general discourses that were received through media and social intercourse. In this way my analysis replicates the way in which my understanding of localized constructions of Italian identity were received as a participant-observer in daily life.

### **Words and Deeds: Interviews and Participant-Observation:**

It is virtually unimaginable now to produce an ethnography without considering the consequence of the ethnographer’s cultural and social background in doing fieldwork.

Gender, class, educational background, age, nationality, ethnicity and social categories that are only meaningful in social contexts that are not definable through the anthropologist's own cultural experience, all have an affect on the ethnographers perspective and acceptance into any community. Issues of the social position of the ethnographer have come to the fore in anthropology from a number of areas: From within post-colonial questioning of the anthropologist's implication in colonial ventures (Maquet 1964; James 1973), from feminist perspectives that questioned male bias in ethnographic representation (Warren 1988 cf. Barrett 1996) and from post-modernist theoreticians (Foucault, Derrida et al) who have dealt with issues of epistemology and representation that have poured forth into anthropology through texts like *Writing Culture* (1986) or *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*(1986) .

Seteney Shami states however, that issues of objectivity/subjectivity are secondary to a consideration of the "relative social position" of the ethnographer so far as the "implications for access to and rapport with the research community, as well as for the substance of data collected" (1988). Hammersley and Atkinson write in some length about the fact that "people in the field will seek to place or locate the ethnographer within their own experience (1995)." Although by no means is there a mechanical process whereby all males or all females and so forth, are perceived or received in categorically identical ways, there are incontrovertible social realities that are defined outside of one's own experience that may be encountered. Eva Moreno (1995) relates an extreme example of how assumptions about male female relationships built into her own social assumptions were at odds with those of an individual from a different cultural background to devastating effect.

As I am married to an Italian woman born in Milan and we stayed in her mother's residence for the better part of my field research, my own relationship to the social setting that I entered was a complex one in regards to my role as an anthropologist and issues of positionality, insider/outsiderness, access to people and ethical considerations.

On the one hand I was culturally an outsider. I did not grow up internalizing the ways of thinking, acting and behaving that are available to locals. There are cultural meanings, histories and decorum that people born and raised in Italy (or more specifically Milan) possess that are not directly within reach of me as an outsider. As well my mother tongue is English, Italian being a language that I have only recently learned. Much that I encountered was unfamiliar, novel, 'exotic', and foreign to me, and yet years of living with my wife meant that I had been exposed to an Italian "way of life", and had a more refined understanding of the subtleties of the living environment than a complete newcomer would have had..

While culturally I was encountered by Italians as foreigner, because of my marriage status, I was accepted socially as an insider. I had a role as a family member and the access that this granted me was, in some respects, that of one among others. So that while I was received as a Canadian and as a student of anthropology, I was also greeted as family: son-in-law, brother-in-law and so forth, as the case may be. Having a role as a family member often superseded any role I had as an anthropologist in the ways others related to me. Even for non-family members I felt that my role as an anthropologist was tempered in the eyes of those I met due to my engagement in such an intimate social relationship as marriage. I was a foreigner, but not an outsider.

As I was a foreigner, people did not expect me to have the common knowledge about living in Italian/Milanese society, that an Italian would have. As well as a foreigner and a student people understood that it was normal for me to be perpetually asking questions.

There was only one occasion in which my role as an anthropologist was a complication. It was an occasion on which a gentleman who supported the separatist *Lega Nord* party, assumed that I was in Italy to study the racism that many felt was expressed in the rhetoric and politics of this party. He expressed his feelings that as an anthropologist, I should be studying elsewhere (Africa he said) and was openly hostile

towards me. Later, I was told that this was characteristic of him in most circumstances, so it may have had as much to do with his personality as with my actual activities. Still it made me reflect on the fact that the responses that I would receive from people were framed by how I was perceived by the other.

Ethical dilemmas were compounded by the duality of my situation. I had to seriously consider what words and what deeds were appropriate material for inclusion in my ethnographic work. When things were said and done in front of me they were not always done with consciousness of my activities as an anthropologist. My access to intimate events and words was based on my place as family member, not because I was doing anthropological fieldwork. I had to heed the possibilities and temptations of taking advantage of this social reality of being a family member. It was for this reason that I wanted, as much as possible to meet people from outside the family. It was inevitable however that my deepest insights into the meaning and making of Italian identity in daily life were seen at the most intimate level of the family I was a part of.

This being said my work as much as it orbits around the family nucleus is not a studied representation of them. The family itself is not the object of my study, the more abstract issue of Italian identity is. However, it is undeniable that it is through them that I gained access and insight into various aspects of Italian life, from definitions and attitudes towards the ‘other’ to the viewpoints on politics, the EC, American military bases in Italy and a multitude of other topics which are dealt with extensively in other chapters of this work. The general perspective that I found myself being familiarized would be that of the Italian social left (which I would distinguish from a political left in that it is less explicitly ideological and more idiosyncratic). However, I was also given access to the centre right perspectives of my father-in-law who lives separately from the household I resided in. This of course was just one of literally millions of possible ‘points of entry’. For this reason this ethnography must be understood as, my point of view from my participation and observation of daily life from a particular context. It is an example of a



reality apprehended, but incomplete in that there remains a seemingly infinite number of possible perspectives that could be expressed and all equally as true and sincere as my account.

Aside from partaking in and observing the routines of daily life in my social setting, I felt that it was important to conduct interviews with as many people as possible. The primary reason for this was that the subject of identity is a very abstract one. While its expression may be seen in public events such as soccer matches, parades, monuments, advertisements, and the like, it was not always easy to know how people situated themselves and others within the category of `Italian`, or what motivations lay behind observed behaviour and how this might intersect with notions of being European or Milanese, Bergomascian, Crotonese, Torinese and any of the other multitude of more local identities that people had.

Formal interviews were important for different reasons. Their content served to illuminate individual representations of Italy and Italians. They also allowed me to situate these individualized depictions within more general discourses that delineated an Italian collectivity. Certain themes would appear in individual interviews that I was able to link to ideas expressed in news articles, works of fiction, advertisements, and such.

It was not taken for granted that what a person said was necessarily identical to behaviour. In fact statements about identity would at times contradict individual behaviour. For instance Aldo, a Milanese businessman, commonly speaks of himself as Italian, but will sometimes identify himself as Milanese to the exclusion of an Italian identity. For instance when the subject of the Mafia or government corruption comes up, his Milanese sense of self may be emphasized in an act of disassociation. It is precisely such discrepancies however that are characteristic of national identity as it is manifested at a local/individual level. People were not following precise guidelines in being or not being Italian and yet Italian identity (or any other collective identity ascribed to) was felt to be profoundly important to people.

I began by interviewing those in my immediate environment such as my mother-in-law and brother-in-law and gradually worked outwards through a network of friends and friends of friends. While it was relatively easy to find people willing to participate in the interviewing process, finding the time to do so was another matter. The primary snag to conducting interviews was in finding the time to do so on the part of the interviewees. People worked long and hard hours and did not necessarily always have an hour or two to set aside for me to ask them about being Italian.

On the other hand people who were interviewed, on the whole, seemed to enjoy the process. Interviews often took place at kitchen tables over coffee, or in other casual settings (One took place sitting on rocks in the middle of a river). I tried to do interviews without the presence of others who might inhibit free discussion. Typically it only the interviewee and I, but in some cases the presence of a translator was necessary. In such cases my wife who was born and raised in Milan served this role admirably. She is an outstanding student of languages and completely fluent in English. Furthermore her role as intermediary was assuring to people I had not met before. People were very forthcoming with their thoughts and feelings about being Italian and it appeared to be a topic that people enjoyed talking about. Many interviews could easily have gone on for longer than the usual two hours that I would allot for an interview. I speculate that this urge to explain who Italians are often came from a common feeling that Italians were not well understood and often misunderstood by the world at large, and that this was an opportunity, however small to speak out on the matter. The positive aspects of the experience for the interviewees was reflected by the fact that it was not unusual that they would tell their friends about me so that this extended the network of possible interviewees available to me. It was not uncommon to be thanked after an interview and it was also usually the case that people told me that it had been an opportunity to articulate things they had not tried to put into words before.

While I was not looking to make a statistically meaningful sample out of my

interviews, I did want to talk to as great a variety of people as possible. In this case I think I was relatively successful. I spoke with a Milanese business man, a young male graphic designer, a career woman who lived alone and practiced an alternative religion an artist friend of hers who practiced the same religion, a school teacher/astrologist, a mother/house-wife/banker, a female university student from Bergamo, people with roots in the north and south ranging in ages from 23 to 56 (see appendix one for more complete descriptions). In all, twelve concentrated interviews were completed, alongside numerous spontaneous 'mini-interviews' that would arise at dinners or on social outings. Observed behaviour, the statements of individuals and an awareness of the larger social setting within which they occurred thus formed a system of triangulation by which I might survey the ways in which Italian identity was being articulated between each these three aspects

### **Length of Research**

The length of time that I formally spent doing research does not accurately reflect my familiarity with or the extent of my experiences in Italy. Before formally beginning my research I had visited Milan six times between the summer of 1992 and the summer of 1997. Five of these times I was a student of anthropology and although I was not engaged in a formal fieldwork project, I did consider the methods and theory that I had been learning as an anthropology undergraduate student in understanding my surroundings. This previous experience allowed me to enter the field with some understanding of the social, cultural and political issues that I was going to be dealing with concerning Italian identity. It also gave me fore-knowledge as to the possibilities that might be available in undertaking field-research in this setting. It was in fact these early experiences in Milan that stoked my interest in the subject of Italian identity as I encountered its complexities firsthand. I am well aware that this is not always the usual case for first-time research, however given the brevity of time allotted to my formal fieldwork, I feel that it was

beneficial to my research that this was the case.

### **Milan, Italy: The setting.**

For a number of reasons Milan is an ideal setting for studying the ambivalence, contradictions and antagonisms that are involved in competing elaborations of Italian identity. First Milan is a city that is recognized within Italy as having a distinct identity marked by its own language (though in actuality used by an ever diminishing number), its own cuisine, folklore, history, and stereotypes about Milanese qualities. Second, Milan plays the role of a sophisticated northern Italian industrial centre, which is symbolically opposed to the rustic rural village that serves as a reference to southern Italy. Third Milan is also perceived as a 'European' city, aligned with Paris and London, as the quintessence of the 'refinement', wealth and power of Europe. Linked to this is the sense of Milan as an 'international' city or cosmopolis. None of these Milans of course is the definitive Milan; rather they represent the various social realities that intersect in this urban centre. Milan is home to people with diverse ethnic and national backgrounds. In the course of a typical day I would encounter people from Switzerland, France, the United States, Brazil, England, Ireland, Japan, Sri Lanka, India, China, Sierra Leone, Senegal, the Philippines, Australia and numerous locations within Italy and throughout the rest of the world.

Major cities have always played the multiple roles of being simultaneously sites of national definition, players on the international stage, and portals for the inflow of ideas, culture, finances, goods and bodies originating from elsewhere. It is precisely this feature that marks urban centres as arenas in which assumptions of an unambiguous national identity are confounded by virtue of daily experience.<sup>1</sup> Ulf Hannerz has noted

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<sup>1</sup> It is no coincidence that the word 'cosmopolitan' was used as a derogative term in Nazi rhetoric as it represented cultural pollution in the midst of an imagined and desired environment defined by standards of purity in all aspects. One may contrast this with the idealisation of the peasantry derived from nineteenth century Romanticism, who were regarded as embodying the essence of Germaness in the ideology of National Socialism. E. Gellner also writes "If roots are what make you what you are, endow you with both vigour and authenticity, it follows that rootlessness is the greatest of all sins, and terms such as *déraciné* and *cosmopolitan* carry the greatest opprobrium (1997:73)".

that cities today “appear to be prominently engaged in transformations and recombinations of meanings and meaningful forms which are changing the cultural map of the earth, and perhaps the way we think about the relationship between culture and territory” (1996: 127).

Milan is an astonishingly vast and ancient city. Populations have lived in the area since pre-historic times and Milan itself has been a settlement since the days of the Roman Empire. In 292 AD the Gauls settled on the site of the present day city, establishing Mediolanum, which became an important trade centre. Various semi-nomadic peoples entered the Po valley from the north, including the Lombards and Franks. Milan was ruled by the Spanish from 1535-1714, followed by the Austrians 1714-1859, and intermittently by Napoleon I of France. Navigating the streets can be disorienting for someone used to the grid design one typically finds in North America cities, as Milan takes the rough form of a wheel (See map 1). Thus streets run out like spokes from the Piazza del Duomo in all directions, while others connect these spokes in ever widening circles. In the Piazza del Duomo one finds the massive cathedral of Milan, the official symbol of the city, atop of which is the golden Madonna or *madonnina*, whose height it is said no structure in the city should be built higher than, though this is not the case now. The cathedral is flanked by the Galleria of King Vittorio Emmanule II on one side and on the other the Palazzo Reale. Passing through the Galleria one comes to the famous opera house, La Scala reconstructed after the original was destroyed by allied bombing during World War II. Beyond the Palazzo Reale is the University of Milan and all about are seemingly endless boutiques filled with designer clothing, *panetterie* selling freshly baked goods, cafes and bars where fresh *pammini* are devoured at lunch. Close to the centre is an entire medieval castle, *il castello Sforzesco*, which sits seemingly, lost in time while the modern world goes about its business. Walking through the city centre one may come across Gothic cathedrals, Roman walls and arches, Renaissance courtyards, and art-nouveau apartments. Compared to a North American city commercial signs are

restrained — smaller, less 'electric'.

From the centre the city sprawls into modern suburban apartment complexes, industrial warehouses, and factories, all bound by knots and ties of concrete and tarmac highways connecting to the cities of Bergamo, Como, Brescia, Mantua, Pavia, Cremona, Varese, Sondrio and thousands of towns and villages in between, so that the entire Po Valley appears as though it were one enormous urban vista.

Milan's fortune and suffering has traditionally come from its strategic location as a crossroads for travelers, traders and invading armies (its Latin name Mediolanum means something akin to Middle Place). Today Milan and Torino (Turin) share the prestige and disdain of being Italy's industrial engines. A consequence of this achievement is that the sky in Milan appears incessantly overcast. Buildings appear coated in grime and a walk around the downtown often grants one the experience of the *'mal di testa Milanese'* (Milanese headache), brought on by fumes of cars. Milan in effect sits in a bowl of its own filth thanks in part to its geographic location; found on a fertile plain in the Po valley north of the Po river, surrounded to the North, west and south by mountains. This is also the reason that Milan is known for its actual fogs that match the mythical ones of London. There is a saying that was introduced to me on one of my first trips to this city that expresses something fundamental about my experiences with Milan ~ "A Milano non si puo' vivere, si puo' solo sopravvivere," (In Milan you don't live you only survive).

Filtered through local stereotypes and cliches one gets a succinct impression of Milan as a city in which business comes before all else. A city where people are always in a rush, where everyone is checking their watch or talking on their cell-phone, where businessmen in their designer suits zip by on Vespas. Everything of any account has a designer label: Versace, Armani, Moschino, Trussardi; from dresses to shoes, to sunglasses and the pen that one writes with. It is not generally admirable to brag that one got a deal, at least not as admirable as the implication that one has spent the most for the best. It is expensive to go out, to eat, to see a film, to drive, to pay rent. It is a city for

producers and consumers. One does not 'hang out' in Milan, at least not without spending a good deal of money. Those who do 'hang-out' for free are in fact street people. Despite stereotypes that some North Americans have about the European regard for public space there is little of it to be found in Milan outside of churches (which are actually owned by the Roman Catholic Church). Young people and children, those with low incomes can easily find themselves cut off from the flow of things. To a North American things may seem small, compact, tight; from cars to stoves to living space. It is a city where one gets the initial impression that everyone is involved in some manner with industrial designers, artisans, artists, fashion, furniture, jewelry, clothes, books, graphics, music, video. The message that one receives is that "to be is to create". Money is a means to an end: to live opulently, to look good, to dress fashionably; a medium through which one can obtain beautiful things and beautiful surroundings. The quintessential (and imaginary) resident of Milan would eat, sleep and dream as an aesthete. Of course this is only an impression. There is much more to the actuality that is Milan, but this is the Milan that leaps forth, that stands out in relief, that thrusts itself in your face, and into your wallet, against the forgotten, the ignored and the undesired other realities of life in the city.

Milan is famed as an international fashion centre but it is also Italy's financial and commercial capital major publishing centre. Cultural and communications industries are dominant in the north with Milan in particular being the site of Italy's major publishing companies (Mignone 1998). The region of Lombardy within which Milan is situated has 23 daily, 136 weekly publications and 1,878 published at various other frequencies (Mignone 1998:434). Milan is also a major market for illicit drugs (Mignone 1998: 87). I would regularly see hypodermic needles in parks, in the street and particularly around the central train station. Indeed I recall the striking image of a police officer helping two young girls inject needles into their arms outside *Stazione centrale*. It was explained to me by my companion that the officers did this to make sure that addicts did not kill

themselves through improper injections. It was also explained that if they arrested everyone who injected heroin that the jails would soon be filled.

Lombardy has the second highest population density in Italy at 373 people per km<sup>2</sup>, the greatest amount of non-foodstuff consumption, and the value of imports and exports outstrips that of any other region (7.5% of all Italian imports are destined for Lombardy, and 30.31% of exports come from Lombardy. There is a large agricultural base as well as the highest rate of self-employed in Italy of both men and women (Mignone 1998).

As it has been since pre-Roman times Milan is still a crossroads, but today on a global scale. One may see African drummers in the park, the latest model Korean Hyundai or Ford Ka (designed especially for narrow crowded European streets) driven through ancient Roman arches, Japanese manga being read by children. One can go to the local pizzeria run by an Egyptian family and drink German beer before going to see an Irish film at the cinema around the corner. Television of course is heavily laden with programs from the USA as the case in much of the world, but there are also South American soap operas, German, French and British programs as well an endless river of fantastically coloured animated adventures from Japan extremely popular with young people. not to forget the multitude of Italian talk, variety and game shows. In the streets throughout the city, one will typically encounter young men from West Africa: Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone and older men from North Africa approach you as you walk wanting to sell you cigarettes, lighters, poor copies of popular music cassettes, bracelets of colourful thread, sunglasses, leather necklaces or newspapers that tell about the hard life an immigrant faces on the street in a foreign land.

Music, clothes, foods, religions, languages, ideas, and genes from every corner of the globe circulate, clash and fuse and reform into something new and the process repeats itself day by day. Not all things are equal of course. This is Italy, this is Milan, but what is a Milanese or an Italian? Now? Today? And tomorrow...?



## **Casa Dolce Casa**

My mother-in-law lives with her cat Sisso, in a small two-room apartment (if one excludes the minuscule bathroom no wider than a door and no longer than an average American automobile) on the second floor of a three-floor building. Her son, my brother-in-law, lives one flight up in an equally small apartment with his two cats Mir and Nomo. To find this place, I call my second home one must first pass from the street through another apartment building, owned by another landlord, that rises some ten stories high. The residents of this building do not always like it that people who don't live in the building have keys to get in, but this is the only way possible to get home. What one sees after passing through this modern well tended apartment complex is an abandoned three story structure. Abandoned except for the fact that people live in it and pay rent. Whereas the canyon of buildings that enclose it are all freshly painted in salmon and gold, its saffron coat remains only in spots favoured by the elements over the years. Being walled in by the high rises that surround it on three of its four sides, one has the opportunity to see the sky only out of windows that face the back of the building. It was in this building, in my mother-in-law's apartment that my wife and I stayed from early May to late August 1997, and it was from here that my field research was centred. It was close quarters: warm in temperature, having little in the way of the privacy and space that I am accustomed to in Montreal.

The neighbourhood was generally built out of apartment blocks of anywhere from three to twelve stories inhabited (judging by appearances) by mid to upper middle-classed families. (See map 2) On the lower levels of the apartment blocks were stores. On our block, on our side of the street these were a bar, a pharmacy, another bar, a crystal and silverware shop, a store that sold household goods (shampoos, soaps, cleaning supplies), a sun-tan salon, a music publisher, a pizzeria, and a pet shop, further down the street were numerous small clothing shops, a fruit store a Chinese food restaurant another

bar and a sidewalk gas pump. Across the street was a large grey four story building that used to be used as office space , but at the time of my field research was used as theatre space.

Around the corner was the post office, a garage, a few bars, a barbershop, a frozen food store, a bakery, and a couple of unassuming but expensive restaurants. On this street also was an unusually well tended building with large glass doors. Security cameras were mounted over and directed at it. This was a modeling agency. Pictures of the young models were posted in the bar up the street. To access the rest of the city one either had to go around many apartment blocks to circumnavigate walled in train tracks that ran through the area or cross a small iron bridge that traversed the railway that made the quarter seem like a city within a city at times. On the other side of the bridge was a train station and a Metro entrance. Here was the area known as the *navagli* marked by a few of the remaining canals that used to course throughout the old city. This was an area known for its bohemian chic, clubs and bars. It was an area I was told where struggling artists, writers and models lived. On Saturday afternoons the *fiera di Sinigallia* a sort of flea-market where one can buy old coins, cds, t-shirts of pop-stars, African drums and carvings, was held along the banks of one of the canals.

On a typical day we would get fresh *focaccia* from the *panetteria* in the morning, (the bakery close around one and open again around 3:30), make coffee on the stovetop, and squeeze some fresh orange juice. Rosa would leave for work at 8:30. Roberto might drop in from upstairs for a coffee or to iron some shirts before going to his studio where he worked as a graphic designer. We could buy groceries either at the PAM (supermarket) or on Saturdays buy fresh produce at the open-air market the *mercato rionale*. Cooking eating and shopping were the activities around which the day centred most, which was generally characteristic of the consumption oriented society. I also worked with Aldo for a week and would have occasion to drop in on him at his offices throughout my fieldwork period. Evenings were typically spent reading, watching television, the occasional trip to

the cinema, and going out to dinner and visiting friends and relatives.

Aside from the daily routines in Rosa's neighbourhood, my wife and I spent ten days in a home in a small alpine village in Valle d'Aosta and two weeks in France with Aldo and his girlfriend. In both instances I was able to expand my insights into aspects of Italian identity through these changes in location and the different contexts within which identity might be expressed. As well I have on previous occasions been to Ferrara, Mantova, Trieste, Grosseto, Pisa, Bergamo, Bologna, Como, Verona and many small villages throughout the northern part of the country which contributed to a broader sense of social, historical and territorial space.

Entwined with methodological issues of the field, the place of history, and the process of ascertaining individual and general delineations of an Italian identity are theoretical assumptions. In the following chapter I will thus discuss in depth these considerations as they pertain to my research into Italian identity.

## **CHAPTER TWO. THEORY AND NATION**

Conceptually the nation is distinct from the state, although in common usage the two terms are often used ambiguously so that there is overlap in their meaning (i.e. United Nations is actually a collective of united states). As Hugh Seton-Watson succinctly puts it "A state is a legal and political organization...A nation is a community of people (1977:1)." The nation may be defined in similar terms as an ethnic group, if commonly at a larger scale (Banks 1996:128). That is to say as with ethnicity a nation is defined as a theoretically homogenous collectivity. There are however no specific criteria that define a prototypical ethnic group or nation. Common language, religion, sense of origin, history, territory, cultural practices and so forth in any combination may form the criteria by which a specific ethnic group or nation is delineated, these criteria may even change with time. What distinguishes a nation from an ethnic group, is the implied political relationship between the nation and the state (Eriksen 1993). If an ethnic group is typically characterized as a minority group living within the territory of a dominant nation one can see that nation is conceptualized in terms of dominance. For this reason a group referring to itself as a nation is involved in a political act as the invocation of sovereignty is made. To refer to one's group identity as a nation is not a neutral act. Thus to hypothetically refer to the Sicilians as an ethnic group says something quite different than to refer to them as the Sicilian nation. Ethnicity and nationality, however, are not mutually exclusive categories. Conceptually ethnicity is a relative term whereas nationality is not, in so far as it is linked to an administrative level of social organization (existing or called for). For instance someone who is an Italian by nationality may also be an Italian ethnic when moving outside of the territory governed by the Italian state. Admittedly there is conflation between concepts of nationality by citizenship and nationality as a kind of ethnicity that parallels the conflation of nation and state as well. This underlines the degree of fusion that is expressed in the term nation-state.

Anthropologist Nira Yuval-Davis defines the state as “a body of institutions which are centrally organized around the intentionality of control with a given apparatus of enforcement (juridical and repressive) at its command and basis (1997:14).”

Nationalism may be defined as the theory by which each state’s boundaries are ideally analogous to those of the nation. Thus the nation-state has been the ideal of nationalism, whereby the nation is often the delineation of a culture through its transcription into space through the establishment of territorial boundaries. Nationalism of this sort is sometimes referred to as ‘ethnic’ nationalism. However there is another conception of what Michael Ignatieff refers to as ‘civic’ nationalism in which nationality is said to be defined by citizenship. This division of nationalism into two distinct typologies can be ontologically perplexing. That is to say, elements of both the civic and ethnic always interact in the fusion of notions of the nation and state as the word ‘nation-state’ itself attests. Anthropologist Nira Yuval-Davis explains that the nation-state “assumes a complete correspondence between the boundaries of the nation and the boundaries of those who live in a specific state.” (1997:11) She distinguishes three different dimensions to nationalism: Volknation: Which links nation to a common origin of mythical nature, Kulturnation: which relates a myth of common culture and finally Staatnation; which promotes the myth of equal citizenship. She sees these as aspects that are related and over-lapping, rather than as self-contained typologies.

Sociologist Rogers Brubaker wishes to see the nation not as a constructed *object* but as an ongoing process, as “a category of practice”. He thus states that “We should not ask “what is a nation” but how does a nation work as a practical category, as a classificatory scheme, as a cognitive frame? (1996:16).” He thus distinguishes his approach from what he calls the developmental or constructivist approaches of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm by his own understanding of the contingency of ‘nation’. To Brubaker the developmental approaches are characterized as tracings of “long-term political, economic, and cultural changes that led, over centuries, to

the gradual emergence of nations” (Brubaker 1996:17). The nation should really be recognized as “a contingent, conjecturally, fluctuating, and precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action, rather than as a relatively stable product of deep developmental trends and economy, polity, or culture (Brubaker 1996: 17)”. He defines nationhood as “an institutionalized cultural political form” and nationness (his own term) as “a contingent event or happening” (Brubaker 1996: 21). Thus constructions of national identity are seated in ever changing political realities.

### **Culture, Nation and Anthropology.**

The concept and practices of the modern nation are intimately entwined with the concept of culture. The legacies of both ‘nation’ and ‘culture’ as ideas are located in Europe from the early 19th century onward, and for this reason alone the idea of nation is of concern to the social/cultural anthropologist. Anthropologist Richard Handler (1988) notes that “nationalism and social science, including anthropology, grew out of the same historical circumstances of modernization, industrialization and the growth of the individual (in Eriksen, 1993:15).” Thomas Hylland Erikson states that this has made it particularly difficult for anthropologists to achieve an analytic distance as regards nationalism as “the respective concepts and ways of thinking are too closely related (1993:15),” between nationalism and anthropology

The notion of cultures as integrated, bounded and unambiguously different from one another has historically served as a fundamental assumption in the anthropological studies of social life and informed the study of communities as self-contained social entities. However the idea of cultures as modular social units has also infused nationalism; the nation being conceived of as a particular kind of culturally consistent collectivity.

In the past, there has been the assumption within anthropology that the anthropologist was observing cultural boundaries that existed objectively, it is now

generally understood that the individual anthropologist has an active role in devising those boundaries through creative processes of interpretation. This is not necessarily to say that the ethnographer is solely writing a fiction (although there are those who would suggest this is so), or is the only author for that matter, but that there is a greater amount of ambiguity involved in depicting social realities than has been evidenced in, approaches to the study of culture, particularly structural-functionalism, by social scientists in the past. Just as archeological knowledge is used in nationalist projects to delineate the roots of a nation, social/cultural anthropological knowledge (i.e. culture) is used to define contemporary national boundaries. A comprehensive understanding of the configuration of the nation-state thus demands the circumspection of the concept of culture.

Anthropologists have come to employ the term culture through numerous visions and revisions, however Jonathan Friedman identifies two general senses in which the term culture has been understood in the discipline of anthropology, these being a universal sense and a differential sense. The universal sense he would describe as being that associated with the turn of the century evolutionists in which “there is an implicit understanding of culture as a unitary phenomenon in which the different peoples of the world have a particular rank, according to their more or less developed culture (1994:67).” It is the differential sense however that is of immediate concern here. This sense of culture is associated with that which was popularized through Franz Boas’ approach to the study of anthropology. Boas’ use of the term culture was decidedly relativistic. In the Boasian school of anthropology, culture is not a general category that encompasses a variety of expressions of human practices around the globe; rather there is understood to be a number of cultures unique unto themselves. Boas approach to cultures in the plural, is regarded as having initiated a radical conceptual shift within the discipline of anthropology in which the focus of study shifted from a project of establishing cultural similarities between societies, to a discourse of particularism. Culture thus came to be understood as a reified ‘way of life’ and the study of culture came to be a process of

defining and ascribing 'otherness' (Friedman, 1994:72). This anthropological sense of differential culture is bound with the modern sense of nation in both their common origin and their basic assumptions about collective identity. According to Mike Featherstone anthropology's concern with "tribal collectivity" can be traced to an "assumption, influenced by German Romanticism and late 19th century hermeneutics (for example Dilthey, who influenced Boas) (Featherstone 1995:136)". It is this same pool of German Romanticism that was the source of the development of the notion of the culturally homogeneous nation.

Prior to the Boasian turn in social anthropology, the discipline of archeology had already moved from an evolutionist paradigm to a focus on the specificities of diverse cultures. This change of focus was informed by emerging nationalisms of the late 1800's as aspiring nation-states strived to lend credibility to their causes through links to enduring pasts. For instance it has been noted that some German Archaeologists of that era "emphasized the apparent lack of non-German peoples in their homeland and during the historical period and projected this situation back into prehistory as evidence of their racial and ethnic purity (Trigger, 1995:269)". A view that there were cultures that existed in 'pristine' isolation in an ethnic or cultural sense, became prevalent in anthropological approaches to culture. If contemporary anthropology has largely deserted this simplified notion of culture the idea of cultural integrity continues to inform populist nationalisms, as anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen notes:

"Their spokesmen tend to invoke a concept of culture which is in fact often directly inspired by anthropological concepts of culture, and in some cases they self-consciously present themselves as "tribes" reminiscent of the "tribes" depicted in classical anthropological monographs (Roosens, 1989 via Erikson 1993: 15)".

The following statement on '*The Identity of a People*' taken from the web-site of the Cultural Association *Noste Reis* (Our Roots) of Piedmont uses premises founded in anthropology to conceptually distance itself from others:



Each people or human community, belonging to a territory and homogeneous in descent and history, develops its own conception of life and the world (the 'Weltanschauung' of the German philosophers) and constitutes its specific culture which is only partly codified in officialdom...On the other hand, the illustrious anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss wrote that humanity's true wealth is comprised of the varied ways in which the different human communities come to terms with life...Therefore each one learns something from the observations of the other and this interaction is fruitful. And so each people must conserve and enrich its **own specific culture** (emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>.

The stated goal of this self-defined cultural organization is to revitalize all things Piemontese: language, customs, and traditions "thus creating the new Piemontese of tomorrow". A glance at the rhetoric of this organization reveals it to be typical of nationalist discourses in that it ironically calls for the revitalization of the past as the program for the future of a distinct people. This discourse embraces diversity *between* cultures while encouraging the maintenance of a 'pure' culture. While anthropology cannot take sole responsibility for the most dire consequences of such rationalizations and politicization of discourses of difference, it certainly has had a role to play in the dissemination of a particular understanding of culture that is propagated at the popular level. If anthropology does not have the responsibility of dissuading the further entrenchment of 'culturalism', it at least has the duty as a scholastic enterprise to point out the complications arising from thinking of cultures as unequivocally integrated and distinct objects of analysis, beyond the confines of the academy.

### **Nation and State: Theory and History**

As is the case with the notion of culture, the idea of the nation as a bounded, homogeneous and integrated collective of people can be traced back to a German Romanticist derivation. However unlike the notion of culture, that of the nation is explicitly a political one as it is linked to the state and to governance, which includes such

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<sup>2</sup> From <http://www.arpnet.it/~noste/welceng.htm>

matters as legal rights and responsibilities. A national identity in other words is also a political claim.

The link between nation and state is evidenced in both practices and language (i.e. the term nation-state: **n.** the modern nation as the representative unit of political organization<sup>3</sup>). This is to say that the model by which the boundaries of the state are ideally thought to be congruous with a solitary and homogeneous people known as a nation, has come to be the accepted norm around the world. There has been a normalization of the nation-state to such a degree that other possible systems of organization appear unnatural or implausible and therefore undesirable.

Rogers Brubaker (1996) points out that the major works on the subject of the nation-state and nationalism, in the last decade have been of what he calls a developmentalist character, citing the works of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith and Eric Hobsbawm as most prominent. Nations thus are treated a socially constructed phenomena, rather than as natural manifestations. Succinctly, in this 'developmentalist' body of work, there is a generally accepted set of ideas concerning the nation-state: 1.) That it is a modern phenomena and thus a product of specific historical and social circumstances, thus an invention of sorts and thus not inevitable: Historian Eric Hobsbawm writes that "The modern sense of the word 'nation' is no older than the eighteenth century, give or take the odd predecessor (1990:3)." 2.) That the nation is essentially an imagined community, in that one can never personally know all of the members of said community (Anderson 1983:3). 3. The idea that a particular collectivity is a nation precedes the existence of such a nation: Gellner has written, nationalism "is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist (1983)". In summation, the concept of nation becomes the focus of study rather than a nation as object that is taken for granted to have a concrete existence. The link between nation and state is conceptually dissected to reveal its artifice in opposition to essentialist

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<sup>3</sup> Webster's New World Dictionary. Third College Edition

assumptions of the nation-state, such as the notion that a population of a given state is homogeneous. This homogeneity was to be ideally expressed in a common language, history, literature, ethnicity, religion and so forth, in other words what might be called a common culture.

An Enlightenment idea that informs the modern relationship between nation and state, and exemplified in the French Revolution, was that the state should legitimately be governed by its citizens rather than by an elite such as the nobility or church. It was from this premise that the equation of the state, with the nation, with the people, followed (Hobsbawm 1990:19). "Historically the nationalist state formula is the marriage of the ancient Idealist view of the state with the modern nationalist idea of culture (Kupchan 1996)." Romantic philosophers provided a "theory of community" through which the state as "a moral partnership of consenting citizens" could be naturalized as a "cultural nation (Calleo 1996:17)". Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) is the German Romanticist credited above all with developing the most fully elaborated conception of nation in relation to culture:

Herder believed that all men did share a common humanity (Humanitat), but history had made them different. Each people (Volk) developed its distinctive culture (Kultur) - a bundle of linked ideas memories, and sentiments that was its reaction over time to a particular environment and collective experience. Distinctive nations were the result. Such nations were the natural subdivisions of humankind, each the product of its own particular circumstances and innovations. Each nation developed its own special insights into human potential, and each had to be understood in its own terms (Calleo 1996:18)

The nation in a sense was envisioned as a self-governing cultural unit at a time when this was the exception in Europe rather than the rule. In response to the influential ideas of the notion of 'a people', in the late 18th & 19th centuries artists and intellectuals 'rediscovered' and invented ethnic histories and national traditions which were employed in the development of national identities throughout Europe (Burke 1978). In essence projects which defined the various peoples of Europe were deliberately pursued with the

idea that each group should share a cultural uniformity and serve as the basis upon which a sovereign country should be founded. The premier tenant of nationalism that developed at this time is defined by anthropologist Ernest Gellner as “primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent (1983:1).” While this ideal of sameness is in actuality never completely met by any nation-state, it is a point of reference from which the attempt to build the nation-state is typically approached<sup>4</sup>. The idea that a nation precedes the nation-state is a common one, however Anthony D. Smith points out that it is much more prescient to regard the conceptualizing of a nation as a product of the formation of the political process of building a nation-state (1992). The history of the Italian nation-state provides an exemplary instance of this fact as outlined in the chapter three.

### **May I See Your Passport? The quandary of civic and ethnic nationalism.**

Michael Ignatieff distinguishes between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ types of nationalism.

According to Ignatieff:

‘civic’ nationalism, maintains that the nation should be composed of all those — regardless of race, color, creed, gender, language, or ethnicity — who subscribe to the nation’s political creed. This nationalism is called civic because it envisages the nation as a community of equal, rights bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values. This nationalism is necessarily democratic, since it vests sovereignty in all of the people (1994:6)

He claims that “most Western nation-states now define their nationhood in terms of common citizenship and not by common ethnicity (1994:7).” ‘Ethnic’ nationalism on the other hand is stated to be a nationalism based on “the people’s pre-existing ethnic characteristics: their language, religion, customs and traditions. (1994:7). In the nation

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<sup>4</sup> That some nation-states promote a concept of official multi-culturalism does not necessarily mean that the reification of culture in fixed categories is circumvented. Typically the tensions between heterogeneity and the political and ideological structures of Nationalist homogeneity result in competing nationalisms within relevant discussions of such. See Segal and Handler 1995. Pease Chock: 1995)

defined by citizenship it is the administrative function of the state that creates the conditions within which one has a nationality. The state thus precedes the nation. In ethnic nationalism, the nation is said to exist independently of the state. Thus one can speak of the 'Basque nation' which exists within the territories of both Spain and France as a nation conceived in terms of ethnicity.

Ignatieff's division of nationalism into two distinct kinds has been criticized for over-simplification of actual practices that occur under the guise of nationalism. For Ignatieff, 'civic' nationalism is in fact democratic patriotism, and is posed as a solution to the more negative aspects of 'ethnic' nationalism. However, Robert Fine who calls this sort of civic nationalism the 'new nationalism' asserts that there can be no simplistic mutually exclusive separation between a civil and an ethnic nationalism (1994 in Yuval-Davis 1997:20)." Further Yuval-Davis points out philosopher Hannah Arendt's observation that the modern democratic nation-state is constituted out of contradictions such as representative politics that exclude participation of the majority of citizens in political life. Even in officially 'multi-cultural' nation-states such as Canada one speaks of ethnic communities, who are largely conceived of as minorities. This is possible only when some people are grouped peripherally to others. Thus even in a nation that might be defined as a 'civic' nation, ethnicity is a meaningful social category. Where groups form around a notion of ethnicity, there is also the possibility of 'ethnic' nationalism. It is Yuval-Davis view that "there is an inherent connection between the ethnic and national projects...there is no inherent difference (although there is sometimes a difference of scale) between ethnic and national collectivities; they are both the Andersonian "imagined communities (1997:16)". Claiming nation status brings an understanding that a group is a

'people' who therefore have an inherent right to sovereignty, whether through the establishment of a nation-state or through autonomy within a nation-state (as is the case with Catalonia Spain). Further complicating the notion of a simple 'civic' nationalism is that it negates meanings invested in ideas about nation and the nation-state through history as they are linked to notions of identity. Even in 'civic' nation-states people have ambivalent notions of what nationality means in everyday life.

### **The hegemony of the Nation-state**

Just as everyone has an age, gender or name it is habitually taken for granted that everyone has a nationality, or in any case that they should have one. It would be, in other words, as arresting to say that one has no nationality, as it would be to say that one has no age, gender or name or culture. While these are categories that are not universal in the sense that not all cultural groups employ them in the same way, if at all, they are universalized through the global institutionalization of modernity. In fact, article 15. of the United Nations 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' states the following: "(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality. (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality" National status is thus linked to issues of human rights as it is understood as a basic constituent of the individual to operate freely in the world. Nationality thus has come to be effectively universally accepted as a norm by which individuals and groups are distinguished on a global scale. Even where an individual's primary identity is not understood as that of nationality, a national identity will be imposed by the state. Furthermore when one attempts to cross borders between autonomous states (inter 'national' borders) one's state affiliation is often imperative, and is in turn received in terms of nationality by officials. In this regard the idea that each person belongs to a nation-state is a hegemonic one, meaning that it is an idea so entrenched in thought and practice that to contradict it or reject it is to position oneself outside the understood social operations of everyday life. The idea of the nation

is so entrenched in the global system of political and economic affairs that it is taken as a naturalized condition of being.

Nationalism overrides the particulars of ideology in that it may be a colonial project in one instance, and yet may just as credibly be a reaction to colonialism in another (Alter: 1985). The goals, means, motives and political ideologies that may come under the label of nationalism are often circumstantial. A state with many nations is according to nationalist thinking inherently oppressive, in that one nation is subsuming its rights to self-government to another. To rectify this circumstance it is imperative that the contained or suppressed nation must construct another state that conforms to a homogeneously conceived nation. The rationale of nationalism is reductionist when followed through. It is about making distinctions between an us and a not-us; distinctions that are to be translated into legislation concerning territorial and political rights. By the logic of nationalism a state with many peoples thus should actually be many states.

The consequences of the hegemony of identifying nation with state has and continues to lead to much political friction because of the inherent fact that despite all institutional action towards constructing states along lines of a single nation there are in fact few if any states in the world that can truly be said to integrate its population as a unified and monochromatic identity. The obvious problem is that there are very few territories in the world that can be regarded as being inhabited by a homogeneous group of people. Nations in other words as units to divide people into groups overlap. The nation-state often absorbs minority groups and in a sense the creation of a nation-state is the stimulus for the creation of other potential nation-states within its own territorial boundaries. The reasoning of nationalism followed to its logical extreme inevitably demands the reduction of the state to the confines of the smallest populations that share a collective identity that may be expressed as a nation. Like the fracturing of a glass with a chisel nationalist movements may set into motion ever diminishing series of splinterings. Nationhood may be understood explicitly or implicitly as the most potent means to

cultivate local interests, by becoming a universally (globally) recognized acting unit.

The number of nation-states has been continually increasing since the mid eighteenth century. Rather than fading into the background as an archaic remnant of earlier times, nationalism has become a global norm for group affiliation and political expression<sup>5</sup>. The basis for the rights of the nation to form a state is rooted in the idea that the nation forms a natural social unit. That a particular people are a nation is something that should be self-apparent. The truth of the matter however is that nations are socially constructed, some more obviously so than others<sup>6</sup>. A useful starting point may be found in Benedict Anderson's oft-quoted definition of nation as

“...an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (1991[1983]: 5-6)”.

The anthropologist however must concede to the fact that the idea of the nation and its link to the state does constitute a social reality in that it is an idea that informs real peoples beliefs and actions, from the formal level of state institutions to the informal manifestations of daily life (i.e. peoples prejudices about buying foreign foods and so forth). In studying the nation as a social phenomenon the anthropologist must consider how individuals relate to the nation, what meaning it has to them and how they participate in its maintenance or transformation.

Needless to say any collectivity is potentially a nation. The question better asked is not ‘what is a nation?’, but the twofold question of why and how is a nation? That is to say why do some groups aspire to nationhood and how have those who have achieved such arrived at such a state. The investigation of what is a nation, then is a question of

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Friedman writes that “ethnic and cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenization are not two arguments, two opposing views of what is happening in the world today, but two consecutive trends of global reality (1990:311)”. The increasing popularity of nationalism clearly falls into this dynamic.

<sup>6</sup> Ernest Gellner in fact points out that nationalism is just as often a project that extinguishes or transforms pre-existing cultures (1983:48-49).<sup>7</sup>



process, rather than of being.

### **The Nation and the Anthropological Quest for Intimacy**

While the developmental theorists (Hobsbawm, Gellner, Anderson and Smith) show how nationalism and the nation-state are largely outgrowths of conditions of modernity, this deconstruction distances 'nation' from its condition as something that is lived out on a daily basis. These approaches are what one might call "top-down" in that their perspective of the nation is at a macro-level and does not provide much insight into how the nation and nationality is meaningful in everyday life. The anthropologist, however, may approach the topic of 'nation' as a means by which people see themselves and others interacting as part of a larger community. If the nation is something largely imagined, it is not thought of this way subjectively.

Hobsbawm recognizes the limitations of developmental theory and discerns nations as

dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist (Hobsbawm, 1990:10).

What does nationality mean outside of the pomp and circumstance of the official evocations of the nation? Ethnological focus has tended to be on public events such as national holidays or other state sponsored productions: Anzac Day celebrations in Australia (Kapferer 1988), Israeli Remembrance and Independence Days (Handelmann 1990), communist state ritual in former Eastern block countries (C.P. Binns 1979/1980, Humphery 1983, Lane 1981, Warner 1984: 265, 278ff). "Most found that these state ceremonies suffered from the fate of imposed ritual anywhere: that however well contrived their forms, they could not control the meaning read into them by their audiences (Cohen 1994: 163)". What might it mean to be Italian at a more personal level

or as one goes about one's daily routine: As a student or a housewife an artist a teacher or a small business man? Hobsbawm expresses a need for investigations into nationalism at a more personal level, but notes that

(The) view from below, i.e. the nation as seen not by governments and the spokesmen and activists of nationalist (or non-nationalist) movements, but by the ordinary persons who are the objects of their action and propaganda, is exceedingly difficult to discover (1990:11).

However it has long-been anthropology's forté to examine social phenomena at the level of the local and minute. It is hoped that anthropology thus may be a suitable discipline from which to explore issues of intimacy and the nation. Agreeing with Thomas Hylland Eriksen's statement that the theoretical concepts employed by the social scientist should not be confused with the understandings that people approach them with in everyday life (1993:16), I propose that the nation in fact will mean different things to different people and therefore no definitive statement as to what constitutes a particular nation can be made. At the same time I surmise that there must be some sort of middle-ground in which nationality is experienced as something shared. The anthropologist researching notions of the nation, is involved in a process of continually balancing the general and the specific, the formal and the idiosyncratic, stereotypes and the diversities of actual life.

### **Symbols: Interpretation and Meaning**

Montserrat Guibernau imparts that it is in the realm of the irrational and emotional that further exploration of the nation and nationalism needs to be explored. He writes that

Social and political theory has tended to place emotions and feelings outside the sphere of its inquiry, considering the irrational inevitability inferior to the rational. My point is that the force of nationalism springs not from rational thought alone, but from the irrational powers of emotions that stem from the feelings of belonging to a particular group (1996:76)

Guibernau proposes, in reference to the nation and nationalism, that since "symbols and rituals play a major role in the cultivation of a sense of solidarity among the members of

the group (1996:3)”, that it through a consideration of such symbols as they are evoked in daily routines that one may gain access to more personal meanings of nation.

Anthony P. Cohen however implores that any approach to symbols in relation to nation must consider the individual interpretations of such, as he examines the nexus of the individual and collective. Cohen states that

cultural forms, such as language, ritual and other symbolic constructions, are made meaningful and substantial by people’s interpretations of them. They are given life by being made meaningful...the power they exercise lies in providing us with the means by which to think. The assumption that under normal circumstances they can make us think in specifiable ways is mistaken. It privileges culture over thinking selves, instead of seeing it as the product of thinking selves (Cohen: 166-167).

The power that symbols have, he states is found in their ability to impart meaning “in ways which allow their common form to be retained and shared among the members of a group, while not imposing on these individuals the constraints of uniform meaning. Symbols can be made to fit the circumstances of the individual” (Cohen 1994:18). Any investigation of the nation from a symbolic perspective thus should keep in mind that symbols are employed idiosyncratically. For this reason the process of interviewing individuals and engaging in daily lives of Italians in Milan is an appropriate means to approach meanings of nation, nationality and nationalisms as they occur in conjunction with a multitude of other factors that inform ones identity, be it gender, class, religion and such.

### **Cultural Intimacy**

Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld offers the conceptual tool of ‘cultural intimacy’ as a means by which public and personal notions of the nation may be approached from an anthropological perspective. His concept of ‘cultural intimacy’ introduces the notion of individual agency in the processes of defining the nation, without losing track of the ways in which individuals identify with groups. The concept of

cultural intimacy recognizes that the state or institutional levels of interpreting and presenting the nation are never monopolistic. There are always alternative notions of what the nation is that both criticize official discourses on the nation and simultaneously reinforce the institution of the nation. A personal example of this was noted on an English language newscast (Global Television, June 31, 1998) when it was remarked by the newscaster that Canadians had done poorly on a national history quiz. The statement was then made that perhaps not knowing Canadian history was as "Canadian as beavers and maple syrup". Clearly a particular Canadian quality of being ignorant of the nation's history will never be incorporated into official configurations of Canadianess and is not something officially taught in Canadian schools. Such a notion however could find its way into popular understandings of what it means to be Canadian. It may in other words be included in the scope of cultural intimacy that Canadians share as cultural intimacy is defined as

The aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation (Herzfeld 1997:3).

I would add however that 'cultural intimacy' need not only be seen as being constructed around notions that could be considered sources of embarrassment, but may include characteristics that are regarded in positive terms.

Herzfeld claims that in order to approach the nation, the anthropologist must study 'self-stereotypes'. "By 'self-stereo-types' he means ideas that people have about themselves which are often conceived in essentialist terms. That is they are often managed as if they were innate or natural qualities that a given people possess. For instance, a self-stereotype that I encountered during my field research, is that 'Italians are an open and friendly people'. The stereotype is used to indicate a norm by which Italians are to be judged by themselves. Thus when my father in law was told by a Sicilian friend of

another Italian woman's lack of generosity, he stated fervently "That is not Italian!". It is this sort of notion concerning what is Italian that is not necessarily part of the official state package of ideas that constitute Italian identity. There are ideas that lie outside the formal state discourses on Italy and the Italian that one encounters through the course of daily life. Thus Herzfeld states that anthropological methods are particularly promising when it comes to gaining insight into constructions of national identity:

I suggest that the model of cultural intimacy is a particularly apt concept for anthropologists to contribute to the study of nationalism (as well as to other idioms of identity formation), because it typically becomes manifest in the course of their long-term fieldwork, a site of social intimacy in the fullest sense. Anthropologists are in an unusually good position to know the forms of rueful self-recognition in which people commonly engage.  
(1997:3-4)

Here the nation is no longer being approached from a "top-down" perspective as one is engaging in the self-ascribed stereotypes that people relate with in order to make sense of the world. Herzfeld points out the necessity for anthropologists to understand the essentialist ideas that are employed as a part of daily life.

Thus Italian national identity will be analyzed with the following considerations:

1) The nation and therefore nationality are historically situated social constructions. 2) That the nation as a social construction is in a continual process of being made and unmade, in response to political, economic and social dynamics. 3) That there are competing and contradictory constructions; therefore the assumption of the objective existence of an entity called the nation is misplaced. 4) There is a popular level of discourse on nationality that has a life outside of official or institutional realms. 5) That individuals situate themselves within a nation/national identity through engagement with sets of symbols (stereotypes) that delineate the nation and in turn that which is outside the nation.

### **CHAPTER THREE. HISTORY OF THE ITALIAN NATION-STATE AS NARRATIVE AND BACKDROP.**

There are two senses in which history may be understood, each one supporting the other like the leaning boards of an 'A'-frame. In the first sense history is understood as that which has historicity, in other words, that which has actually occurred in the past. In the second sense, history is the activity in which the goal is to record, understand, identify and interpret that which has occurred in the past. Needless to say history in the first sense can never be completely recalled, so that history in the second sense is something that can be contested, revised and is unavoidably incomplete. However, it is history in the first sense, as something truthful and definitive, which infuses history as an interpretive activity with its authority. History is ultimately a discourse about authenticity. Ideally it operates as a systematic field of specialized knowledge through which definitive statements about past events are made. In doing so it delineates rules by which statements made about past events are regarded as valid or not. For instance a mythological telling of history, in which a supernatural origin for a people is claimed, is generally regarded as non-valid as an historical explanation by western scholastic standards; it does not meet the standards of verification established within the discourse of history. The historical explanation is always expected to supersede a mythological explanation and never the reverse. Claims to "historical accuracy" (which are claims to knowledge) thus feed into structures of authority and power, whereas claims to knowledge provided by ancestral spirits do not.

It is not merely historians of course who have an interest in the telling of history. Politicians, social activists, educators, corporate boards, housewives, physicians, lawyers

and so forth, all have stakes in the 'truth' of past events. Nationalist movements in particular are concerned about the telling of history, as it is a means of legitimation to claims of territory and rights via identity. Any study of the nation-state thus must recognize the role that history plays in the maintenance of the nation-state. In the text 'History and Ethnicity', Chapman, McDonald and Tonkin observe that:

A nation draws history behind it, like the wake of a great ship. Useless or irrelevant events either do not happen, or are ignored or are completely stillborn. The process is one with centuries of history, with the efforts of generations of people, literate and nonliterate, intellectual or otherwise. It is small wonder that a nation with a long history looks to have its destiny carved out for it in advance, as if everything before were a preparation for something still to come. (1989:7)

The past in other words informs the future. It answers the questions of who 'we' are, and where 'we' are going, by telling who 'we' were in the past. History is usually a necessary source of validation and legitimacy for nationalist causes as history is a discourse whose legitimacy surpasses nationalist rhetoric. To be able to make historical claims to land and rights is something that is recognized as meaningful and necessary in legal and political terms because it is accepted as verifiable.

Paradoxically the nation, which is validated by its historicity, is simultaneously felt to transcend history. That is to say, the nation is typically dealt with as an inherent quality of the order of things and not as socially and historically contingent. As renowned scholar of nationalism, Benedict Anderson has noted:

If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny. With Debray we might say, 'Yes, it is quite accidental that I am born French; but after all, France is eternal.' (Anderson 1983:11-12).

The social historian may ask the question 'How did the past create the present?' but also may properly invert this question to ask "How does the present create the

past?" (Chapman, McDonald, Tonkin, 1989: 5) From an anthropological perspective, history is often approached through the second question wherein history is treated as a requirement of the present (Hylland Eriksen 1993:72). While the goal of the historian may be to apprehend in a plausible manner history as it occurred, the anthropologist often looks at history as it is used in the present. In this chapter, I thus review Italian history with a dual purpose: to recall the events that have shaped the present, but also to layout the background from which contemporary perceptions about Italy and Italian identity are drawn. With these thoughts in mind I will relate a concise history of the development of the Italian nation-state from its beginnings in the mid-1800's to the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the present day Italian Republic, keeping in mind issues chiefly pertaining to the idea of 'nation' and Italian identity.

### **Nationalization of the Past**

While Italy has long been understood as a well defined geographical area, prior to 1861 one could speak of being Italian only in the way that we now speak of one being European, African, Asian, Caribbean, Latin American and such. In other words, it was not necessary to have a common language, sense of history, or set of cultural practices to be given this label. The preferred way of imagining Italy by nationalists during the Risorgimento (the 19<sup>th</sup> century movement for the unification of Italy: 1840's to 1860's) and by most Italians, nationalist or not, today, however is to emphasize a uniform identity which has been maintained from earlier times. There is an assumption that is often made that the Italian nation precedes the Italian nation-state. Italy is treated as a nation that was waiting to happen.

National history encourages a view in which diverse political and cultural forms of the past are subsumed under a common heading of Italian history. Italy of today thus may be thought of by Italians and non-Italians alike as a land with ancient roots and a venerable patrimony. A typical history of Italy begins with the Romans, (though



sometimes this is moved to an earlier time with the Etruscans) and continues through the Renaissance, the 'Age of Discovery' and the Enlightenment to the Modern period. Italian history thus encompasses the words and deeds of such notable individuals as Augustus Caesar, Dante, da Vinci, Machiavelli, Michelangelo and Raphael none of whom, were Italians in the sense of nationality we use today. Yet one might readily face ridicule to deny that these people were Italian, outside of an academic context.

What constitutes the boundaries of Italian history is primarily determined by the boundaries of the present day nation-state. This is to say that despite the political, ethnic or cultural categories that defined communities in different terms in the past, they may all be explained as Italian, if events occurred within the borders of the nation-state as they are set out today. An example of how history is nationalized may be given through the following example: The city of Nice was once a part of the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia and this onetime kingdom now forms two of the official regions of the Italian nation-state. The history of Nice however is only peripherally part of Italian history as Nice was given to France in the 1800's prior to the establishment of the Italian nation-state. Today Nice is a French city and therefore its history is told within French history. Italian history thus extends not only temporally, but *spatially* ending where the present day borders of the country end. Had Nice remained part of the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia it would today be an Italian city and would no doubt, be proudly included in the Italian patrimony; its past would be conceived of as an Italian past<sup>7</sup>, in the same way that the pasts of Venice, Milan, Rome, Florence, Naples and so on are conceived of as Italian pasts. However in the case of Nice, events that occurred there in the distant past are not commonly considered as a part of Italian history<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that Nice was the birthplace of Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi who was 'mortified that this Italian city should be bartered away to the French in contravention of the nationalist principle' (Duggan 1994:129)

<sup>8</sup> Another example of the nationalisation of the past would be the question of Russian/Ukrainian history. During the period of the Soviet Union learning about past events in the Ukraine, would be undertaking a study in Russian history. Today with Ukrainian independence the same set of past events are studied as Ukrainian history.

## **Building the Nation**

The Risorgimento, which literally means “the resurrection” is the name for the historical period which begins in the early 19th century and is characterized by the emergence of Italian nationalism which worked towards the political unification of the various political entities that oversaw the lands of the Italian peninsula. This period ends in 1861 when they were politically merged under the House of Savoy, rulers of the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, as the Kingdom of Italy<sup>9</sup>. Before 1861 the geographical territory of Italy was governed by numerous states: The Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia (established in 1720, previously known as the Duchy of Savoy) sat on the borders of France and Switzerland in the north west. In the north-east along the borders of present day Switzerland and Austria was the Republic of Venice (La Serenissima). Central Italy was primarily occupied by the Papal States which extended from Rome along the Adriatic coast to include Ravenna, Bologna and Ferrara. Sandwiched between these relatively large states were the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Duchy of Modena, the Duchy of Parma, the Duchy of Mantua, the Duchy of Milan, the Duchy of Massa, the Republics of Genoa and Lucca on the Ligurian coast, and the Stato dei Presidi which included the island of Elba off the coast of Tuscany. South of the Papal States was the Kingdom of the Two Sicilys which consisted of the remainder of the peninsula (referred to as Naples) and the island of Sicily (See map 3)<sup>10</sup>.

The idea of Italy had circulated long before the nation-state came into being. However, it first served as a designation for a geographical area and later came to be a cultural and linguistic label (i.e. one could speak of Italian music or literature). The foundations upon which a common nation was said to exist during the Risorgimento was

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<sup>9</sup> This makes the nation-state of Italy only six years older than that of Canada, which is generally thought of as a young nation-state

<sup>10</sup> Today there are a number of seemingly anomalous political entities that trace their form to pre-unification times. These include the Vatican City, which is an independent state contained within the city of Rome and the Republic of San Marino near Urbino on the Adriatic coast. Present day Monaco also finds its present day autonomy deriving from political organization of pre-unification Italy when it was located within the territory of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

primarily these cultural and linguistic attributes, however these were held in common only by an educated elite (Lyttelton 1993:99)<sup>11</sup>. For the most part the notion of a common Italian nation circulated among men of letters in the mid 1700's (i.e. Saverio Bettinelli, *Della patria degli italiani* (The Italians' Fatherland) in *Il Caffé* 1766, and Gino Rinaldo d'Carli *Lettera seconda: Dodici lettere inglesi* (Second Letter: Twelve English Letters) 1765)<sup>12</sup> A politically united Italy remained a subject of interest to this minority.

At the time that the modern state was founded there did not exist in practice, anything that could be thought of as an established Italian nation or people. By the most conservative estimates, less than 10% of the population within the Italian territory spoke the Italian language. In fact this language was one among hundreds of regional languages used in everyday speech throughout the peninsula.<sup>13</sup> Italian as it exists today finds its origins as the written language derived from fourteenth century literary Florentine which was codified at the beginning of the sixteenth century (Lepschy, Lepschy and Voghera, 1996:69). It was a literary language, and not the speech of everyday use at this point in time<sup>14</sup>. When Italian was chosen by the new Italian government to be the official language of the nation-state it was primarily because of the prestige it had in being the traditional language of essayists and poets<sup>15</sup>. That it was not the speech of common usage in fact did

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<sup>11</sup> Lyttelton places the figure of those knowledgeable in Italian and literate at 2.5%. he gets this figure from T. de Mauro. *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita* (Bari, 1970). p.43. See also Levy 5:1996)

<sup>12</sup> Gino Rinaldo d'Carli expressed his feelings on 'provincialism' in a story in which an Italian traveller is asked by a Milanese gentleman if he is a foreigner in the 1700's: "The Milanese...unsuccessfully attempted to defend his line of inquiry by alluding to the custom everywhere in Italy of labelling a foreigner anyone who is not born or does not live within the immediate confines." The traveller regards this practice of referring to Italians within Italy, as foreigners, as a characteristic that is shared by all Italians and insists that it is wrong for what he regards as the same people to refer to each other as foreigners.

<sup>13</sup> Italian languages are grouped into thirty dialects. Calling these tongues dialects is however a social/political distinction rather than a linguistic one: "These dialects are in effect separate Romance languages and they can differ from each other as much as French differs from Spanish. These Italian dialects are not derived from Italian, nor are they varieties or adaptations of the national language...Turinese, Milanese, Venetian, Bolognese, Florentine, Neapolitan, Palermitano, etc. are all 'sister' languages, derived from spoken Latin. They differ from each other in phonology, grammar and lexis" (Lepschy et al. 1996:70) From Italian Nationalism Ronaldo S. Cunsolo 19:6)

<sup>14</sup> Given that Italian was a literary language, it is significant to point out that in 1860 over 90% of the population of Italy would have been illiterate ( Lepschy et al 1996:74)

<sup>15</sup> "In the age of nationalism poets enjoyed a peculiarly privileged role as the guardians and even creators of national identity. Nowhere was this more true than in Italy. After all Dante was the founding father of the Italian language...Dante and the other great poets of the past were elevated to the status of patron saints in

not discourage nationalists who often had cursory knowledge of it themselves: "many of those who led the struggle to establish the unified state did not speak Italian and most, being from Piedmont spoke French as their mother-tongue (Richards 1994:104)".

A conscious effort was made on the part of the government to educate the populace of the newly established nation-state, who spoke diverse languages, in the Italian language as a single language was desirable for practical as well as ideological reasons. Italian Nationalists of the day argued that "a national language, national authors, and a national literature were essential for the development of an effective public spirit" (Cunsulo 1990:7). French which was spoken by the Italian Monarchy and the political elite was understood to "belong" to France and was used anyhow only in the north-west of Italy. Italy is perhaps unique among European nations in that until the mid twentieth century for a vast number of Italians, the national language was in fact a second language.

The creation of a uniform Italian identity was consciously argued as a necessity by the founders of Italy in 1861 as evidenced in the oft quoted statement made by Risorgimento statesman Massimo d'Azeglio (1792-1866) "We have made Italy, now we must make Italians (Hobsbawm, 1975: 89)." While contemporary nationalist movements are typically characterized by demands for sovereignty through the establishment of an independently governed state establishing political independence from what is understood to be an already existing state. (I.e. Quebec from Canada, Scotland from the United Kingdom, Catalan from Spain), such was not the case in the call by Risorgimento nationalists. In contrast the establishment of Italy called for numerous states with diverse languages, customs and identities to unite within the body of a new and larger state. The goal of the Risorgimento nationalists was to assemble a single, political system, economy, language, sense of history and people out of a multiplicity of states, languages, peoples, and their pasts. Ironically, the Risorgimento which means "revival" was a project to

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the national revolutionary cult" (Lyttelton 1994:72)Teich, Mikulás and Roy Porter eds. *The National Question in Europe in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge University Press. New York 1994 [1993].

create that which never existed except as an ideal. The creation of Italy was seen both as the fulfillment of a manifest destiny and as a practical project given political trends of the day that were shaping the way in which states were to operate on a global scale. It was thus both a product of Romanticism and of pragmatism. In order to understand Italian Risorgimento nationalism it is thus necessary to look beyond the borders of Italy.

### **Europe and Nationalism**

Italian nationalism (1789-1860) occurred in the context of a period of European history in which nationalism in general was being legitimated on moral, and scientific grounds as the alternative to older forms of rule that were clearly directed from above, be it by emperors, monarchs or religious leaders. Following the French Revolution, rule by an elite, particularly a foreign elite, appeared distasteful to many, because of ideological principles of self-rule popularized during the enlightenment. Democracy and the rights of citizens as the foundations of just government had come to be understood as part of the natural order of human progress, while the older principles such as 'the divine right of kings' had come to be deemed as archaic, and superstitious (the Restoration notwithstanding)<sup>16</sup>. Rousseau's belief that "the general will" should guide government, as opposed to the will of the few, came to the attention of much of Europe's educated elite through the gates of the French revolution (Calleo 1994:17). To be sure there was a strong reaction against the physical and social excesses of the revolution, as typified by Edmund Burke *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, but all told by 1848, the status quo was changing throughout Europe.

Much of the Italian conception of a new unified Italian state was elicited by the French Revolution (Lyttelton 1994, Keating, 1988) At the time of the *Risorgimento*

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<sup>16</sup> I.e. Alexis deToqueville wrote in 1835 "The gradual development of the principle of equality is therefore, a Providential fact. It has all the characteristics of such a fact: it is universal, it is durable, it constantly eludes all human interference, and all events as well as all men contribute to its progress." *Democracy in America*: 1963 [1835]:29."

(1815-1860) the Italian word “patria” shifted from being a word merely referring to a person’s place of birth or state affiliation, to becoming a politically charged term. A “patriot” at this time came to mean “someone who worked for the cause of freedom against despotism.” (Lyttelton: 63) A link between identity, territory and political ideology was thus conventionalized in Italian nationalism.

Romantic philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) who is acknowledged as the individual most important to the development of the principles of nation and nationalism, ironically formulated much of his theory in reaction against the French culture and language which Napoleon brought to the German states in the early 19th century. Ironic because it wed a German nationalism with French Enlightenment ideas about self-government in defiance of French cultural imperialism. That Von Herder framed his nationalist principles within the enlightenment notion of ‘Progress’ is evidenced in the title of his work *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*. He stated that following the dictates of ‘Progress’ the cultural nation and the political state should coincide as the nation formed the natural unit by which the boundaries of the sovereign state were determined. It was from this pool of thought that the ‘father’ of Italian nationalism, Giuseppe Mazzini, drew in the development of his beliefs in a politically and culturally united Italy as a fulfillment of providence.

Italian nationalism, however, was never represented by a single movement or set of ideas. Not only were there a variety of formulations of nationalism, (neo-guelphism, liberalism, monarchist, confederationism) but the unification process itself was far from a coherent project. Surveying “Italian” history from the 1840’s to the 1860’s (which in many respects is limited to events within the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia) it is clear that various ideological streams intertwined with pragmatic political platforms.

### **Nation ordained by providence**

Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) is typically characterized as the provider of the

*esprit de corps* of the Risorgimento. Founder of *Giovane Italia* (Young Italy), he proposed a kind of spiritual nationalism which was as much influenced by Herder's ideas of national self-determination (Duggan 1994: 119-1200) as by notions of popular rule born of the Enlightenment. Mazzini held the belief that the Italian peninsula was destined to be unified as one nation in one state.

Italy was imagined by Mazzini as "the third Rome" the first being that of the Roman Empire characterized by political unity, the second being that of the Catholic Church characterized by moral unity and the third imminent Rome being "Rome of the People, of the Italian Nation, having faith in Progress, in Humanity's unified life, and in the special purpose of each nation" (from G. Mazzini "*Missione italiana*," *Scritti* [Writings] *di Giuseppe Mazzini*, 1832-71 (Milan, 1921) pp. 58-59. via Cunsolo).

Ultimately Mazzini's dream of seeing a united Italy did occur, but not in the context he wished for. Rather Italy was united in many respects by default and convenience, rather than through the fulfillment of an idealists notion of destiny unfolding.

### **National ordained by parliament**

In practice the call for a united Italy was not always met out of sympathy for nationalist causes. For instance, historian Lyttelton writes that it "found its greatest response in provincial cities like Brescia and Reggio- Emilia, where it was seen as a way of challenging the hegemony of old capitals (Venice and Modena) (Lyttelton 1993: 64)." And while Mazzini was thoroughly a 19th century nationalist, the pragmatics of establishing the first national government and giving shape to the Italian nation-state were largely the designs of liberal Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour, the powerful Piedmontese parliamentarian and first Prime Minister of Italy. Cavour did not favour Italian unification as much as he desired sovereign rule and "aggrandizement" of Piedmont in the

face of competition from the French to the west and The Austro-Hungarian Empire which occupied Lombardy to the east (Duggan, 1994: 123). He used nationalism for what it could do as “a superior instrument” to manage disparate movements throughout the peninsula, recognizing that “Confederate and unitary, democratic republican nationalists were indispensable for manpower (Cunsolo 1990: 68).” Cavour’s style of nationalism has been called state-chartered nationalism because of its institutional design as opposed to its emotional appeal. In fact, Cavour discouraged populist political activity believing that “a mass, spontaneous uprising was naive and ruinous”.

Noted Italian historian Denis Mack-Smith evaluates that the Risorgimento was a mish mash of variously motivated causes that often conflicted rather than a coherent, expression of a popular consensus (1968:108)<sup>17</sup>. Whatever the dynamics that encouraged the political project of “Italy” it was certainly not founded in the realities or imaginations of the masses who inhabited the various states from the foot of the Swiss Alps to the Island of Sicily. The ultimate outcome of the struggle(s) towards unity was that “unity was to lack the popular and democratic foundation which Mazzini and other democrats had regarded as indispensable” (Lyttelton, 1994: 95).

At the Southern end of the peninsula, Sicily had revolted against rule from Naples in 1848-49 and briefly established itself as an independent state. This did last for more than a year and liberal and democratic opinion was that the path to freedom was to join the rest of Italy and thus override Neapolitan rule (Lyttelton, 1994:97). Here then is an instance of how regional politics could favour political unification without being nationalistic. Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi took advantage of revolts that were taking place against the Bourbon royalty in the south where they had governed for centuries.

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<sup>17</sup> Mack-Smith:111 We are confronted by the fact that the pivotal rebellions of the Risorgimento were local uprisings against oppressive government. in fact that the key motives at first were more liberal than national. For instance, it might be a protest by Milanese citizens against the Austrian tax-gatherers and the important point here was that they were tax-collectors, not that they were Austrians, for similar risings took place elsewhere in Italy. At another time it was a protest by laymen against the overweening pretension and privileges of the Church.”



Coming from the north of Italy with his 'thousands' as his mercenary army was called he steered revolting peasants towards the idea of unification. For the peasants the battle alongside Garibaldi meant the hope of relief from poverty, for the landowners, it meant freedom from the dabbings of Naples. In truth it was "more of a civil war than a war of liberation"(Duggan 133). For the king of Piedmont, who had discouraged Garibaldi's ventures in the south, Garibaldi's success was an unexpected chance to unite the entire Italian peninsula.

Italian unification thus came piecemeal. In the north the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia was motivated to be a great European power. An immediate problem that the first government of Italy faced and that was that unification had been a project that occurred from the top down. There was little cohesion amongst the various interest groups in the new country and ambiguous popular support. "The idea that Italians collectively were burning to make a united republic was apparently quite false in fact. It was, nevertheless, one of those myths which, true or false, are a cause of heroic and superhuman action," (Denis Mack-Smith 1968:108). That a conscious effort would have to be made to naturalize the creation of the new nation-state was foreseen by earlier proponents of Italian unification (1790's).

Unitarian propaganda attempted to win popular support and diffuse a new idea of nationality through education. A kind of republican catechism was drawn up for children: they were taught that they were Italians, that Italy's boundaries had been set by nature and that the division of Italy constituted 'violence against natural rights' (Lyttelton: 64-65).

The city of Turin in Piedmont, seat of the Monarchy of Vittorio Emmanuale II and the parliament of the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, became the new capital and to many it seemed that "Piedmont had conquered the rest of Italy (Duggan 1994:133)." Cavour set out to establish the political institutions and structures of Piedmont throughout the rest of Italy, stating that "people will settle down and adapt themselves to our regime, for our institutions are in all respects preferable to those from which they were liberated."

(Duggan 1994: 135) Popular support or at least the appearance of such was felt to be necessary to legitimate rule and popular plebiscites were held to formalize annexation of territories into the Italian state. Lyttelton notes however that “The character of these plebiscites as expressions of popular sovereignty was highly dubious” (98) In fact in the south it was necessary to keep public order through the use of military occupation. The Italian nation-state was established in 1861 with Venice added in 1866 and ‘completed’ in 1870 with the inclusion of Rome (map 4). The conditions of unification however meant that the Risorgimento has been reflected upon by Italian historians as “*una rivoluzione mancata*” (a revolution that never took place) (Cunsolo: 1990: 73)” an idea that persists in present day thought among neo-fascists, Padanisti separatist and ethnic revivalist movements such as those found in Piedmont, Friuli, the Veneto, Valle d’Aosta as well as to some degree among less ideologically concerned individuals who formed my social network in Milan.

### **The Consequences of Italian Unification**

The unresolved question of an Italian national identity lead to feelings of desperation among later politicians. A sense of urgency to complete the unfinished project of the Risorgimento was tied to a feeling that Italy was not a true nation-state in the manner of the great powers as France or Britain, (but that it deserved to be as the seat of the western Renaissance). At this time the parliamentary practice of *trasformismo* by which opposition party members were bought off by the majority of the parliament, became systematic. As Italian senator Stefano Jacini put it, there was a split of Italy into *a paese legale* (legal country) and *a paese reale* (true country). The former being that of the political class and the latter that of the people at large (Riall, 1993:46). This condition raised the question of the legitimacy of government that has attended perceptions

between the state and the people throughout Italy's history. Regrettably the resolution of the 1890's as the Italian government, under Prime Minister Francesco Crispi, directed its energies towards competing with the "mature" nations of Europe who were deeply involved in imperialist endeavors at this time. The public embraced the government's proposals of establishing a greater Italy in the midst of economic and social turmoil that characterized Italian affairs at the end of the 19th century. Italy's economy was shaky, parliament was corrupt, major bank scandals were widely publicized. Furthermore, under the pressure of the imminent collapse of the country Crispi adjourned parliament to rule by decree in 1896 (Mack-Smith, 1968:112-113). Crispi asserted that nation's "had an existence prior to the individuals composing them and thus had rights of their own — in particular the right to self-preservation" (Duggan, 1994: 169). It was his argument that he acted in the interests of the nation that this was a justification for his dictatorship of Italy. Italy thus entered the 20th century beginning a history of military aggression in the horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritria) which was to last up until the end of W.W.II. In Italy's case nationalism was to be closely entwined with the developments of dictatorial rule and the glorification of war. The consequences of this relationship can be seen to resonate in current attitudes and thought concerning issues of nationalism, patriotism and Italian identity in Italy.

### **The Irredentists: Forging the Nation in the Flames of Battle.**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a polarization was evolving between the Italian socialist left and the governing interests. Nationalism was used by the government

as a means to counter the currents of a possible class war which was the desire of the Socialists. The internal frustrations and resentments with the state and social conditions would be redirected towards 'glorious' and patriotic wars against other nations. Many intellectuals saw the war as a chance to forge a national community and complete the work of the Risorgimento and in 1911 Italy went to war with Libya saddling itself with a colony it had little control over.

Patriotism was offered as a replacement to religion and socialist utopianism. As Antonio Salandra stated in 1913 of the liberal platform: "We cannot offer Paradise in heaven, unlike our Catholic colleagues, nor can we offer Paradise on earth, unlike our socialist colleagues...the very essence of Italian liberalism is patriotism." Guided by this sentiment a large percentage of the population in 1915 wholeheartedly supported Prime Minister Salandra as Italy walked into the disaster of World War I.

Italian liberalism came out of the First World War in tatters with liberal seats in parliament falling to half of what they were following the election of 1919. At this time politics became polarized between the extremes of right and left, with any middle ground vanishing. This is a situation that continues throughout Italian politics up to the present day. Imperialism, patriotism, romanticism, and a deeply politically divided society formed the foundations upon which a new stage of Italian nationalism were built at the beginning of the 20th century.

### **Fascism and Unity**

Ideas and events that were to inform fascism were being developed from the beginning of unification in 1861. Imperialism, one party rule, the desire to unite the country not only politically but as a people all were to taken to there ultimate extremes under fascism. Historian Dennis Mack-Smith claims that Mazzini in part laid the ground for the kind of disdain that fascism showed for the rule of law, in that he "left behind him

a legacy of rebellion against authority, of hatred, of conspiracy, ... His resentment against not only the monarchy, but against parliament and the judiciary could not help but bring the whole constitution into dislike and contempt (1968: 113)” This is an attitude that will be much evident in discussions in chapter five about Italian attitudes towards patriotism and the state.

Although fascist *squadristi* had taken to the streets earlier, it was in 1921 that fascism as a popular movement came into being. This was the year that the *Partito Nazionale Fascista*, PNF, was founded. On October 24, one year later, Mussolini was made Prime Minister at age thirty-nine after a fascist march on Rome to denounce the current government. Officially he was to remain so until 1943, but in actuality he acted as *Il Duce* (the Leader) and ruled by decree. This marks the commencement of a period in which ideas of nationalism, patriotism and their accompanying symbols and rhetoric were to be monopolized so thoroughly by the fascist state that after the collapse of that regime they remained largely unapproachable to most Italians, including if not especially for, politicians.

A central aspect of the fascist agenda was that the party explicitly tried to forge a single and homogeneous Italian identity, through a highly centralized state bureaucracy. The importance placed on this goal is reflected by the fact that economic considerations were often of secondary importance to issues of producing a cohesive Italian national identity (Duggan, 1994: 221). As historian Emilio Gentile notes, the fascists faced the continuing task of creating Italians as the founders of the Italian nation-state, as it was a situation that was not felt to have been resolved. While fascism certainly located its heritage in the past (the Roman Empire), fascism was also engrossed in a project of

forging the “new man” who of course was to be Italian. Thus fascism both proclaimed an ancient Roman legacy while professing to will into being a novel and superior people. That they were ‘inventing tradition’ would not likely be taken as a criticism; creation was in fact the stated goal: “under fascism, this nation is being born... fascism is creating the customs from which a nation is born, the fascist nation.” (from Gentile *Sacralization* footnote 68 p.96) Thus the links with Croce’s idealism

Mussolini said that fascism’s main task was to fashion a new type of Italian, with new values and new ways of behaving. Rejecting the fundamentals of the Enlightenment version of Progress, fascism sought to remodel society by appealing not to reason but to the irrational in man: fascism according to one squadristi, was a revolt against ‘intellect’ and ‘the man of culture’ in the name of “faith, will and enthusiasm”.

Gentile describes much of this process in *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* recalling how schools, youth groups, public events and “fascist Saturdays” were designed towards the end of inculcating the masses with the politics and culture of fascism.

The goal of Italicization meant that a uniform use of language was legislated. For instance French place names were replaced with Italian ones in the primarily French speaking Valle d’Aosta. Populations were relocated, in order to ‘Italicize’ regions such as the Trentino where ‘non-Italian’ populations outnumbered the Italians. The stated goal of fascism was to subjugate the individual to the totality of the nation and state which were to be identified as one. The nation was imagined to be an ideal that transcended individual concerns. In Mussolini’s own words,

The fascist conception of the state is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, fascism, is totalitarian, and the fascist state — a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values — interprets, develops, and potentiates the whole life of a people (Dahbour and Ishay, 1995:224)

The fascist state of course was transient and collapsed with the defeat of the axis powers

in World War II. The making of an Italian people as yet incomplete. The monopolizing of patriotism and the state only deepened the fissure between the *paese legale* and the *paese reale* that had been initiated in the early years of unification

### **The New Republic:**

The end of World War II was a turning point for Italy politically, socially and economically, but the end of one political system did not necessarily mean a cultural revolution had taken place<sup>18</sup>. A symbolic distancing however, between the Italy of the new Republic and that of the fascist regime be developed was imperative to the maintenance of social stability. In this undertaking the image of the Partisan is of great importance and will be discussed in greater depth the following chapter on contemporary Italy. The project of creating the patriotic Italian, and of maintaining the nation, after the monopolization of such symbolic resources by the fascists for so long, has proven a cumbersome task. As Marx has stated: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please...The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."

### **Italian Political Landscape in brief:**

The post-war Italian political establishment was monolithically dominated by the *Democrazia cristiani* (Christian Democrats), or DC, an ideologically right of center party aligned with the policies of the Roman Catholic church. The *Partito comunista italiano* (Communist Party of Italy), or PCI, formed a strong opposition in parliament. American influence under the Marshall Plan for European reconstruction gave its support to the

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<sup>18</sup> see David Forgács: *Post-War Italian Culture: Renewal or Legacy of the Past?* in *Reconstructing the Past: Representations of the Fascist Era in Post-War European Culture* ed. Graham Bartram, Maurice Slawinski and David Steel. Keele University Press Staffordshire. 1996.). Forgács notes a much greater change in culture and society from the mid to late 1950's than from the 1930's to the 1950's (51).

DC fearing that the PCI whose antecedent was the Partisan anti-fascist movement in World War Two, would receive popular support and achieve legitimate power. Given the Cold War politics that defined relations between the USA and the USSR this was an unacceptable scenario to American policy makers, as well as to many Roman Catholic Italians whose views were represented by the DC. Italy thus joined NATO and gave solid support to western European unity. Through the 1950's Italy experienced rapid industrial growth which has since been mythologized as 'the first economic miracle' (the second miracle coming in the 1980's). It was also at this time however that the economic discrepancies between the rich industrial north and the "backwards" agricultural based south widened. The status of DC dominance in government, and communist opposition remained in place into the 1970's, producing greater social tension, than was experienced in the UK or in France for the same period (McCarthy 1997:4). The *anni de piombo* (Years of Lead roughly the 1970's) were characterized by terrorist violence from groups like the *Ordine Nuovo*, *Squadri di Azione* Mussolini and the Rosa de Venti on the right and the Red Brigade and *Gruppi di Azione Partigiana* on the left. terrorist acts were counted at over 2,000 by the late 1970's and included over 40 murders

It was in the 1970's also that the 'secularization' of Italian social life occurred. Church attendance dropped dramatically, divorce was legalized, contraceptive devices were legalized (1974).<sup>19</sup> The right to a safe abortion was to be institutionalized in 1981, but only after frantic debate through the 1970s.

The 'second economic miracle' came in the 1980's lasting until about 1992. This year marked a turning point for Italian economy, politics and society as a whole. During these years the 'materialist' values of consumer driven society were edified. By 1987 Italy was recognized as the world's fifth industrial power with a GDP exceeding that of Great Britain and by 1991 northern Italy was one of the wealthiest regions in the world.

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<sup>19</sup> In 1970 Italy had its first divorce law, however divorce was only to be granted in exceptional circumstances.



However people were having fewer children and were postponing marriage to later years. As a result family networks underwent extreme changes. Where once large extended families formed the foundation of social life, Italy was becoming a country in which the one child family was tending to be the norm.<sup>20</sup> It was also in the 1980s that immigration, legal and illegal, began to have a social impact for the first time, as Italy came to be seen as a land of opportunity and/or refuge by many people from north and East Africa and Eastern Europe. Politics of difference, would take on a new meaning as Italians who in general saw themselves as immune to the kind of racism that was perceived in other nations, had to engage in daily life with a growing population of 'foreigners'.

In the 1980s a number of developments occurred that were to set the stage for the state crisis that was to occur from 1992 to 1995. The DC's monopoly of power was disrupted by the *Partito socialista italiano* or PSI. The PSI, however, did not disrupt the status quo of 'systematic clientelism', that defined Italian politics and business. (Systematic clientelism has been defined as "the attainment and retention of power through the expropriation of public resources and through the use of the state to expropriate private resources (McCarthy 1997:62)"). Rather, the PSI came to power by competing within the same network of kickbacks and patronage that the DC used to maintain its power for so long and as a result further entrenched clientelism as systematic. By the late 1980s the second miracle was quickly withering as the Italian Lira was devalued and subsequently dropped from the European Monetary System. The Italian debt drove the government to make extreme spending cuts and introduce new taxes. The northern middle class of small business owners, had grown during the 'miracle', but were largely excluded from the system of clientelism and thus were rather underrepresented by the legislature, and yet it was this group that carried the greatest weight of the tax burden.

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<sup>20</sup> Statistically Italy had the world's lowest birth rate (perhaps excluding China) in the 1980's (Martin Clark *Modern Italy: 1871-1995* (2nd ed.) Longman:New York, 1996).

It was at this time that Italian regional politics emerged. The DC and later the PSI had formed its power base in southern Italy, where the majority of state bureaucrats came from, employment in the state bureaucracy being a traditional means of attaining financial security in the absence of any significant development of private industry. Another system of power in the south was located through networks of organized crime. Not surprisingly the state and the mafia came to be engaged in a relations of reciprocal benefit. From the perspective of many in the north it thus appeared that the high taxes they paid, which were redistributed through vast subsidies to the regions of the south were being squandered by a corrupt state, and in effect being stolen from them<sup>21</sup>

It was thus not very surprising when support for the previously marginal *Lega Lombarda*, who preached the reformation of Italy into three distinct and financially autonomous republics of north, Centre and south, gained sudden support. The parties of DC and PSI were portrayed by the *Lega* outsiders as southern thieves who had hi-jacked the state and were bleeding the industrial north dry. Despite its explicitly racist rhetoric, the *Lega Lombarda* (precursor of the *Lega Nord*) was openly discussing the systematic clientelism that defined Italian politics and big business, for the first time.

The public furor that this raised alongside the first judicial investigations into state corruption marked the entry of the Italian nation-state into a period of crisis so extreme that many marked it as the sounding of a new republic. Coinciding with the rise of the *Lega Nord* was *mani pulite* (Cleanhands operation) the investigations into *tangentopoli* . the systematic clientelism that characterized the primary mode of state functioning by independent magistrates, such as the famed Antonio Di Pietro, who became a sort of folk hero<sup>22</sup>. Anti-Mafia campaigns were actively pursued as well, with the Mafia lashing out

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<sup>21</sup> For instance the northern region of Lombardy paid 23% of Italy's taxes in the late 1980s, but received 13% of public spending.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, I recall seeing the graffiti "Grazie di Pietro" on a building in Milan at this time. Asking about the meaning of this it was explained to me that di Pietro was a judge. As a Canadian I had no experience with judges being seen as heroes as was the case in Italy. Anti-Mafia prosecutor Giovanni Falcone being perhaps the most revered.

with unprecedented public violence. Their acts which goaded the public to demand further action, included the bombing of the Uffizi gallery in Florence and the murder of popular judges Paolo Borsellino and Giovanni Falcone, who threatened to reveal the depth of the links between the Mafia and the state. From 1992 Italy entered into a period of crisis that was to last until 1995. By September 1993 the *mani pulite* investigations had resulted in over 2,600 people being put under investigation, among them 325 parliamentarians. As the depths of *tangentopoli* were revealed day by day on television and in the newspapers calls for political reform were made, resulting in the decentralization of health care, greater regional control of spending and a new system of electoral representation based on the British "winner-take-all" model. As well for the first time city mayors were no longer to be appointed by the parties governing from Rome, but directly elected locally. Political and administrative elites were swept from power as the government fell. Effectively the DC and the PSI ceased to exist.

A 'transitional' government led by Carlo Ciampi, President of the Bank of Italy and an administration of political 'technicians' was put into place to supervise and organize new elections under the new electoral system.

The new election took place in 1994 with the *Lega* sweeping the north with its anti-state rhetoric. The neo-fascist *Movimento sociale italiano* also benefited from the new conditions in the south where the DC and PSI had once been guaranteed support. A new party emerged, Forza Italia, led by the tanned and toothy multi-millionaire owner of Fininvest, Silvio Berlusconi. Berlusconi brought to Italy a new style of politics, with emphasis on style. Berlusconi preached a version of the American dream translated for Italians through his media empire which included three television stations, newspapers and a publishing company. Berlusconi's privately owned television stations were in direct competition with the state owned RAI networks. Through them he rallied a populism which portrayed him as a private citizen struggling against an oppressive and impersonal state. As well he conducted his political campaign in conjunction with his

popular soccer team AC Milan, which was coincidentally winning the Italian championship at the time. In fact the name of his party, *Forza Italia*, is a soccer chant, roughly meaning "Go Italy!" Berlusconi's image of the successful entrepreneur and family man, (his beautiful blonde wife and children appeared frequently in glossy Berlusconi owned magazine spreads, by his side) who spoke for the common folk was extremely successful. The only real competition he faced was from the political left, in the form of the Partito democratica della sinistra or PDS (formerly the Partito comunista italiano reformed in the early 1990s). Berlusconi thus reverted to cold war rhetoric demonizing the Italian left as Stalinist despots in waiting, who would turn Italy into a vast gulag immediately upon gaining power. To ensure his political victory, Berlusconi formed a coalition, the Freedom Pole or Polo, with the *Lega Nord* and the Alleanza Nazionale (formerly the MSI). The left on the other hand formed the coalition party, Ulivo dominated by the PSI and its leader Massimo D'Alema. The elections of March 1994 resulted in victory for the Polo and Berlusconi became the Prime Minister of Italy.

The situation was not to last long however. While the leader of the AN was willing to play the role of Berlusconi's lap-dog in order to bask in the light of a political legitimacy it had previously been denied as the progeny of the neo-fascist MSI, Umberto Bossi, leader of the *Lega Nord* was not so willing to play along. The *Lega* became frustrated as its goals for the federalization of the Italian state were waylaid in parliament. The *Lega* refused to support the government during a vote of confidence resulting in its collapse.

Bossi quickly turned from federalism to outright demands for northern autonomy. Bossi now spoke of the historic nation of Padania and set about to create parallel institutions to those of the Italian state (currency, constitution, parliament). Elections were held again in 1996 this time instead of presenting the image of the smiling optimistic family man, Berlusconi came off as paranoid and aggressive. He frequently spoke of conspiracies against him and during a time of social tension his unconciliatory

tone towards the left made the public nervous. This time Berlusconi and his party *Forza Italia* did not have the advantage of being a novelty as was the case in the 1994 election, being tainted by having ruled as a part of a system voters had rejected in earlier elections. In contrast the PSI presented itself as stable, calm and willing to compromise. While Berlusconi continued to demonize the left the public generally appeared tired from the years of crisis and turned towards the PDS message of reassurance. The *Ulivo* coalition thus won the 1996 election. the *Lega Nord* this time making a go on its own won 10.1% of the House seats and had in fact won 20.55% of the vote in the north and was particularly popular in the 'prealpine' areas from Varese and Como to Brescia along to Belluno and Treviso, while their popularity waned in the metropolises of Milan and Turin. It was in the south that *Forza Italia* and its partner the AN dominated. It was at this point in time, May 1997, that my formal period of fieldwork began.

This chapter has provided the background from which present day formulations of identity are situated socially, politically, and of course historically. It prepares the ground upon which to discuss the contradictions that constitute constructions of a fragmented Italian identity next to those of a uniform or united one. Italy and therefore Italian identity are still commonly considered "unfinished", Italy being sometimes characterized in Italian discourse as not a "real" country, despite attempts to furnish a homogeneous identity at the state level. Today regionalism has become politicized, and patriotism is taking new expression. Italians must deal with the official stance of the naturalization of the nation-state while simultaneously acknowledging the opposite, that it is a country of many peoples. The history of 'incompletion' of 'heterogeneity' preceding 'homogeneity' forms the basis for the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR. ITALIAN KALEIDOSCOPE.**

Chapters four and five work in conjunction, presenting on the surface opposed views of Italian identity. Chapter four focuses on the social fissures that challenge local constructions of a shared Italian identity: between nation and state, between north and south, and between a national identity and regional identities. The fact that Italy as an 'unfinished' nation-state is transparent in daily life to such a degree that some Italians told me "there is no such thing as an Italian" or that they did not think of themselves as Italian is discussed. Chapter five inversely shows how a conceptually unified nation may be represented locally. Both general perspectives, that of a uniform Italy and that of a fractured one, are points of reference for people's individual representations of Italian identity. These perspectives may also be regarded in positive terms as being actual or in negative ones of being regarded as illusory.

### **Encounter between the Italian state and the Italian nation.**

There are numerous characterizations of collective identity so that claims to identify the Italian nation as a homogeneous unit are problematic. There is, for instance a model of an Italy composed of a distinct Italy of the north (*il settentrione*) which is contrasted with an Italy of the south (*il mezzogiorno*). There also occurs a geographical ideation of Italy as a triplex of north, centre and south with the centre cast as an intermediary both culturally and physically between north and south, however it is the binary model that is more prevalent. A multitude of regional and urban-centered identities that often predate (or at the very least are felt to predate) Italian unification, complicate nationalistic rhetoric, in that they may preempt calls for social action, based on national patriotism<sup>23</sup>. As well, there has historically been a variance between

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<sup>23</sup> Here it might be appropriate to point out that when the state raised taxes in 1997(6?) in order to help pay off Italy's national debt, politicians found it easier to evoke the need for individuals to make sacrifices in the context of being part of the European Community than for Italy (ie for the state). See Patrick McCarthy *The Crisis of the Italian State*. St. Martin's Press: New York, 1997. for a more complete discussion.

imaginings of a Catholic Italy and a secular Italy that define the nation along different lines. Parallel, (at times) to the Catholic/secular lines are the sociopolitical delineations of an Italy of the 'left' and an Italy of the 'right' which openly debate and at times have violently challenged each other's claims to define an ideologically oriented Italian identity.

Secondly, in Italy the notion of correspondence between nation and state is confounded by an oppositional construction between *la gente* (the people) and the state, rooted in the history of the unification and subsequent historical events, whereby '*la gente*' may be represented as the genuine or legitimate (natural) social unit in opposition to a contrived and remote state. Thus a number of alternative notions concerning ideas of nation, nationality and their relationship to a state, compete with the formally recognized ideal nation-state which Italy is supposed to represent. For instance, it has been said by some observers that Italy is a nation without a state in reference to the perceived anarchy of its political processes, that there is no such thing as the Italian nation, that Italy is a nation with two states<sup>24</sup> (civil and religious), a state with two nations (*Padania* and the *Mezzogiorno*), or that Italy is a state with hundreds of micro-nations.

### 1. Italy: '*la gente*' versus the state

The state and the people (*la gente*) were often represented both in Italian popular discourse and by those in my social network in terms of an oppositional dichotomy. Personal views of Roberto, Maria, Francesca, Rosa all articulated with this discourse. As the project of nationalism and nation-building predicates the formation of a state upon its legitimate representation of 'the people' (who are the nation), this opposition complicates the Italian state's legitimation that it acts on behalf of the nation/people. In fact, in Italy the political class (*classe politici*) and the ruling class (*classe dirigente*) are seen as a kind of 'other' relative to Italians, as Italian scholar Mario Mignone relates:

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<sup>24</sup> Political philosopher Antonio Negri writes that "Italy is a country with *two* states, with *two* realities" referring to a Catholic 'stasis' and the secular Italy. (Allen and Russo 1997:11)

the political and the ruling classes are the culprits for anything that goes wrong. Here, too it is difficult to identify what is real or who these classes are...The *classe politica* is "they," those people, those incompetents and mischief-makers. Certainly not "we" or "I" or any close friend. It is not even uncommon to hear a "prominente," a member of Italy's ruling class excoriate the *classe politica* as if he or she were in no way responsible for the political, fiscal, social *crisi* of the country (1998:410).

This discourse of a state/people dichotomy is woven throughout many aspects of Italian life. It resonates from the conditions of unification, was exacerbated by fascism and was further defined by the crisis of the state in the early 1990's. All three periods of state formation are frequently regarded as forms of illegitimate representation of 'the people' by the state. The period of unification being regarded as a project of an intellectual and political elite, the fascist period of rule being depicted as an imposition through violence upon 'the people' (i.e. Rossellini's, *Roma città aperta*), and the post-war Republic being characterized in daily editorials and news programs by systematic corruption in which the state functioned for the benefit of business and political elites. Italy, the state, thus is often portrayed in Italian media representations as being, at odds with Italy the nation. This sentiment is succinctly expressed in a passage from Cesare Pavese's novel *La casa in collina*, wherein a teacher, during World War II, seeks refuge from urban bombardment in a village in the hills:

"Professore", exclaimed Nando, lowering his head, "do you love Italy?"  
Once again all their faces were around me: Tono, the old woman, the girls,  
Cate. Fonso smiled. "No," I said quietly. "not Italy, the Italians."

This was a sentiment that was expressed to me often in the conversations I overheard, in the formal interviews I undertook and in media representations. Isabella told me that this was a book that one studied in school. I showed this passage to her and Josefina (who is from Sicily) and they both agreed this captured, in their estimation, what Italians felt about their country. It came out in statements about the flag, the anthem and other symbols the state employs to represent Italy. Patriotism of the sort that saw an allegiance to the state was rejected in this discourse, the state was perceived with too



acute a suspicion for this, while a patriotism to the people or allegiance to ones locality or family was valued. Italian essayist Giorgio Bocca's statement says that the Italian relationship with *la patria* (the beloved homeland; homeland in a patriotic sense) and the state is one which it is felt can be done without. Whenever the subject of nationalism or patriotism came up the phrase "we are not very patriotic", was not far off. As Maria, a biology student from Milan said:

We are not patriotic in the sense of the French or of Americans. Flags and anthems are more important to them, than what's inside. the English are all very proud and respectful when they hear the national anthem, they (French and Americans) are like this. We don't have a strong sense of patriotism.

It was explained by her that people were too 'mature' for such sentiments, which were often associated with American type flag waving, or even Nazi ultra-nationalism, or that people didn't feel Italian, that local affiliations meant more, or even that the flag was ugly. Whatever the explanation, it was a common sentiment that I encountered, that the kind of nationalism represented by 'flag-waving' was definitely not 'Italian', but as will be discussed later people in my social network were not without their own kind of patriotism.

**a) "We are not flag-crazy".**

In general national flags play a significant role in the representation of the nation and the state. A flag may serve as a symbol in which sentiments of group solidarity, patriotism, and shared history, but also of family, home, and sense of self are invested. The flag may thus serve as a site within which feelings of the self and the larger social group are united. Thus issues surrounding placement, treatment and 'respect' for national flags are of great social and symbolic significance. The official flag of a nation-state is a particularly special kind of symbol in that it is the 'property' of the state, while simultaneously belonging to all the members of the nation. Flags, thus may draw the nation and state into a relationship of shared patriotism, whereby the love of ones

country, from a nationalist perspective, will be identical for the love of the state as the nation and state are idealized as a unit (the nation-state). People may consciously identify with an alternate flag than that which represents the nation-state, thus some Americans fight for 'old glory' or 'the stars and stripes' while others fly the Confederate flag (although feelings for either flag are not by necessity mutually exclusive). As the case may be, the associations that people have with the flag of the nation-state to which they belong may reflect ideas about patriotism, nationalism and collective identity in general.

The Italian tri-colour, purposefully emulates the French tri-colour, revealing the *Risorgimento* engagement with enlightenment values. However, Italy was first unified as a kingdom, and in the centre of the flag on the white band, was the seal of the monarchy. This remained the flag of Italy under fascism, until the end of the Second World War, when the Monarchy was abolished by referendum, and the seal was removed from the flag. The national flag did not have a strong public presence either in an official capacity or in informal uses in Milan and when I asked Francesca and Isabella, I was told that this was typical. In fact one is more likely to encounter the national flag colours of green, white and red in North America as emblematic of Italianess. As Beverly Allen and Mary Russo have noted, Italy is not devoted to the "cult of the flag": They tell of the experience of an acquaintance visiting the United States from Italy:

On a trip to the local megasupermarket, the visitor was astonished to find Italian flags just about everywhere: on products ranging from cheese to vinegar to sparkling water. Since Italy does not espouse the cult of the national flag, this Italian had never seen so many Italian flags in one place. (1997:7).

Asking various people in my milieu about the flag usually evoked the same response. 'Italians are not patriotic'. The flag, first off, was recognized as a measure of patriotism, a kind of patriotism that was generally said to be un-characteristically Italian. Secondly, this proposed lack of patriotism was usually noted as a positive quality by those I knew, although this would not be the only way in which it might be seen. During a formal

interview with Roberto, a Milanese graphic designer, concerning Italian identity, the issue of flags and patriotism came up.

The first time that I went to Denmark, I saw something unexpected. The Danish flag was everywhere, even in peoples gardens. This could be because they have been a kingdom for centuries. There is a strong sense of being Danish. It is also a way that they distinguish themselves from Norway and Sweden. This flag waving is not common in Italy.

A conversation with Isabella, a student of Italian literature, related similar thoughts about flags,

When I was in high school , a friend of mine went to the States as an exchange student. When he came back I asked him how it was in the USA. and the thing that shocked him the most, was that in the family that hosted him there was a little boy who knew and sang often the national anthem and could list all the presidents. They would wear clothes with the flag a lot and show the flag a lot. They had towels with the flag. If you had a backyard you had a flag. In Italy this would be unthinkable.

These views were confirmed by the distinct absence of flags or flag imagery as we went about our routines. I recall Francesca telling me that Italians “would never wear clothes made out of the flag, like you see in America”. Whether this is true is not relevant. This attitude reflected a way in which Francesca was constructing a sense of Italian difference which seemed to articulate with a general Italian discourse as indicated by Italian scholar Mario Mignone, who writes that “except at international soccer matches. it is difficult to see Italians displaying their flag as an expression of passionate nationalism. And the sight of that flag never creates tears in the eye or vibrates strongly nationalistic heartstrings (1998:217).” While one may argue the absoluteness of this statement, it reflects a notion that was expressed unanimously by my Italian cohorts which equates the display of flags with an expression of nationalism. The impression I have from my field research in Italy is that public display of the national flag is not casual, but in fact is taken to express an extreme nationalism of a sort that is generally distasteful in Italian society. Given that the only time I did see the flag displayed in public was in association with a Fascist group. Someone flying an Italian flag is more likely to be seen as a nationalist

extremist than as a 'normal' citizen. I have noticed a similar attitude towards national flags from visitors from Italy to Canada, whereby it was expressed to me that we must be a very patriotic people considering the vast number of Canadian flags that had been observed. I grew up with the idea that Canadians were not a very patriotic people again relative to Americans. To me the flags were invisible, to my Italian guests they were markers of a patriotism that I felt was absent. Additionally I recall a conversation with Maria in which the issues of patriotism and the flag were raised. She asked me why Backpackers from Canada always had a little Canadian flag sewn on to their backpacks or jackets. She told me that to her it seemed a bit distasteful. To her it appeared that these travelers were expressing a chauvinist nationalism.

During the summer of 1997, there was much debate in Italy over the issue of federalism due to pressures from regionalist political movements for decentralization of the government at the same time the government proposed new legislation that would require the Italian flag to be flown in front of all public institutions. In Rosa's house the message was clear 'This was no coincidence'— this was an insulting ploy to promote the states public presence; a sort of visible reminder on the part of the government that Italy was still a single nation-state and would continue to be. The reactions I observed in friends and family generally expressed that this was a ridiculous idea. The reaction to the flag should not be underestimated, the general distaste for this law as I encountered it was comparable to what I would imagine would be felt by many in Canada if citizens were asked to fly the flag at every residence. What astrologer/school teacher Marina said to me soon after the law was proposed was a typical response: "I don't like flags or national anthems in general. It's silly to put up a new flag by decree. This won't help unity. The Italian flag doesn't mean anything. We never had unity to begin with." Or as Francesca remarked most succinctly, "We are not flag-crazy".

There was a general agreement within my social network that flags represented a kind of patriotism that was not "Italian". The state's attempt to evoke the symbolic

unity that the flag ideally represented was soundly rejected. No doubt there could be found people that would react differently to the flag, but when I asked Isabella what kind of person would put up the Italian flag, she responded quite matter of factly “a fascist”.

Ironically the localized rejection of flags and nationalistic patriotism, served to forge individuals sensibilities of what was felt to be authentically Italian. –not being patriotic, not flying the flag. That was Italian to them. Thus by rejecting a state sanctioned patriotism, Rosa, Isabella, Roberto, Francesca and Maria, for example, were also contributing to a discourse that was seen to be shared (or at least they felt they shared) with a good many Italians. On the other hand Aldo who agreed with the sentiments of the others took this same logic as part of the justification for politically dividing Italy in two, as in his estimation it didn't matter what flag or passport you had, “You are still you.”

#### **b) The Partisans and the ‘Reluctant Soldier’**

If in ‘fighting for the flag’ of one’s nation-state a soldier is engaged in a patriotic expression then Italian images of the soldier are particularly telling as to how the relation between nation and state may be constructed in Italy. There are two images of the soldier that are fundamental to general constructions of Italian one as active, the other as passive. The first is that of the *partigiani*, (partisans), Italians who pursued guerrilla warfare against the fascist state and the German occupying military forces in World War II. The second is that which I call the ‘reluctant soldier’, in that it is a representation of the role of soldier as something that contradicts Italian ‘nature’. Thus in Italy, Italian soldiers are often portrayed as victims of circumstance. These were images that were particularly evoked in my social milieu to express a sense of a distinct Italian identity.

In contrast to Germany, post-war Italian leaders and historians have the activities of the partisans against the fascists to distinguish an innocent and authentic Italy which was oppressed and pushed underground, from a criminally repressive, and aberrant state which was overthrown by ‘the people’. As depicted in the Italian novel of the Resistance

*Il partigiano Johnny* by B. Fenoglio “[we were] to oppose fascism in every way, in the name of the authentic people of Italy”. The narrative of the Resistance contributes to an Italian national identity in that it is told in terms of inclusion, “The *partigiani* excluded no one: rich and poor, professionals and laborers, children, old people, communists, socialists, christian democrats, everyone had a significant role (Mignone, 1998:9)”. In 1943 the Resistance Movement began reaching an estimated 450,000 followers at war’s end. Resistance was ideologically informed through its organization by the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Christian Democratic party. However at its early stages it is estimated that 70% of the Resistance was composed of communists (Ginsborg 1990:15). It is also noted that the different partisan groups were known to fight each other as well as the fascists and Nazis. Furthermore the Resistance occurred in northern Italy and thus its commemoration refers to events that are the experience of only part of the country, however important to Italy as a whole. However one may find piazzas and streets in every Italian city named after partisans. The partisan was an important figure in validating the post-war Italian Republic as morally authoritative.

Just as anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen states, that “Mass produced accounts of ‘our people’ or ‘our culture’ are important tools in the fashioning of an ethnic identity (1993:91)” one could say that they contribute to constructions of national identity as well. In the schoolbook, *Favolose vacanze 5:attività e giochi per la classe quinta e I primi giorni della media, più una favola dai paesi lontani*. Nicola Milano Editore, 1996. (Wonderful vacation: Activities and Games for the fifth grade and the first days of middle school, with a tale from faraway lands), one finds the Italian role in World War II presented in a very ‘partisan’ manner. Italy’s wartime experience is represented by two readings, that emphasize Italy as rebel and victim<sup>25</sup>. Notably Italy’s political alignment with the Third Reich is not mentioned. The first reading relates the terrible

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen notes in accordance with the early theorist on the nation. Ernest Renan (1882). “that nationhood ( or ethnic identity) involves shared memories, but also a great deal of shared forgetting” (1992:92).

conditions of the Italian soldiers sent to fight under German command at the Russian front and reads as follows in the history section of the text on page 54. It is titled *La Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (The Second World War) with the directions: *Leggi queste testimonianze* (Read these testimonies):

The second reading is on the partisan resistance:

*L'8 settembre 1943 avevo solo 18 anni. Molti giovani e molti soldati piuttosto che combattere con I tedeschi e I Fascisti preferivano la via dei monti, inserendosi nelle formazioni partigiane. In montagna fui accolto da gente diversa: professionisti, impiegati, operai. Le popolazioni avevano simpatia per noi e la nostra lotta non sarebbe stata possibile senza il loro aiuto. Io ero volontario ed ero orgoglioso di partecipare alla Resistenza. Per me la guerra è sempre una cosa brutta, ma è anche l'unico mezzo per ribellarsi alle cose ingiuste.*

(On September eighth 1943 I was only 18 years old. Many young people and many soldiers rather than fight with the Germans and the fascists preferred the path to the mountains, joining the partisan groups. In the mountains we were welcomed by all kinds of people: professionals, office workers and labourers. The people were sympathetic to us and our cause and it would not have been possible without their help. I volunteered and was proud to participate in the resistance. For me war is always something ugly, but it is also the only way to fight against injustice).

It is significant that the pieces are presented as testimonies. The voices of the past whose purpose in the textbook is to teach Italian children their history, thus act as representative witnesses to the events of World War II. The experiences described are given as both typical and general, and as personal and authentic. The testimony is accompanied by a black and white photograph contemporary with World War II of three men and two women. The men have long sideburns and goatees and recall images of members of the Italian political left in the late 1960's and early 1970's. The two women look prepared for combat. One points at a map as if in command, a canteen strapped over her shoulder and hair tied back in a bandana. The text accompanying the photo explains that the partisans were supported by the 'people' in contrast to the fascist state who it is implied were not. It explains that the people's support of the Resistance was essential to bring freedom to

Italy. 'The people' is all inclusive and thus no matter whether one actually was a partisan or a communist, the general 'we' is portrayed as participating in the cause of combating fascism.

The image of the partisan however is that of the moral rebel; a representative of the 'authentic' people against an unjust state. Thus, on the one hand, the image of the partisan has operated as a model for left-wing acts of violence against the state in the 1970's in Italy, while on the other hand, the partisan was a means through which the new Republic could distance itself morally from fascist Italy. The partisan thus works as an important figure to Italians of both the social left and right (except for sympathizers of fascism). The patriotism of the partisan is an anti-institutional patriotism located in a notion of the 'people' and 'authenticity'. In this sense they are folk-heroes.

In the case of my household this certainly was true. Isabella told me stories of how her grandparents had 'resisted' the German occupation including hiding people at risk to their lives. She used this image of the partisan to explain to me that it was very Italian to oppose authority. She linked her own activities as a student protester in the 1980's to this spirit of resistance and to a general Italian quality. Roberto who admired social activism of the left would also explain it in terms of an Italian 'we'. The enemy, the right, fascists, industrialists were not part of that 'we'. The qualities that he admired thus being seen as characteristically Italian, while those he disdained were not.

The second significant portrayal that relates to the partisan is that of the 'reluctant soldier' and is likewise steeped in notions of 'the people' and 'authenticity' opposed to an arbitrary and institutional state. The Italian soldier is often depicted as the ordinary man or boy who has been swept away from home and family to fuel the war machine. This representation is reproduced in the Academy Award winning, Italian film, *Mediterraneo* (1991), which tells the story of eight Italian soldiers sent to invade a Greek island in World War II. The soldiers are depicted as dreamers, romantics, and bumbler at heart and end up befriendng the Greek villagers they have been sent to 'conquer'. They



soon forget that they are at war and enjoy a bucolic lifestyle. In the end all but one who marries a local woman, return to Italy only to be told that the Germans are now their enemy and the Americans are their ally. The movie sentimentalizes the soldiers and speaks of the 'true' Italian nature, which inhibits the making of professional soldiers. They are depicted as humans first who would rather indulge themselves in the 'good life' food, sex, friends, family, than go about killing innocent people whom they have never met. The schoolbook *Favolose vacanze 5* imparts the idea of the Italian Soldier as victim in the Second World War<sup>26</sup>.

*Ho fatto la guerra sul fiume Don, in Russia. Non eravamo preparati e ci siamo trovati là che mancava un pó di tutto. Il freddo era terribile. Il freddo è stato il nostro nemico. I piú sono morti congelati. Non si mangiava, non c'era fuoco, eravamo malvestiti. Era tutto un disastro. Ma le guerre sono tutte terribili. Durante la ritirata sono stato fatto prigionero e sono rimasto in Russia fino al 1946*

(I fought on the Don river in Russia. We weren't prepared and we suddenly found ourselves there missing a bit of everything. The cold was terrible. The cold had been our enemy. Most froze to death. There was nothing to eat, there was no fire, and we were poorly clothed. It was a complete disaster. But all wars are terrible. During the retreat I was taken prisoner and remained in Russia until 1946.)

The film *La Tregua* based on Italian author Primo Levi's novel of the same name, also depicts the life of Italian Soldiers in Russia in World War II having been forced there by the Germans. Thus image of the 'reluctant soldier' conveniently explains both Italy's military defeat in World War II and serves to exempt Italy from the kind of blame that Germany receives for the events of World War II. Allegiances and enemies are portrayed as arbitrary; ideological motivations vanish in the absence of words. The fascists are not

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<sup>26</sup> While all participants in war may be thought of as victims in some respect given the nature of war, what I wish to point out is that there is a selective process that is occurring in which certain circumstances are said to represent history better than others. Thus one isn't likely to read about Italian soldiers gassing Ethiopians as part of Mussolini's Imperialist campaign, as representative of the Italian governments motives in World War II, even though this may be the case.

Italian in the way that the Nazis are German. It is not my intention to imply that Italians are at heart war-mongering. Here I only point out that some behaviours are seen as representing something of the Italian character, while others also enacted by Italians are not. Representations of the 'reluctant soldier' thus run parallel to the distinction that is made between '*la gente*' and the state.

Again this image was one that was part of the imagery that defined the Italian in my household. Isabella has numerous times joked about how Italians make bad soldiers. In fact she jokingly said that this explained why Italy had lost in both World Wars. Roberto who had done military service incorporated this image into his sense of an Italian 'we' as well. He explained how incompetent he thought the Italian army was explaining this in terms of Italians not being war-like. Ida incorporated this spirit into her imagery of Italy as well:

There is a tradition of resistance (in Italy) to the system. Rationally I know this is bad but emotionally it feels good. It allows more liberty. It is a good quality to have, because people adapt the system and not vice versa. We don't have a strong collective sensibility. We are very individualistic. We think about our own personal survival first. The nation is not important.

**c) The Incomplete nation-state:**

It is often stated in both scholastic literature and popular discourse that the unification of Italy, was a project that was never completed (Barzini 1964). As Marina expressed when she stated "We never had unity to begin with". As indicated in chapter three, it is argued by some Italian historians that the average Italian never fully invested in an identification with the nation-state (Duggan 1997). Aside from the fact that this premise served as a major argument in the validation of the efforts of Mussolini and the

fascist state to socially and culturally homogenize Italy, the perception persists in the Italy of the 1990's that Italy is 'unfinished'. As an incomplete project, the argument follows that Italy is not a 'real' country. In this respect, people I encountered often depicted themselves as black-sheep in the European family of nation-states; a 'fact' at times both esteemed and resented by Italians. Paradoxically this sense of difference stemming from feelings of not being a 'legitimate' nation-state contributes to a sense of a shared Italian identity.

It is sometimes postulated that the cultural and linguistic diversity that distinguishes Italian history and society negates the possibility of forming a 'natural' unit based on a common identity; that for this reason there is no nation. This is the argument that appears in the Gilberto Oneto book, *L'Invenzione della Padania: la rinascita della comunita' piu' antica d'europa*. (The invention of Padania; the Rebirth of the oldest community in Europe, 1997) as to why northern Italy should separate as an independent state from southern Italy. There was a perception on the part of Roberto, Rosa, Isabella, Aldo, Francesca, Maria and others that France and Great Britain as well as other European nation-states are 'real' countries in that they are thought to more closely meet the ideal of 'unification'. That is to say that they are said to have a strong unitary identity compared to Italy. The fact that Britain is a conglomerate of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland or that France is populated by Bretons, Alsatians, Normans etc. is usually glossed over. As student at the *Statale* (University of Milan), Gloria told me. "When Italy was created people couldn't understand each other, they couldn't understand each other's language or socially; we still have to make the Italian people".

Luigi Barzini's story of Fornovo in which northern Italian peoples banded together to fight French armies in 1495 is situated in the discourse of the incomplete nation-state:

Fornovo is the turning point in Italian history. The distant consequences of the defeat are still felt today. If the Italians had won, they would probably have discovered then the pride of being a united people, the self-confidence born of defending their common liberty and independence. Italy would have emerged as a reasonably respectable nation, capable of determining her own future, a country which adventurous foreigners would think twice before attacking. Nobody would have ventured lightly across the Alps for fear of being destroyed. The European powers would have been discouraged from endlessly quarrelling over Italian politics and from cutting slices of Italian soil, with their defenceless and laborious inhabitants, in order to placate dynastic rivalries and satisfy everybody's greed...The national character would have developed along different lines. The voices of patriots would not have been mocked, but respectfully heeded. When unity and independence finally came in the nineteenth century, the old habits were set. (1977:287)

The unified nation-state was the ideal goal of numerous nationalist movements in the 19th century, with which Italy is included and was seen as a necessary step towards modernity by Risorgimento patriots. Italy portrayed as a 'failed' nation-state is characterized as being inferior to ideal European nation-states, typically indicated as France, Britain and sometimes Germany. This is a theme which will be returned to in more detail in the next chapter.

What needs to be indicated here is how people such as Isabella, Rosa, Gloria, Marina and others, talked of Italy in terms of it not being a legitimate country because of its diversity, its history, their sentiments towards the states legitimacy and its perceived if not actual ineptitude but were also able to see this as something that defined Italy and Italians. As with 'anti-patriotism' this belief could be remarkably incorporated into a sense of an Italian 'we'. For example, when Francesca told me that Italy was not about passports she located Italy as something irrelevant to politics, situating it in the heart and emotions, "To be Italian is more interior. It does not have to be demonstrated." Whether

Italy was a nation-state or not by the standards of other European nation-states was not important to how she managed her sense of self. It was this difference as she saw it, that partly defined Italy and herself as an Italian.

### **The Two Italys: north and south.**

Aside from the distinction that poses the Italian state and the Italian people in an antagonistic relationship, Italy is constructed in everyday life throughout Italy as two distinct social entities, that of northern Italy (n. *setentrione* adj. *setentrionale*) and southern Italy (n. *mezzogiorno*, adj. *meridionale*), sometimes referred to as the two Italys in literature. Despite the entrenchment of categories of north and south in daily discourse, the actual division between north and south is ambiguous and varies whether one speaks in terms of culture, economy, history or geography, and of course whether one is speaking as a northerner or southerner. Generally, however the division of north and south is situated within arguments informed by notions of modernity. The north is represented as industrialized and fully integrated in the capitalist free-market world of mainstream Europe, while the south is represented as “backward” and characterized in terms of having to “catch -up” to the rest of the ‘developed’ world (i.e. Europe and America). A northern and southern Italy have been distinguished (at least) since Unification and while it is possible to pose such a dichotomy as complementary it is frequently presented as an antagonistic situation exemplified by the common phrase of the *questione meridionale* (southern problem) particularly from a northern Italian perspective. Antonio Gramsci’s observation that northern Italians were inclined to regard the *mezzogiorno* as a ‘ball and chain hobbling Italy’s social development.’ reflects many contemporary arguments about the *questione meridionale* today. In fact at its worst the ‘northern’ perspective characterizes southern Italians in racist terms labeling them *terrone*, a word derived from soil — terra. It is considered highly offensive and carries with it not only the image of the ‘backwards’ peasant, but in Mario Mignone’s words of

“an individual who is clannish and anti-social (198:206), and blames the south’s economic and social backwardness on what is perceived as an inherent laziness, and manipulative nature.

Even when not presented in terms of positive versus negative qualities people speak of social or cultural difference drawn between a north and south, Gloria a northerner gives in typical description of northern and southern differences:

The south and centre are characterized by warmth and passion. The vision of the family differs between the north and the south. In the south the family is more closed to the outside and more patriarchal. In the north the family is warmer and less suffocating. The mentality in the north is different. One plans to buy a home and have a career. In the south these are of lesser importance, people are more relaxed about possessions. The north is more work oriented. Different philosophies of life exist. The north is more hurried and stressed, the south is more relaxed. Workers came north from the south, but people who were from the north went to Switzerland for instance and had a harder time [than those who came to northern Italy from southern Italy]. Now those southerners are integrated. There are still sayings like “the southerner is lazy” but these are not said with any seriousness, they are just in fun. The south and the north are integrated. ‘*Terroni*’ is an ignorant word. I love Naples, my neighbour doesn’t like it, but she is ignorant, she has never been there. Bossi understood that there is an attachment to land, house, jobs and possessions<sup>27</sup>. He takes advantage of people’s fears of losing these things. It is scapegoating. The north is all about economics. They say without the south we would be better off, ‘another Switzerland’. They say Rome is the enemy and misuses tax money.

It should be noted that I never inquired directly as to the differences that are made between north and south, and that this was information that was presented to me to explain Italian identity in general. Significantly it was northerners who spoke most frequently about the differences as important. This is not to say that southerners do not recognize the same distinctions, only that they were not described to me in depth. When I asked about Italian identity the idea of a shared identity was more prominent. It should also be noted that the southerners I spoke to were living in the north in or near Milan.

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<sup>27</sup> Umberto Bossi. party leader of the northern separatist party *Lega Nord*.

The general notions about north and south could take quite individualistic turns. For instance Marina a teacher and astrologer a northerner from a village near Milan had a very unique understanding of the differences between north and south informed by her beliefs in astrology:

The north is under the sign of Taurus and this is a sign of building. The south is under the sign of Scorpio, a sign of destruction. Together they make a complete cycle of creation/destruction and so in complementing each other form a balance. What the north gains the south throws away. They are in direct opposition. It is the money pole that is located between these two signs. The unity of Italy is in danger. The thing that keeps us together, history, ironically is being used to take us apart. For instance by saying that we [northerners] are Celtic, but people move too much for this to mean anything. Diversity is good. If Italy did separate this would be sad. North-south diversity is not understood. People tend to live in their own world and don't step out of it to understand each other. I feel at home everywhere in Italy; I love the passion of the south. It is too bad that they don't use it constructively, besides to make love [said in jest]. On the other hand the north has lost its passion to the god of money. Even an open-minded person who works with someone from the south will notice a dramatic difference from someone of the north. A northerner works from 9-5; a southerner tries to find a way to make you work for them. At first when you experience this you think 'the *Lega* is right', but you can learn from each other. You can also make it clear that they have to change a bit. The north ends with Toscana and Umbria. Friends from Rome say, "Once we had slaves, now we have Milanese people." The first impression one has of southerners is that they think, "you work, I'll watch". We both have to relax. Not just northerners. In the south there is a sense of hospitality. You cannot betray or delude them. In the north possession of things is important, but in the south, people, family and friends are what counts. These are the lost values of the north.

Marina thus saw stereotypes about northern and southern qualities, as being rooted in actual behaviour, even pre-determined, however, she speaks in more ambiguous terms as to the value associated with different behaviours. Like Gloria, she admires the 'warmth' of people from the south. At the same time she thinks that northerners are too materialistic. Aldo had a stricter notion of difference between north and south, that was not necessarily reflected in his own behaviour. Aldo, who had been a supporter of the northern separatist movement led by the *Lega Nord*, told me the following:

I think the reason we have this situation in Italy is the many years under foreign domination. The Germans (Austrians) were in Milano, the Spanish were in the south, the Arabs were there as well. There are all these different mentalities; it's difficult to have a uniform country. If there were two countries it would be better for both the south and the north. In the south they have the Mafia and this has been imported to the north. There are a lot of Mafia in the north now. We really need to divide because we cannot carry the weight of the south. In the south the conditions of life are different. Things cost different. If you take the same salary that one has in the north and you have that in the south it is really worth more. Things cost about half as much in the south. Things in the north are more expensive. If we could do like the Czechs and the Slovaks it would be a peaceful division that benefited both. This thing of Padania versus Italy is not the important thing. That's just about a name. The north pays more tax than the south. The nationalism of the *Lega* is not important. What is important is: "Why do we have to pay for them?" Milano is the number one industrial city in Italy and this is a source of pride for me. I am happy to be Italian. But the Italian image is not so good; we have bad government and Mafia. In Germany or in the UK the response is "Oh my God, Italians!" Italy could be very important.

On the one hand, Aldo accepts the rhetoric that blames the south for all of Italy's social and economic problems while, on the other hand, from spending time with him it is clear that he is sociable with southern Italians he meets in actual day to day life. While the rhetoric in which his arguments for separation between the north and south of Italy are racist, his actual practices as I have observed them are egalitarian. It is notable that there is apparent contradiction in his ideas. While he supports the division of Italy into two countries *Padania* the north, and 'other' the south, he still speaks of pride in being Italian, of Italian cuisine, music, art and so forth. Clearly the notion of a Padanian identity that sits in the center of the separatist platform has no real meaning to him. Rather it is the idea that the south and north exist in a relationship that he sees as detrimental to the north with which he is concerned.

Of course it is not only from a northern perspective that a distinction between north and south is made. There are southern perspectives as well. While Francesca, whose parents came to Milan from the south, would agree that there may be differences from north to south it is not necessarily evidence that there are two Italys. To her, "Padania is



a geographical area not an identity. There are differences between north and south in rhythm. Things are quicker in the north and slower in the south". She also told me on one occasion of a time she visited Naples. She described the people there as open, friendly and kind. The woman she stayed with gave her, her bed to sleep in while she slept on the floor. She was fed well. We were in the galleria in central Milan. She looked around and said Milanese aren't like this. Recognizing social and culture differences didn't automatically translate into a sense of two different peoples.

Although born in Milan, Ida's parents are from the south. She has gone to university in Salerno, but works in Milan and feels that the scapegoating of south for Italy's economic problems hides a real racism:

In the beginning of Italy's history unity was for political and economic reasons. Now frustration with scandals of corruption causes people's inner feelings to burst out. The scapegoat became the south and the government People became selfish. Maybe this economic scapegoating is a kind of excuse, there are feelings underlying it. Feelings of difference that have always been there. In the 1950's people in the north wouldn't rent apartments to workers from the south. It's natural (normal) to feel a sense of difference, as in France where they have a north south distinction and an east west distinction

Francesca and Italo who identify themselves as 'southerners' living in Milan were more reluctant to see the calls for separation in terms of racism, preferring to emphasize economic motivations. However, I found it difficult to ignore the fact that there was a virulence towards the south on the part of some northerners that was articulated in a manner that exceeded simple economic arguments. For instance an article in the *Corriere della sera* of May 22, 1997 read: "Go back to Sicily *Terrona*. Bartender condemned for insult". This newspaper article tells of a woman, Francesca De Giorgi from Messina in Sicily who was teaching elementary school in Ardenno a town in the north of Italy. She went to a bar at lunch and was repeatedly confronted by the bar owner "Why do you come here, why don't you go back to Sicily *Terrona*?" The teacher took the bar owner to court and won damages. Other such lawsuits of this nature were mentioned in the article.

Personally I was witness to a particularly virulent condemnation of southerners by a northerner, as lazy and thieving and culturally backward. It was an impassioned and disturbing rant, whose racist nature was open.

The racism that appears in the dialogue about north and south is particularly apparent as it is bound to a more familiar racism which positions Europe as morally, and intellectually superior to non-Europeans. Thus it was not infrequent for me to hear southern Italians as being derided as “Africans” by some northerners, “They are not really Italian” or “European” was something that I heard at dinners.

The idea of ‘two Italys being firmly fixed in Italian discourse, with southern Italy marked as northern Italy’s ‘other’ had never been a significant political issue until the late 1980’s when the *Lega Lombarda/ Lega Nord* entered the national political scene. It remains to be seen whether this distinction can serve as a fracture point along which the Italian nation-state might be politically divided in the future. It is far too simplistic to reflect the realities of movement of people since the end of world war two when hundreds of thousands of Italians from the south moved to the industrial cities of the north, largely to serve as the labour force for the new factories. As a result speaking in terms of a northern and southern identity are complicated in a manner that makes the idea of a single Italy more favourable to many.

### **“Le Mille Italie”: Diversity within the nation**

#### ***Localismo and campanalismo***

Rosa was born in Milan, but her parents came from Puglia in the south. She told me that “when one is in Italy one doesn’t have a sense of being Italian... that the facts of history prevented there from being an Italian identity”. What she was referring to was the fact by which local identities defined by belonging to a particular region, village, town or city were often of more importance in daily life than an Italian identity. The Italian word *localismo* (localism) refers not only to nominal affinity to ones locality, but to conditions

in which a local identity supersedes other collective affiliations. As related earlier, before Unification the Italian peninsula was teeming with principalities, virtual city-states and kingdoms of various sizes and powers, not to mention the cornucopia of linguistic and cultural differences that could be and are yet encountered. Rosa gave me the following description of the different stereotypes that she said Italians recognized as characterizing each other:

**Ligurians:** Miserly

**Piemontese:** Shy, cold, closed, hard to approach

**Lombards:** Busy, serious, angry/worried (pissed off)

**Tuscans:** Sarcastic, wise-cracking, ironic, sharp-witted

**Veneti:** Gossiping

**Napolitani:** Different from all other Italian peoples, in a class of their own characterized by “the art of surviving” have the quality of “arangiarsi” which roughly means ‘to manage’. Clever, efficient and resourceful. (She spoke quite passionately about these people and took more time to explain them to me. It is also notable that she described them in a positive light as there are other negative stereotypes that are equally well known as expressed in the rhetoric of the *Lega Nord*).

**Calabrese:** Have an extremely strong sense of pride to a degree that must be careful as they are easily offended. They never forget a wrong done to them.

**Siciliano:** Strong sense of honour, very bright and clever, have a rich culture with deep roots such as those that link them to ancient Greece. . Another characteristic is “Omerta” ‘conspiracy of silence’. I saw nothing, I heard nothing. (Once more she presented a positive image of this group and generally stayed away from the associations with the Mafia and so forth. Again see the *Lega Nord*).

**Sardinians:** Closed stubborn, harsh like the land they live in. This quality was said by her to relate to the fact that they traditional lived as shepherds and spent much time in isolation. A “Lonely life”

**Emilia- Romagna:** Associated with food such as ravioli, tortellini and eating well. Imagined as plump, happy and laughing. They also have a strong communist tradition.

**Romans:** Called “sbruffon” which means braggarts, boasters. They still identify with the ancient Romans “Sono Romani” we are Romans, they say meaning Its enough for one to know this about them. This speaks for itself. Another saying that is tied to this is “Lasciate mi passare sono romano” (Out of my way I am Roman).

**Abruzi/ Modise:** Nice, simple, sincere, calm, generous.

**Pugliese:** Linked to the sea, good workers . Serious minded. (note that this is the region that her parents were from).

Although she presented them as stereotypes, there were occasions when I heard

Valle d'Aosta a little girl who was staying in the cabin next to ours where we stayed as the guests of Lucia was trying to sell Lucia's niece wristbands that younger children were manufacturing. "She must be Milanese," said Lucia referring not only to her entrepreneurial spirit, but to the fact she was taking advantage of the other children's labour.

Whatever the stereotypes the actual and or perceived diversity of Italian local customs, languages, histories and identities reflects a more complex imaging of Italy than the division of Italy into a north and south. It also undermines the binary 'us' versus 'them' mentality which the north/south dichotomy often provokes. Local identities rather, are often informed by the notion of *campanalismo*, a kind of parochialism which challenges the idea of a defining center for an Italian national identity. The word *campanilismo* comes from that of *campanile* which literally means belltower and *campanilismo* comes from the fact that each *commune* had a belltower at its centre. It also refers to a kind of local prejudice whereby ones primary concern is for the benefit of ones village, town or city above all else. It implies a certain chauvinism and disregard for the fate of those who are from outside ones community. Enzo Biagi, a well known Italian journalist writes: "Maybe we (Italians) don't have a sense of the nation but of the *campanile*. (Forse non abbiamo 'il senso della nazione' ma quello del campanile)" (1995:163)". Ida told me that *parrocchiale* (parochial another word which is incidentally of Church origins — *parrocchia* meaning parish), characterized Italians in general and that *campanilismo* was more important to the average Italian than patriotism. She also called it 'micro-nationalism'.

*Campanalismo* was described to me by many of the individuals I interviewed. Rosa told me of the historical competition for the spice trade between *Genova* (Genoa) and *Venezia* (Venice) which remains a source of reticence between people from the two

cities to this day. As she told me there is rivalry between Livorno and Pisa and between Torinese (from Turin) and those from Cuneo : “Livorni say that Pisani are stupid. Torinese say bad drivers must come from Cuneo.” Chiara, Aldo and Roberto told me of similar situations involving the legacy of the actual combat between the old city-states. In fact each *comune* (as Italian cities are called) has its own flag and coat of arms. The *palio* remains an important event which is televised live. It takes place in Sienna each year where riders from the different quarters of the city race horses in the central piazza. The flying of the colours is extremely important to the event; soccer as well is competition between cities where the traditional colours of the commune sometimes with reference to their heraldic origins, are worn.

There are numerous language groups including, German speakers in parts of Trentino- Adige and French speakers in Valle d’Aosta as well as Slovene speakers in the Trieste-Gorizia region. Albanians and Greeks in the south. Other languages include Bavarian (as opposed to standard German), Bergamasco, Catalan, Cimbrian, Corsican, Emiliano, Franco-Provencal, Friulian, Judeo-Italian, Ladin, Ligurian, Neopolitan-Calabrese, Piemontese, Milanese, Romani (Balkan and Sinte and Vlach) Sardinian (including Campidanese, Gallurese, Logudorese, Sassarese) Serbo-Croatian, Sicilian and Venetian. (source ethnologue at <http://sil.org/ethnologue/countries/Ital.html> (Summer Institute of Linguistics (1996) (See map 5).

Whereas in many other European nations a national language has long become the norm and in many cases enjoy exclusivity in everyday usage, Italians have surprisingly maintained local languages as a part of everyday life (although one may imagine that this may be changing rapidly looking at the pattern apparent in the table). For instance, Aldo speaks Milanese as well as Italian (not to mention French and English), a friend from Naples speaks Napolitano as well as Italian, Francesca speaks Crotonese the dialect used in Crotona where her parents lived before coming to Milan and Italian, Lucia speaks Torinese the dialect of the city of Turin where she was born as well as Italian, German,

French and English, a friend Josephina understands Messinese though she does not speak it herself as well as Italian, French and English. Francesca liked to make fun of my wife's Milanese accent. Another friend from Naples explained that when he wanted to speak 'privately' in public places in Milan he would speak Napolitano with his friends.

**Table 1. Italian and dialect Usage in Italy**

<i>Usage in the family</i>	<i>1974</i>	<i>1982</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1991</i>
dialect with everyone	51%	47%	40%	36%
Italian with everyone	25%	29%	34%	34%
<i>Usage with friends and colleagues</i>				
only or mainly dialect	42%	36%	33%	23%
only or mainly Italian	36%	42%	47%	48%

(Lepschey et al 1996: 75)

To counter such possible sources of division the Italian nation-state, from its inception, has maintained a strong centralized model of government whose extreme conclusion was witnessed in the establishment of Europe's first totalitarian state. It was not until the end of World War II that a level of regional government was introduced and it was not until the 1970's that the effects of its introduction were felt to any meaningful degree, as the system of government remained highly centralized. As noted earlier, until 1993 even city mayors were appointed to govern by the elected party representatives in Rome.

Ethnicity has a peculiar place in Italian society. While there has always been and remains a strong sense of various groups being culturally distinct from each other, such as Sicilian, Friulian, Piemontese and so forth, these differences for the most part have not generally been understood to be at odds with a general Italian identity. In other words that the Piemontese is just as much an Italian as the Friulan has not customarily been questioned. However when a cultural difference has been evoked in conjunction with a political consciousness, the notion of distinct ethnicity from that of being Italian has

simultaneously evoked. This is the case with movements in Sardegna, Valle d'Aosta, and Trentino-Alto-Adige.

### **The Special Regions**

Officially Italy is divided into twenty administrative regions which are not always configured to correspond to culturally defined units. Of the twenty, five are designated as special regions. In these cases the idea of ethnic distinction does play a significant role. The formal recognition of the special regions was sometimes indicated as disruptive of the stability of the Italian nation. For instance both Roberto and Aldo told me on separate occasions that they resented the special rights, particularly the tax breaks that people in the special regions had. Roberto explained that this was an unfair advantage. His thoughts on the matter were that it divided Italians into groups that created an antagonism. He pointed out that as a Milanese he belonged to a distinct group too. "why should some groups have special rights?" he asked "In Italy we have differences everywhere. From one town to the next, but we are all Italian."

The five special regions are Sicily, Sardegna, Trentino alto-Adige, Val d'Aosta and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Rather than review each of the five regions discussion of the circumstance of Trentino Alto-Adige should serve as an example of how this is so. The Trentino Alto-Adige region is accorded special status due, for the most part, to its significant German speaking population to whom the Alto-Adige is in fact traditionally known as Südtirol. Once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire it was absorbed into Italy in 1919. During the fascist rule, Mussolini put into place a policy of Italicization of the population which enforced the usage of the Italian language in public spaces. Additionally residents from other parts of Italy were 'imported' into the region to 'dilute' the German speaking population. For hubristic reasons Mussolini held a plebiscite which required the choice to be made whether to remain in Italy or to leave for Germany, which he was sure he would win after the imagined success of his Italicization program. 80% of the

population of the region voted to move to Germany. In 1946 Austria renounced any legal claims to the territory “on the condition that Italy respected the cultural identity of the German-speaking minority through regional autonomy (Richards, 1995:87)”. However, in 1948 the area of Trento-Bolzano, was incorporated with Alto-Adige as Trentino Alto-Adige, shifting the regions population to a ratio of five Italian speakers to each German speaker. In 1969 Austrian intervention led to the institutionalization of two linguistically based school systems as well as a quota system for employment. These bureaucratic measures meant individuals had to choose formal designations as German-speakers or Italian speakers.

The question of whether Italian nationality is seen as a matter of citizenship, biology, cultural affinity or a particular kind of socialization is a tenacious one which the special region of Trentino Alto-Adige raises. While technically Italian nationality is designated by citizenship, the history and social differences found among the population of this region are not erased by an administrative title. It is reported that when asked, German-speakers of this region will often respond along the lines of saying “they are Italians of German mother tongue” or simply ‘European’ (Richards, 1991:91). Clearly there is a sense that German speaking Italians are Italians in a way that non-hyphenated Italians (whose first tongue may or may not be Italian) are not. German speakers of Trentino Alto-Adige are for historic reasons seen as outsiders, to some degree, by other Italians, as well as by themselves. The nation again slips away from easy definition.

If Italian citizenship alone does not necessarily make one a member of the Italian nation, it is hard to say just what does contribute to a sense of an Italian nation. Take the case of Lucia who approaches her affiliation with Italian national identity with some ambivalence. I spoke with Lucia the evening of July 18 1997 in her summer home in the alpine region of Valle d’Aosta on the French and Swiss borders. Lucia was born in Turin (*Torino*) and is married to an Egyptian with whom she has two sons. They lived for many years in Vienna and also have lived in Libya , New York and presently in



Montreal. She returns to Italy and Vienna regularly:

I think of myself as northern Italian. I grew up in Torino, my parents are from there and they are very *Piemontese*, especially my father. I feel Italian when I think of the past, but I feel partly like a Celt living in Italy. I can relate to the Renaissance but not to the rest of Italian history.

*Piemonte* was never conquered, by anyone except the Romans. It was always a free land along with Liguria and the Alps. The Celts [who lived in these parts] with their own language and traditions were a part of Gaul. The Romans left things as they were. I feel *Piemontese*, not Italian. It was *Piemonte* that succeeded in uniting Italy.

When I was young there were no similarities between Torino and the other cities in Italy. It was a very quiet city, very German. This has all disappeared. Forty years ago it was a different world. It was a city that was quiet, clean and elegant. [She then related to me how she realized that the industrial changes that occurred depended upon an influx of people from other part and that this had a dramatic effect on the city]. I resent the ruining of my town, but this has been the price of keeping pace with the changing times everywhere.

My husband is Egyptian. In the south of Italy he is more at home than I. I would not come back to Italy to live because I couldn't live with the changes. I feel more at home in Vienna. [She compared the Torino of the past to Vienna in some ways]. Valle d'Aosta had been united with *Piemonte* in the past, it had a similar feel. It's a place to get away from the city. It isn't that others and other ways of life don't have a right to be, but that I still feel a loss of a way of life that is painful. The way of living in Italy is not so interesting to me, I feel closer to a way of life in Torino 'the langue'. People are accepting of foreigners there. The country people may seem rough on the surface — aloof, but they accept outsiders.

I sometimes feel more uncomfortable than my children in Italy. When someone in Canada asks, where you are from, I never say that I **am** Italian. I say I am **from** Italy; I'm *Torinese*. I left Italy in 1983 to Austria where I lived until 1992. Then one year in New York another year in Vienna and moved to Canada in 1994. I also lived in Libya for three months in 1973. It was a horrible experience. People resented me being from Italy and resented my husband being from Egypt. It has been a constant struggle for to maintain my identity. I have made a conscious effort to do so. Having an Egyptian husband I've had to accept many things that don't make sense to me. When living in Austria I never sought out other Italians. I never felt a need to be part of an Italian community. Even my house in Vienna is *Piemontese*. I do not have one Italian friend in Vienna.

Lucia has red hair, and remarkably green eyes of a kind usually associated with northern Europeans. These features are not noted frivolously, but play a part in her sense of

collective identity as these are characteristics that are not typically imagined as being definitively Italian ones within Italy itself:

In *Piemonte* there is a feeling of being of a different origin. This is important to me. When I was growing up I wanted to be 'normal'. Going abroad and finding oneself different from the Italian stereotype was upsetting. I was glad to feel at home and normal within a Celtic Identity. There has been a new interest in Celtic identity in *Piemonte* within the last thirty years. No one would have identified with this before. The pre-Roman people living in this region were conquered but not Romanized. The traditions remained even with the coming of Roman Catholicism. *Piemontese* has words that are only found in Irish dialect and I believe that the kind of people in *Piemonte* must have been similar to those in Ireland. There are similar traditions; In *Piemonte* on the eve of November 1st people were obliged to leave chestnuts and milk for the spirits and the *masche*. In Austria *Krampus Nacht*, the *Krampus* are a sort of unkind spirit, is a night to appease the spirits who come to do ill, with sweets and dried fruits. A bishop, maybe St. Nicholas gave sweets to the people as on Halloween, but it was not scary, there was no sense of danger. The idea of the Italian people is not as important as being part of a smaller identity.

Lucia's discussion of identity raises the issue of identity and contingency. On the one hand, she initially identified herself as a northern Italian, but then chose to emphasize an alternative identity as a Torinese and Celt. She emphasized the parallels she saw between Turin and Vienna. Neither of these alternative identities are necessarily at odds with an Italian identity and only how one positions oneself determines whether they are. Identities are not only a matter of one's own choice however. Others accept or reject one's own labels and all too often have labels of their own to categorize individuals who may or may not categorize themselves accordingly. Thus one is confronted with the larger social context within which individual affiliations are made. The question then is given the diverse collective identities that one encounters in Italy, why have they not commonly been constructed as 'nations' or even in ethnic terms?

After some initial expression after unification in 1861, regionalism did not express itself politically until the 1980-90's (Hine:1996:109). By 1890 parties that based themselves on regional claims or language differences had ceased to be politically

meaningful (Levy 5:1996). Federalist models of government such as that proposed by Carlo Cattaneo in the 1860's came to be disfavoured in the present day. However federalism is widely discussed as necessary for the continuance of Italy. Federalism as a political alternative was pushed onto the parliamentary table by the *Lega Nord*, who have since come to reject it in favour of outright separation and the creation of a new nation-state of Padania. "For the first time since the *Risorgimento*, there is a real threat to national political unity (Hine 1996:109)". In the 1980's-1990's regionalism has continued to play an important role in Italian society.

LA STEFI di GRAZIA MIDASIO



"The thing that I don't understand, is how some people want a united Europe at the same time they want Italy in pieces".

IL SIGNOR ROSSI di BRUNO BOZZETTO



"I would like some federalism."  
"Venetian or Roman style?"

Two cartoons from the daily newspaper the *Corriere della Sera*

## Conclusion

The fractured quality of an Italian identity paradoxically is something that was also imagined by some in terms of being characteristically Italian. The distinctions between a state patriotism represented by the national flag, and a patriotism of the people 'la gente' represented by the partisans made for a generally complex sense of national

identity among those in my social network. Dismissing the states legitimacy to represent the people could be said to be characteristically Italian, as Isabella and Roberto said. Northern and southern differences could be seen as divisive, “we are two cultures, two peoples, we should be two countries” as Aldo would tell me or accommodated “it is the diversity that makes Italy unique” as Nadia said. The same followed with regionally oriented identities which could be portrayed as separate and therefore unable to be integrated “the people in Valle d’Aosta are really French” or situated within a metaphor of an Italian family in which the relationship between distinct regional identities were equated with that between brothers and sisters as Rosa and Maria did. In the following chapter the impetus thus switches from enlisting fissures that serve as points of contention as to a cohesive Italian national identity, to representations which accommodate difference within what is perceived to be a shared identity.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: HOW TO BE ITALIAN: FROM VIA GOBERGNONE**

The previous chapter enlisted the diverse social constructions that characterize the Italian national identity as situational. These were the historical and social realities within Italy that allowed people like Chiara to tell me that “Italian people don’t feel like one nation.”, or as Marina said, “We never had unity to begin with.” It explains the political emergence and rhetoric of the *Lega Nord* who claim that the unification of Italy was a historical error. However the category of the Italian is clearly meaningful to millions of individuals who identify themselves as such (as well as to the Italian state). Among the individuals who constituted the social network which I was a part of in Milan, Italian identity was certainly meaningful though not to the exclusion of other identifications. In this chapter I reverse directions and show how a common Italian identity was constituted by the various Italians I came in contact with in Milan. Once more I position the individual representations as they are situated within general discourses. Following Herzfeld, I navigate between local and socially diffused discourses as they engage each other, as neither “hegemonic texts” nor social actors stand alone. Individuals learn what being Italian means through personal interactions with other Italians and via textual and audio-visual productions, and in turn produce or reproduce the category of Italian:

The space in which they meet constitutes the nexus of political action, and the visible matter upon which the work of empowerment/disenfranchisement is performed typically consists of stereotypes (Herzfeld 1997:159).

In other words stereotyping reproduces relations of power.

Necessarily, I am delving into the use of stereotypes, but as Herzfeld states, studying stereotypes is not an endorsement of them. The generalities herein are not statements on my part as to what being Italian ultimately means, nor are they even meant

as descriptions of Italians. What is presented are representations of an Italy and the quintessential Italian on the part of those Italians involved in my research. Certain themes which constituted self directed stereotyping are presented as generalizing frameworks that allow people to speak of a common Italian nation and Italian national identity. They are notions that people were familiar with as part of a discourse of Italian identity, even when they were contested. Here is description of idealized notions that form the most prevalent framework around which a common identity was said to exist. The themes are broken down for purposes of explanation and analysis as in actuality they are much more integrated.

While collective identities cannot be spoken of in terms of stable or timeless entities, they are constructed as generalized categories by those who employ them. This means that at a rhetorical level there are ideas that circulate about what an Italian is and what Italy is. At this point in history certain notions are generally recognized by many Italians as being representative of Italy and Italians. Even those who reject them as false stereotypes and cliches, still recognize the discourse. For instance Italian scholar, Mario Mignone claims that,

It is true that all Italians, from the Alps to Sicily, love espresso coffee, want their pasta al dente, watch the same television programs, follow soccer with the same passion, hum the same pop songs, are equally skillful artisans, and have developed an uncommon proclivity for self-criticism (1998:4)

Clearly this cannot be literally true as people still have different tastes and abilities, however as self-stereotypes they are something that would be recognized by Italians in general. Thus when my wife refused wine at dinner, Chiara remarked in jest “She is not really Italian.”, the drinking of wine being a familiar activity associated by Italians with

Italian identity. One need not partake in the act to recognize its meaning.

### **Italy in Europe**

As anthropologist Edwin Ardener pointed out in 1972, there is an interplay between self-identification and external classification that occurs in a 'taxonomic space' which is not neutral (Ardener cf Banks, 1996:132). The discourse that speaks of an Italian national identity articulates with other popular discourses such as those on race, gender, class and ethnicity and must be situated in a general framework of 'European Modernity'. Italian national identity is thus situated in sets of ideas that speak from and about positions of power and dominance. Italian national identity develops in relation to the construction of other specific national identities, but moreover, to the construction of general tropes about Europe, nations, progress, and civilization. Italian national identity is as much about where Italy and Italians fit into a larger scenario as it is about what occurs in Italy internally. For instance Italian historians have typically presented Italy in the role of pupil, to the northern European countries role as model (Agnew 1997:37).

Historian Gerard Delanty remarks that from the 15th through the 17th century the dominant idea of Europe shifted from being understood largely as a geographical expression and came to be understood as representing a set of common values: "Modernity and European identity have Reason, Science and Progress at the core of a belief in a universal system." European values were envisioned as universal, rather than culturally specific and thus conscious and attempts to impose them on other parts of the world were made (Delanty 1995). Social Darwinism developed as an adaptation of a theory of biological evolution which was thought to explain social differences (Delanty 1995:96-7). The concept of Race took a new explanatory importance as anthropology developed into the "science" that explained variation among humans closely modeling itself on biological science of the time. Constructions of racial difference that situated

various peoples within hierarchies of evolutionary development were codified by turn of the century social scientists like John Fiske and William Graham Sumner. While social scientists may have long since moved on from these ideas they have been more firmly incorporated within ‘common knowledge’; common knowledge in this case referring to the assumptions accepted by socially predominant groups as defining the normal and true condition of all matters (Dijkstra 1996). For instance, notions leached from social Darwinists (i.e. Herbert Spencer) that explain social phenomena through biology (i.e. that economic poverty is explained by a corresponding genetic poverty) inform strains of contemporary thought even if not articulated in explicitly sociological terms.

The construction of ‘we’ expressed relationally with constructions of ‘they’ is often (though not exclusively ) made in antithetical terms which are implicitly characterized as ‘superior’ versus ‘inferior’. There is in fact much ambivalence in constructions of the other. For instance, the ‘primitive’ may be cast as the noble savage whose innate wisdom has been lost by civilized man, as readily as the superstitious backwards who is in need of enlightenment (moral, technological, spiritual and so forth). However, the following table represents a general schematic of ideas that are often implicit in statements alluding to human nature within general discourses finding their roots in modern Europe ( Said 1979, Young 1995). The column on the left lists concepts that are often assumed to define Europeaness in terms of civilization and modernity, while those on the right are understood to describe those who are deemed to be less European in terms of distance from civilization and its supposed principles. They represent familiar oppositional dichotomies which are encountered on a regular basis, in media representations and dialogues (advertising, television dramas and comedies, magazine articles and so forth):

<b>Europe</b>	<b>other</b>
Northern	Southern
Rational	Emotional
Progressive	Degenerative
Modern	Backward
Technology	Nature
White	Dark



Pure	Polluted
Vital	Feeble
Healthy	Diseased
Provider	Parasite
Western	Eastern
Urban	Rural
Controlled	Impulsive
Active	Static
Material	Spiritual
Lawful	Criminal
Wealthy	Poor
Masculine	Feminine

This table is by no means complete, fixed nor universal, but serves as a necessary point of reference for the discussion of the constructions of Italian national identity that I deal with in this chapter.

The north/south division that is delineated within Italy, as related in the previous chapter, is repeated for Europe as a whole. A northern Europe characterized by efficiency, orderliness and in general encompassed by the attributes listed in the left-hand column of the table, is posited against a southern or Mediterranean Europe often characterized by the attributes listed in the right-hand column. The north /south European construct is situated in a discourse of modernity versus backwardness (Agnew 1997) which is in turn infused with racist notions as evidenced in explicit racist constructions<sup>28</sup>. Such notions date back at least to the Romantic era when Italy was constructed as a geography of ancient ruins, a space in which travelers from France, Britain and the German states could act without moral restraint, a paradise complete with all its temptations for sin (Barzini 1964). A virtuous, protestant, modern, 'north' and a pagan<sup>29</sup>,

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<sup>28</sup> Such as those made by neo-Nazi groups in the United States. In the documentary film *Blood in the Face*, a member of a right-wing paramilitary group shows on a map of Europe where the division between the 'Aryan' peoples and those who are not (and thus said to be inferior) is drawn. The line is made just below Rome (parts of Spain and Portugal as well, were of 'questionable' racial stock he stated) and corresponds roughly to areas of Europe of lesser industrial development.

<sup>29</sup> Where Protestant versions of Christianity form the social norm, Catholicism may be portrayed as an archaic, idolatrous brand of Christianity associated with 'cultish' practices, whereas protestantism is associated with the values of modernity: democracy, liberalism, industry, etc...

morally abandoned backward 'south' was imagined. A construct that some Italians feel is in place today, as Luigi Barzini writes:

They liked the mild climate but feared it, as they liked but feared at the same time the Italian's elegant life, easy pleasures, adaptable morals, intricate reasoning, wines, women, the harmonious landscapes, the feeling of being immersed in history and ennobled by it. They were thrilled by one of the pleasurable sensations Italy always gives visitors from the north, that of feeling morally superior to the natives (Barzini 1964:5).

or as Francesca said: "I went to Germany and found it clean, but in places where 90% of the tourists are from Germany they are rude and disrespectful. They do things they wouldn't do at home". Nadia whose father had been ill-treated as a guest-worker in Switzerland after W.W.II said "Switzerland and Italy share a border but they are different worlds". She explained that this was because there were different mentalities and different ways of life between the two countries. Aldo agreed with this statement. He explained to me that the Swiss were obsessed with following regulations, "In Italy we are more flexible." He told me how on a business trip he had to drive through Switzerland and he was stopped by the Swiss police. They gauged the air pressure in his tires and told him it was too high. Aldo said that he told them it was at the legal standard in Italy. They then gave him a huge fine. Now Aldo refuses to enter Switzerland and told me with great pride, "Now I just drive around the country".

In June 1992 Isabella and I were travelling by train through the south of France. Our first stop was in Nice. Outside the train station a middle-aged man was looking for people to rent rooms he had to offer. I told him that we were interested in a room and he asked me where I was from. "Canada" I said. He smiled. "And you?" he asked Isabella. He turned away and began talking to other backpackers. He said in French, "I only want nice clean people". He then gave examples of who were clean people, "Scandinavians,

Canadians, Americans, Germans.” and who weren’t “No Italians, No Spanish.” He explained, “They are too loud and too dirty”. Isabella explained to me that a lot of ‘Europeans’ thought that Italians were loud and dirty people; that they were associated with Mafia and corruption, but that this man’s open racism was an extreme she had yet to encounter. Italian identity thus may be rendered between the poles of European northerness and southerness, which in my estimation has much to do with the tensions surrounding constructions of northern and southern Italian identity. Italian identity is constructed both from the centre and periphery of discourses of modernity, progress, race and gender that in general form are recognized throughout Europe. On the one hand, Italy is often characterized in the media by other Europeans, as a land of weak morals and disorganization typically ‘Mediterranean’ juxtaposed against a ‘Teutonic’ efficiency and restraint<sup>30</sup>. The statements made by politicians and technocrats from other European countries (notably Germany) to Italy’s economic endeavors in relation to their entry into the EC have been marked by what many Italians regard as racism; Italy and Italians typically being portrayed as incompetent at best and criminal at worst. Aldo expresses a typical relationship:

The most different from Italy is the UK because they are very snobbish. They have bad relations with other people. It’s difficult to have a good relationship with them. They have to be number one; above you. The binoculars I sell, the very good quality ones, they are from a UK company. When I contacted them last spring they were very cold and judgemental, because I was from Italy they didn’t take me seriously. I started selling their product in March and in July I received a letter of congratulation because they had sold so many through me. I hate this. It is ugly and two-faced. I think this is usual in England. They think “We are English, and you are Italian!” In that order of importance.

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<sup>30</sup> Despite the events of the Second World War, the stereotype of a Germanic restraint remains in circulation.

One of the questions that I asked consistently of those I interviewed was which European country was felt to be most similar to Italy and which was the most dissimilar. This helped me understand how people individually might define themselves as part of an Italian nation, but also show any levels of consensus on the matter that might exist. Here are some of the responses I received

**Roberto:** Mediterranean people have similarities. In contrast Russians are like the Danish and Swedish. In Italy we have Humus. There is a Mediterranean way of eating. When I lived in Barcelona I ate bread with garlic, oil, and tomato sauce. People who live on the coasts eat variations of the same basic ingredients. Also in the south of Spain the music and card games are influenced by Arab peoples.

**Italo:** I don't feel European. We don't have anything in common with the other (European) countries like Sweden. Europe has been born out of diversity. Spain would be the European nation most similar to Italy and Switzerland would be the most different.

**Gloria:** Spain is the country most similar to Italy while Germany is the most different in Europe to Italy. Italy will have to adapt to the other countries like Britain, Germany and France. Italians don't really care about being powerful. They just want to survive. It won't matter to be the best. I don't feel like a European citizen. I have traveled a lot (in Europe?) and I feel that Italy is the most beautiful place I like Italy, but sometimes I am ashamed of the separatists. In the world newspapers they read about the Mafia, headlines like "Child dies in Mob fight." I feel very Italian, but I feel bad when the world reads of a bad thing an Italian did. like "Italian Murders in London." I feel like this affects me,; that I must live up to a standard when I go outside the country. I'm careful to respect the laws of the country I am in. Italy is only 120 years old and still has a lot of differences from Europe. It is Utopian to try to feel a part of a continent; not realistic. When Italy was created people couldn't understand each other, [linguistically/socially] we still have to make the Italian people. The wars are still alive in our minds. My grandfather cannot forget that. There is still tension and friction between the nations.

**Rosa:** The area of the Mediterranean shares a common culture and history. For me it is hardest to relate to the Scandinavian countries. I don't know much about them. Spain is the most similar to Italy maybe France and Greece as well.

**Aldo:** Spain and France are the most similar countries in Europe to Italy. France is 90% like the north of Italy. The south of Italy is the closest to Spain, they are nice people but they are a little backwards, like Naples. One could see cows walking everywhere.

**Ida:** I imagine Spain to be the European country I would feel most at home in, whereas Finland, the Scandinavian countries are the most different. the climate, way of living, they are very organized, everything goes right. You never hear about them, about any troubles.

**Nadia:** The eastern countries of Europe are much different than Italy. Those Europeans from the Ex- Soviet bloc, like Hungary (are different). In 1975 I was in the Czech Republic and we went to Russia. I swore I would never go back. Lot's has changed since, but then you had to give your exact route that you were going to travel, where you were going to stay to the officials. It was too strict. They were communist in the past and Russia is part of Europe now, but then it was a 'mono' world, there was one way to eat, one way to do everything. It was all planned for you to. now its all changed, it fell apart, sure it's a mess now, but I'd rather have a mess like we have here in Italy than such order.

Responses to the north/south European dichotomy are various, but may be generalised at two extremes. One response is to locate all the negative aspects of Italy and Italians in southern Italy. In this case northern Italy is portrayed as European and the south as 'African' or 'Arabic'. A different response is to embrace the sense of difference that is said to delineate northern Europe from southern Europe. Just as the first response expresses a desire to be a part of the centre of modernity, of civilization, of Europe, the second response may indicate a rhetorical rejection of Modernity and processes of globalization. In practice it was a combination of both responses that was given by the same individual, often depending on a given situation. Aldo's statement combined both responses at once: "I would like to see in the future that we have a normal economic situation like the other countries, but to also keep the mentality of the Italian people". Simply phrased, a single message may be received out of the seemingly contradictory attitudes. "We are as good as the rest, but we are unique", which underlines the ambiguity within which Italian national identity is located in a discourse which posits

modernity or 'backwardness' as the extremes of fate for a nation-state.

### **"A way of living strongly"**

It was typical for me to hear northern Europeans (British, Scandinavian, German and so forth) characterized as ordered, efficient and lawful. Sometimes it was stated that their ability 'to get things done' was admirable; 'something Italy lacks' as Aldo said. There is an idea that in other countries things operate in the way they are supposed to: i.e. that there is less government corruption, that public services are more efficient, that the legal system makes more sense elsewhere. I recall a conversation I had with Roberto, in which he explained what he saw as the difference between Germany and Italy. He stated that Germany is still 'Nazi' in that there was virtually no freedom to be had; to obey rules was "something in the back of their minds". The politicians there stole as much as the Italian ones did, he explained, however he supposed that when they were caught, they were punished. Justice did not work in Italy in his estimation.

However, it was also usual to hear that an ordered society comes with a price of a society based on injunction. Ida's words capture an idea that was heard often:

There is a tradition of resistance (in Italy) to the system. Rationally I know this is bad but emotionally it feels good. It allows more liberty. It is a good quality to have, because people adapt the system and not vice versa. We don't have a strong collective sensibility. We are very individualistic. We think about our own personal survival first. The nation is not important.

That northern Europeans are 'cold' is the term I encountered most frequently from Italians in describing their temperament. (Americans and Canadians were usually lumped together in this pot). For instance, people would often want to shake my hand rather than give me the usual kiss on either cheek that was normal between Italians. When I finally asked someone why they were shaking hands it was explained that they thought that as a North American I would find the kissing of each cheek to be too intimate. Conversely

Italians I met often characterized themselves as 'warm' as Francesca stated "We are hot-blooded" (climate and disposition/temperature and temperament thus being fused). I was also frequently told that Italians have a great sense of intimacy. It was explained or implied that friendships were deeper, and family relations more important than in other places. "We stay with our families longer", "it's more difficult for us to move", I was told by Maria and Isabella during one conversation. Affection and generosity were explained to be particular Italian characteristics. "We kiss and hug a lot", "We aren't afraid to touch each other". "When we miss each other it is very painful, we cry a lot". These were the sorts of phrases I heard from people who tried to explain to me how they as Italians were different than other nationalities. This would come up in relation to my own unfamiliarity with customs. Once when I said to Isabella that I found having to kiss everyone goodbye at the end of the night a 'chore', she responded by telling me that Canadians were too cold and went on to explain that an Italian would never think such a thing. In this way she incorporated general discourses on 'nordic' and 'Mediterranean' differences into her own sense of self.

Since Italians are 'supposed' to be expressive according to familiar characterizations, individual Italians who are withdrawn were not always recognized as typically Italian. For instance a woman we knew was given the nickname 'Siberia' in reference to her 'cold', 'northern' nature. Among her 'cold' behaviours was the fact that she did not like to kiss on the cheek as is the Italian practice. It was also said of her that she was like a 'Nazi' because of what was seen as her exaggerated concern for household order. (i.e. the bathroom towels must be folded in a specific manner, the bed made just so, showers should be no more than three minutes long and so forth). Interestingly care for the household can be seen as being very Italian in other contexts as when Isabella told me it was shameful to an Italian to have a dirty home. Whereas her behaviour expressed in an individual of German nationality would be conceived of by some in my social network as typical and therefore normal, by those who characterized her as being like a 'Nazi' it

was not received as normal for an Italian. Northern people were generally said to live reserved lives. The lack of open display of strong emotion was often equated with the absence of emotion. I recall Roberto smirking at the words to a Pink Floyd song that played on the radio: "Quiet desperation is the English way" . "It's so true," he said. "It's perfect".

Contrarily I was told by Gloria that being Italian was as "a way of living strongly" She elaborated that,

An Italian is a passionate intelligent person with a good sense of humour, with an important sense of family. Generosity, a smile, friendly fashionable, ready to help people. When an Italian meets someone for the first time they have a special way of bonding. They are open in general.

Gloria was not alone in this sentiment. It was repeatedly explained to me by various Italians I knew that "we are a passionate people". Rather than being seen as a weakness, emotion was valorized

Here then was a way in which the boundaries of an Italian identity could be maintained at a local level while engaging with a discourse that appeared to be general. By labeling certain behaviours as northern and cold they were excluded from an arena in which Italian was played out. Thus Brazilians and Spanish could be called 'cousins' by Roberto and Rosa and others, while Germans and Swiss were marked by this same group as alien. Does this explain why Isabella who never watches sports would cry after the Italian soccer team lost to the German one along with hundreds of others in the arena and yet when losing the 1994 World Cup was appeased by the fact that "at least we lost to Brazil"?



**“We develop our brain, but we lost creativity”: Imagining the Italian nation as the imagination.**

I began to understand that there was a way in which it was implied that living ‘fully’, ‘the Italian way’, was seen as more intuitive than, the way of living in ‘other countries’ (‘other countries’ often stood for Scandinavia, Britain, France, Germany Netherlands). There is a manner in which organization is equated with an unhealthy artificiality and chaos with autonomy and spontaneity; the natural man or woman was idealized as a creature of emotion rather than cognition. What initially puzzled me was a distinction that was generally made between creativity and cognition. At first this seemed contradictory to me. Didn’t one use one’s mind to think up original and creative ideas? What came to understand however was that creativity was seen in terms of inspiration, that is to say creativity was understood to come from the spirit and was linked to emotion and passion. The general code of a rational, organized and functional ‘northern Europe’ was thus not uniformly valorized. There was the passionate and therefore creative ‘southern Europe’ or specifically Italian ‘spirit’ that was said to distinguish Italians from others. What Marina said is typical of this dissection: “Italy is about creativity. We should find our own model. The old crafts are all gone. We develop our brain, but we lost creativity, like artisanship. In the future I picture man as having a large brain with no hands or legs to work with.”

In fact, chaos was constructed as an essential condition for creativity in that it demands spontaneity and provides the conditions of free action. As Nadia put it:

Its true we have scandals, but we have art and literature, fashion industry. I think about Italy in a confusion, it feels like a dead-end, but we are resourceful, we will always manage to find a way to continue. I really appreciate this resourcefulness. it is our mentality to be resourceful. I’m proud to be Italian I wouldn’t change. it’s really amazing that we continue , but we have a special ability to be resourceful with ‘nothing’ I would rather have the confusion that this brings, the creativity, than have strict rules.

Confusion may bring disorder, but it is the necessary condition for acts of creation.

Planning and creativity were often posited as oppositional. Creativity was seen as something spontaneous and elemental which manifested in conditions of disaster. Aldo claimed that

What makes Italy different from other countries is *fantasia* [imagination]. People know how to use their imaginations. This is why we are the first in the world for fashion and style. Milano is a European city, but it has money. Its about making money, but all the great designers come from elsewhere in the country. Versace was from the south, Trussardi also I think. The difference between Italy and Germany is that we invent. Other countries wait until a disaster happens to be creative, otherwise they are happy to follow routines. Italians have problems everyday so we know what to do.

Just as Italian writer Giorgio Bocca characterizes the average Italian as being “anarchic” one who lives “from day to day” (1997:5) and Enzo Biaggi writes “In Italy nothing is stable except the temporary (1995)”. I was told by Roberto that:

The typical Italian lives from day to day, rather than planning for the long term. He will try to do big things despite knowing that he will not succeed. In general he tries to make the best of poor means. In Naples for instance the people are known for being resourceful and inventive with limited resources. This is so in any field.

He explained that the Italian ‘economic miracle’ for instance in terms of blind chance, rather than a result of any determination to reach a goal. I was told it was Italian nature to work outside formal systems.

Individuals were thus drawing the line of what they saw as another boundary between themselves as Italians and non-Italians. One that explained the turmoil that characterized Italian politics. As a graphic artist it was understandable that Roberto might integrate this perspective into his sense of what was Italian. However, Aldo, a businessman, who was known for overworking also incorporated the idea of a specific Italian imagination into his ideas of what defined an Italian.

### *Arangiarsi and Furbismo*

In Italy there is the concept of *arangiarsi*, 'the art of surviving'. It is embedded in the notion that one must be quick-witted to survive. Rather than systemize, one improvises. One doesn't create a system that works, one works the system to one's advantage. There is an idea that was expressed persistently that Italians can get by with next to nothing. Achievement in Italy is not always seen in terms of success within a system, but in 'bucking the system' as the English language phrase puts it. Take the example of Ugo Fantozzi (played by Paolo Villaggio) who was a popular character in a series of movies in the 1980s. He is an accountant working in an office environment in which his co-workers try to take advantage of him. While everyone else breaks the formal rules in order to get ahead, Ugo follows them to the letter. His behaviour marks him as a 'loser' who never succeeds as the others do. In the end he is shown to find his happiness in his family, rather than in the world at large.

Rosa explained that in Italy rules were more flexible. She said that when she was in other countries she missed *l'elasticamente* the stretching of the rules, that she said was normal in Italy, "It's the little things like being able to talk your way out of a parking ticket". Whether this is objectively the case is a matter of opinion, however, many people I spoke with insisted that in 'other' countries things had to be stricter since people followed the rules. For instance Rosa was amazed that people lined up for the bus in Canada. She saw it as a sign that people were sheepish. Part of her self-image as an Italian says that Italians get by in life through their wits, by being the fox, not the sheep.

I recall a Milanese gentleman I met on a train ride explaining to me that Milan's success in the fashion industry reflected a special Italian ability to survive. He explained that after the war Italy was in financial ruin. Milan needed a way to make money, so it invented a fashion industry from scratch. "We had no natural resources, so we used our imaginations" he explained. His interpretation of events made it seem that there was a particular Italian ingenuity that was evident in this case. 'The ability to make something

out of nothing'. Milanese author Luigi Barzini calls this *virtuosismo*: the talent for make much out of little. Recounting the deeds of Italian poets, writers, painters, musicians, scientists he claims,

They have filled libraries with admirable love poems inspired by no vulgar passion but by a highly developed ability to make harmonious and technically perfect combinations of words. They can write impeccable essays proving the absolute opposite of what everybody knows is the truth; impeccable scientific papers knowingly based on slightly spurious data; historical studies in which facts disagreeing with the author's thesis are carefully neglected. Some criminal lawyers take a special pride in having clients acquitted who they know are really guilty. Many see through the deception and yet applaud the adroitness of the performer. It takes a great man to do such things. Anybody can make an omelette with eggs. Only a genius can make one without. (1977:91)

Ida explained that to her to be Italian was to have to accept that things aren't done in formal ways, at least not with any predictability: "To be Italian , by way of example, is to wait for exam results". She explained that she had been waiting for an absurdly long time for the marks for her exam to be posted although it was necessary to know these marks in order to continue her studies:

This is the typical kind of thing, like waiting six years for a tax return, because of bad organization which nobody cares to rectify. Certain things are manipulated, there is a lack of respect for people. Italy missed a period of history and still has an old fashioned medieval system. bureaucracy is stuck at this time. Feudalism still is active in some places, there are still illegal ways of doing things. Lots of underground activities. Like writing off expenses. I have a friend who has his own business which works in a system with loopholes, which people can work within. This circumstance brings out the art of survival.

Ida seemed to have mixed feelings about what she described as the 'Italian way' of doing things. On the one hand, it was very inconvenient, but on the other, she thought it made people more self-reliant in that one could always try to find ways to make the system work for you. What I thought was particularly revealing, was that when I would allude to anything that might sound critical of the 'Italian way' of doing things, she, as well as others, were quick to defend not only their actions but those of Italians in general. This

recalls Herzfeld's notion of cultural intimacy in which those who are on the 'outside' are not as free to play within culturally constructed discourses that define a group. I knew I was being seen as an 'outsider' on such occasions. For instance people would always joke about how the trains were late or how long it took a letter to be delivered by the Italian postal service to me. For me to make the same sort of comments however, was to risk offending people.

An Italian label that valorizes what Ida called working within the loopholes is *furbo*. To be *furbo* is to be sly or cunning, particularly when one is taking advantage of someone else. It is a compliment to call someone *furbo* because it means they have sharp wits. Cheating on taxes (successfully) was often given as an example of being *furbo*. One must be careful to recognize that the valorization of such behaviours is relative. For instance swindling the elderly out of their pensions is not *furbo*. An elderly person getting two pensions however might very well be. Whether a behaviour is seen as abusive, corrupt or astute seems to depend on whether it is seen as the 'good guys' beating the bad guys'.

An example of how *furbismo* is a part of Italian sense of identity can be seen in the book by Sergio Ricossa titled *Survival Manual for Honest Italians* reviewed in *Io Donna* (March no.13, 1997). The byline of the review reads 'The disgrace of honesty: A virtue that for us is synonymous with naïveté'.

Thus there was a way in which the perceived 'chaos' of daily life, of inefficient government, of unresponsive public services of working outside the 'system' could be appreciated at one level as an asset to the maintenance of an Italian way of life, in that it was this very lack of system, that reflected and created the conditions for a distinctive Italian creativity, while at the same time acting as an endless source of frustration. Thus Rosa or Nadia, by way of example, could include what elsewhere might be regarded as negative qualities as positive ones. Thus when a British man on an Italian talk show said that Italians needed to work on their morals and get organized Isabella and Roberto (along

with the talk show audience were furious). Associated with this was the time when a British student working with Maria made similar comments on Italy's 'backwardness'. Maria who was known for her mild nature raged as she told Isabella and I about this. It was a personal attack. The fact that the student was British irked her to no end.

### ***Patrimoni***

It is not only people who can be prescribed a national identity. The idea of patrimony can nationalize objects as well. An individual's sense of national identity thus may be attached to a crown, to jewels, to a document, to a tree or building or as in Gloria's case a painting:

If they [France] give us back the Mona Lisa we'll talk. It is important to get it back. It is the property of Italy by heritage. Whenever I go to the Louvre I make a public speech in front of her about how she is Italian, but nobody understands because I'm speaking Italian.

The content of patrimony is subjective. It is a matter of choice. In Italy patrimony is associated with artworks, music, old buildings, there is a specific notion that it is 'culture' that forms the body of the Italian heritage, it is a trove that also gives evidence of an Italian creative genius. However it is also thought of in terms of an economic resource. It serves as a standard which marks Italy as handmaiden to the Enlightenment and modernity through the Renaissance. It places Italy as firmly a part of Europe, but as distinguished from the rest of Europe at the same time: "Beauty and culture are something to cherish and develop that others don't have", I was told by Marina.

One afternoon coming out of the subway in central Milan, I had noticed a poster that referred to an organization devoted to caring for the *ambiente* (environment). The pollution in Milan, is such that I would habitually get headaches from the fumes of cars and come home with soot covered clothes, so I was inspired to see some sign that someone was concerned with the 'environment'. On closer inspection it was apparent, however that the *ambiente* in this case referred to the effects that pollution was having on

historical artifacts and buildings. I told Isabella who I was with that I thought it a bit odd that in such a visibly polluted city that there seemed to be more concern for relics, rather than living people. Isabella replied that this made sense to her “because, its all we have”. She explained that this patrimony was Italy’s resource. “We don’t have forests or the rivers and lakes that you have in Canada. This is what we have to protect.” An advertisement appearing in a popular Italian magazine, recalls this conversation:

Our artistic patrimony is not scarce. On the contrary one third of the works of western civilization are here in Italy. What we are missing is something else. The capacity to exploit these blessed riches to make returns like the Arabs make returns on their oil wells, as they are really and truly ‘cultural deposits’(Lo Specchio, no.78, July, 19,1997.

Marina as well expressed a desire to use Italy’s patrimony as an economic resource more efficiently, but also as a resource that would encourage further creativity which she felt that the ‘modern world’ was discouraging:

Our history and culture are not fully appreciated here. We need to start from the roots and develop our creativity, but this is something that society does not encourage. I am proud to be Italian. We could survive alone on tourism for all we have to offer. We should not take our artworks and culture for granted. Life is too fast now and its easy to lose this appreciation, of history and art.

The idea of an Italian patrimony is an important one in creating a sense of commonality amongst the regional diversity to be found in Italy. If a blue-collar worker from Milan, for instance, can feel that the Piazza San Marco in Venice, the artworks in the Uffizi in Florence, St. Peter’s in Rome and the ancient Greek theatres in Sicily are his own, as much as a wealthy socialite in Palermo, one has managed to bring together individuals of diverse backgrounds to affiliate through common points of reference. When I asked Laura what it was that she thought Italians might have in common she had some difficulty answering. Like most individuals it was not something that was self-evident. However reflecting upon it she replied, “What unites the Italians as a people is the history and sense of beauty.”

## ***Gastronomia***

Perhaps because it is such a fundamental part of the everyday, I noticed how food played such a large role in the construction of Italian identity. As with people food can be spoken of as native, foreign, American, French and so forth. The idea of a national cuisine, or in the Italian case *cucina*, is common enough. Thus categories about and attitudes related to food can contribute to more general ideas about identity. As with Italian ideas of national identity it is sometimes argued that Italy does not in fact have a national cuisine, but numerous regional cuisines. However from my perspective there was also an idea of an Italian way of eating, that people spoke of.

On the one hand food and kitchen evokes a wide spectrum of associations with home and land: the peasant who works the soil, the, the hearth, the mother who prepares the food, the family, subsistence. Gloria said "We like our own food. We love it. We have an arrogance about its greatness and we really don't want to integrate other foods . We are very *campanilisti* ."and Ida "The only thing I feel a real attachment to about Italy is the land and the food". These were common ideas that were expressed.

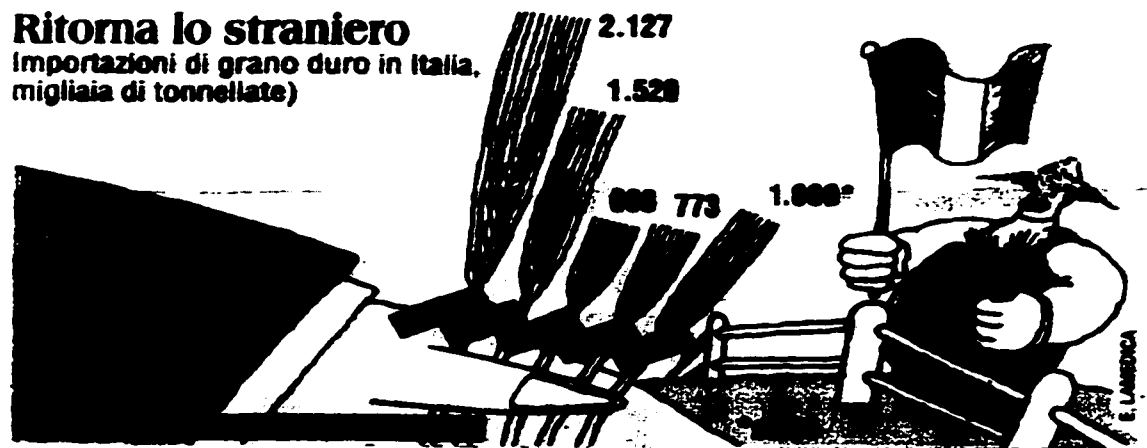
The wheat-sheaf has served as a symbol in the peninsula since Roman times and was used in fascist imagery to evoke and construct patriotism.



Fascist era posters celebrating Italian grain:  
"National Grain Exhibition" and "National Competition for Victory of Grain"

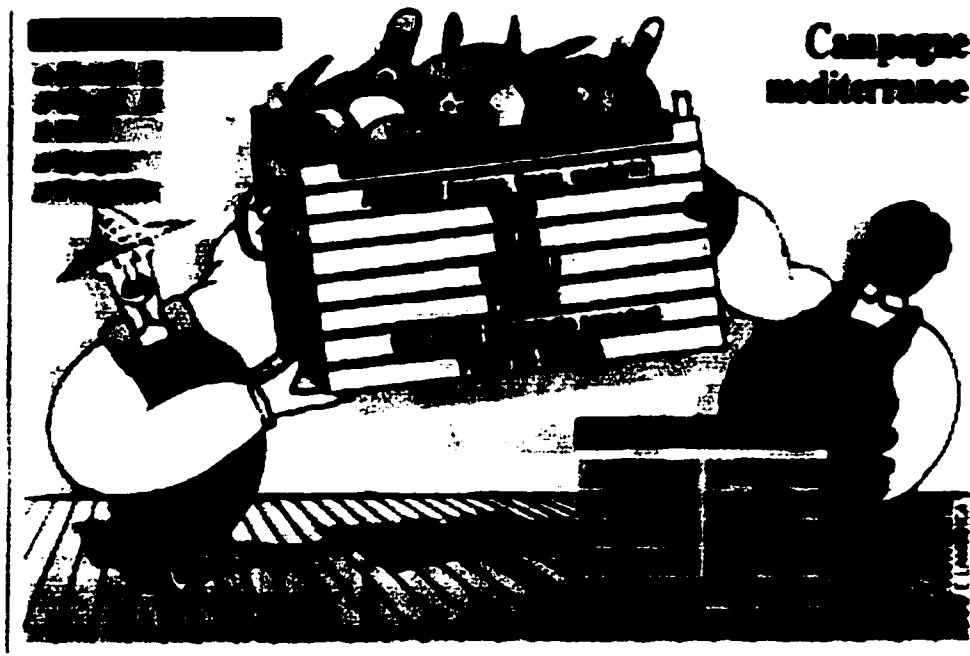


A headline in the *Corriere della Sera* declared "Pasta attacks 'made in Italy'. The farmers: 'we eat spaghetti made with grain from Arizona' " (Sunday April 13 1997)". The fact that American grain was being used to manufacture pasta in Italy was seen as provocative. It belied the idea that the pasta on Italian plates was itself purely Italian. It introduced a foreign (and American at that) element into what ideally should have been the produce of the Italian soil, cultivated by Italian 'hands' and contributing to Italian sustenance.



"The foreigner returns. Importation of grain to Italy, thousands of tons. *Corriere della sera*

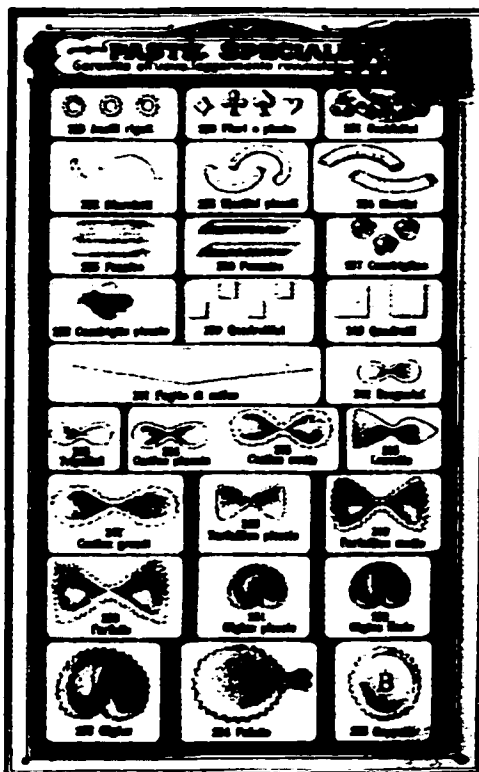
Perhaps a sense of the importance that 'the art of food' has to Italian identity can best be seen by the response to American food. American food is often said to be bland unhealthy and strange. An article in *Io Donna* called: *Cibo I Nuovi barbari* (food the new barbarians) relates the author's experience in a supermarket in America where he encounters marshmallows, ding-dongs and twinkies. Foods he calls calorie bombs. In fact Rosa said "I wouldn't go to the USA because the food would be terrible. I would miss the culture (of Italy). When I think of American food it is very unappetizing. Everything there is fake". One night when Roberto was making pasta in a particularly methodical way Isabella told him he was making it "*come un Tedesco*" like a German and that they should take away his passport.



Competing Produce: EU versus non EU foods compete in a Mediterranean arena

I recall a dinner conversation at our local pizzeria with Aldo, Rosa, Roberto, Maria and Isabella. Towards the end of the meal the topic of *gelato* (ice cream) came up. All at the table agreed that in “all the world” there was no finer ice cream than that made in Italy. Isabella stated this was because it was an art in Italy. That only fresh ingredients were used. It was the shared opinion of my dinner companions that quality in general was important to Italians. Then Aldo mentioned an ice cream called Häagen Dazs, which he had recently bought in the supermarket. He said it was very good, but very rich. Maria agreed that it was an excellent ice cream. Aldo said it was a European ice cream, Dutch or German, he thought. I then pointed out that this brand of ice cream was actually made by Pillsbury an American multinational food producer and that name had been made up to sound exotic to North American consumers. There was general doubt expressed at this statement. “It’s too good to be American”, Aldo said. I insisted that it was true, but pointed out that it was still made out of ‘quality’ ingredients. It was too late. The ice cream could no longer be praised. (although I suspect still purchased). As an

identifiably American product none of the ice creams objective qualities had changed, but it no longer was located in the arena of intimacy that Aldo, Rosa, Maria and the rest felt they shared as Italians and Europeans.



Pasta varieties

Finally, food was coupled with the idea of creativity as a fundamental Italian quality. Rosa and Isabella for instance would sometimes characterize their food as 'peasant food', meaning it was a way of cooking that developed in conditions of economic hardship: "It's all basic ingredients, like polenta and pasta. Sea food. We use the same ingredients in imaginative ways because we were so poor we had to eat the same things all the time", said Isabella. A poster similar to the one above was given by Rosa as an example of Italian creativity with food, noting the variation in shapes was not only for looks, but that each shape had different qualities and were used for different purposes, such as the kind of sauce they went with. Isabella compared Italian food to French

cuisine. French food was for rich people she claimed, it was complicated to make and served in small portions. It was said that what was important in Italian cooking was that it tasted good and that it filled you.

Rosa told me stories about people who brought their own sauce in bottles when they traveled abroad. She said that Italians hated to travel because they couldn't find good food anywhere but at home. In fact, Nadia said that the first thing she did when she crossed the border from Austria, after a long trip abroad, was to have a big bowl of pasta. My wife's family will send her food products (parmigiano-reggiano cheese, coffee and various candies) that they know she can purchase in Montreal. The fact the food came from Italy imbues it with a special status for those who send it as well as for my wife.

### **Pride and Prejudice**

While Aldo and others expressed a pride at what they portrayed as a certain Italian guile, when it comes to be judged by other nations this same valorized quality may be downplayed, dismissed or even criticized. There is an idea that one encounters in some media sources that the other industrialized nations treat Italians paternalistically. For instance that Germans and Britains laugh at their inefficiency and deride their crime problems; that as a nation-state they are inferior to their neighbours. One example, that expresses this notion succinctly was in *La Donna*, 24 June 14 1997. Lucia Annunziata wrote under the By-line: 'Too many tricks to enter in Europe':

For a year, they have denied us entry into Europe: Too *furbi* with accounting they tell us. Then, a surprise, Germany discovers the same methods. And France changes its mind. We are the most maltreated country in Europe. For a year all the leaders of neighbouring countries, and all the *soloni* of our country have denounced and ridiculed the declining Italian 'genius', which they say is a mix of accounting tricks and ambiguous politics..."

The sentiment that Italy is not the 'real' country, that it 'should' be, goes back as far as the Risorgimento. After meeting English travelers in Rome for the first time Massimo

D'Azeglio wrote in *Miei ricordi* (My Remembrances)

With foreigners I experienced a sensation of humiliation so painful that from their friendship came to me more bitterness than satisfaction. I was ashamed of being Italian!...The cold behaviour of the English...the tranquil and self-confident pride that could be seen on their countenances...looked as if they were intended for me, to make me feel my inferiority, to make me understand that when a nation is the prey of anybody that takes it, when it allows all sorts of people from the four quarters of the world to come to it to amuse themselves, just as hunters migrate to regions where the game abounds, then those who belong to such a nation can be tolerated among foreigners, but cannot be considered their equal ever. (180 in Barzini)

A more contemporary expression of a similar sentiment to that of D'Azeglio was expressed by Gloria and Nadia:

**Gloria:** Winning the cup is a source of pride in the eyes of the world. This shows that we are more than just Mafia and pizza. In other countries where Italians work, like Germany, Italians are humiliated. So when in 1982 Italy beat Germany [in soccer] it was like a revenge. What we wouldn't say to their face we said by winning.

**Nadia:** We are still afraid of Germany. They are not likeable because of W.W.II. Under the ashes, they still have hatred that could come out again. They would, they could destroy us in a second. I do admire their ability to rebuild their country. What I dislike is that Germans see poor Italians as jolly good fellows. they think that we aren't serious or capable of being industrious. In relation to the EC they kept saying Italy would never get in. I like the fact that now Germany has to face the same problems as we do. they treat us very paternalistically. At the seaside, at vacation spots there are many Germans. Hotel owners will take Germans before Italians. I dislike their disdain, their contempt. As to the Mafia, they are everywhere not just in Italy...The other day on TV there was a man from the USA. His parents were from Italy and he said that he was ashamed to be Italian as a kid, but that now he was proud of it. It makes me feel good to hear this. We have good cars, sports, food, fashion. "Buon Gusto" we are friendly and open to foreigners, we are welcoming. It makes a difference to be seen positively by others. If we are only seen as a country of emigrants this is not a source of pride.

The discourse that sees Italy as an incomplete project; as a false or failed or nonexistent nation is located in a discourse of modernity. There is what John Agnew calls 'the myth of backward Italy', which portrays Italy and Italians as technologically industrially and

morally backwards. It is said to be evidenced in the inefficiencies of administration, government, 'the system' and in the widespread practice of corrupt practices as observed during the *mani puliti* investigations and of the practices of the Mafia. Italians themselves see the reality of such claims in daily life, but typically are offended by foreigners pointing them out (recall Maria's reaction to the British students comments on Italy being 'backwards' or Rosa's and Isabella's outrage with a British man criticizing Italian society.)

Letter Economist June 17-13 1997

### **Italy's Progress**

Sir—I was dismayed to read in your article "Hitting the high notes in Italy" (May 10th) references to Italians' "fondness for tax evasion and creative accounting". I would like to remind your "witty" journalist that Italy is among those promoting the European ideal, and that in recent years the country has made special efforts to restore its economy and to meet the Maastricht's criteria. Italians are paying for these efforts through new taxes, unemployment and a restructuring of the welfare state.

Instead of applying stereotypes you should concentrate on the good things that have been done and offer encouragement to continue along the path of reform.

Rome Fabio Caporro

The boundaries of cultural intimacy in these examples have been breached by individuals who were seen to reside outside of the Italian arena of shared identity. The personal engagement with a collective identity was clear to me in the instances in which I saw people outraged with the comments of foreigners that criticized Italians.

Individuals may situate themselves within the national community by engaging in sets of stereotypes that are generally shared (or thought to be shared) with others who see themselves as part of the same community and a perception of a uniform Italian identity thus may be maintained. However, even recognition of the same stereotypes does not mean that they are formulated identically. None of these are 'official' or

institutionalized versions of the Italian. They represent imagery that contributed to peoples sense of camaraderie as Italians. As an outsider I had to learn through observation and direct inquiry their constitution. Needless to say this all has taken place within a limited social environment, but it is precisely in this context that I have tried to show an articulation between the local and the broader social contexts within which individuals make meaning out of a national identity.

## **CHAPTER SIX. AGAINST THE BORDERS**

The previous chapter elicited ways in which the individuals that constituted my social network in Milan, situated themselves in discourses that delineated the boundaries of an Italian identity. In this chapter I focus on areas in which the assumptions that are implicit in those boundaries are confronted. Identities are often most clearly demarcated in opposition to other identities (Banks 1996:151). In the case of an Italian identity this was evident at a local level ( again embedded in more general discourses) in relation to America (USA), Europe/the European Community and issues of immigration into Italy particularly from non-western countries. In conjunction with these is the general issue of globalisation: (of free market/single market economic system, and of the changing distribution of goods and knowledge and people) and what this means for changing notions of Italian nation and nationality. In this chapter I will thus discuss how general uniform representations of Italy and Italian identity were reconciled (or not) in relation to the social 'other', be it goods, ideas or other people.

### **America**

America has long played a significant role in the formation of Italian identity not only due to the history of immigration/emigration relations, but after the fall of the fascist regime, alongside with the Soviet Union (to the communists), it served as an ideal model of the modern nation-state for Italy to measure itself by (Agnew: 1997). In practical matters it was the United States of America who directed the path that the new Republic would follow after the second World War. America furnished massive funds through the Marshall plan to rebuild Italy physically, economically and through the weight of these funds politically. The partisans, who had fought against the Italian fascists and German occupation forces, had been largely communists. Given the cold-war dynamic that was drawing the iron curtain across Europe at the time, American foreign policy could not suffer communist leadership in the new Italian Republic. The new political system was



thus designed with American input to ensure that any party in power would have to rule by coalition, thus a buffer was set in place to diminish the possibility of a popular communist victory in an election. Aside from such incognito machinations there was the commencement of the tidal wave of American culture that continues to crash on the shores of the Italian peninsula, with its movie stars, Coca-Cola and popular music. As related previously the split of Italy into camps of right and left, aggravated by cold war politics, disrupted the simple development of a common "Italian way". However with the eventual collapse of the Soviet-Union, America has taken on a greater exclusivity as the centre of modernity within whose maelstrom 'lesser' nation-states whirl. Whether it is expressed in terms of 'anti-americanism', a confrontation of Catholic vs protestant ideals, the adaptation of an American model to Italy, or the consumption of American pop culture, Italians of all types confront America in some respect of their daily lives (Agnew 1997).

Thus America plays a role of the Italian 'other'. The other of the future, the 'other' of a centre that produces cultural and social change in the world through economic and military might. America is often approached in terms of what Italy might become socially, for better or worse. Thus one finds America represented as both the mythic 'land of opportunity', but also as the 'American nightmare'.

The myth of America originates with the turn of the 19th century emigration, particularly from the south of Italy to the United States. Along with the tales of opportunity and material and monetary wealth that were sent to Italy from the United States, an extensive literature developed to anchor the myth in the Italian public consciousness. A fundamental image of America is produced in the short story "Aunt Bess in Memorium" by Guiseppe Berlo and in Ignazio Silone's novel, *Fontamara* (1930), who write of America as a land of opportunity, but also as a new Eden in which innocence is recovered (Mignone 1998:111-112). Carlo Levi's *Cristo è fermato ad Eboli* (Christ stopped at Eboli, 1945) is a well known Italian novel that depicts 'the good life'

in America in more balanced terms, depicting as well the pain of dislocation that accompanies the migration, as much as opportunity it provides. While many literary works on the subject of emigration were projects of the imagination, Mario Soldati's novel *America Primo Amore*, 1935, represents the author's actual experience at travelling in the United States. It is a book that portrays America as a lover with whom the narrator has become disillusioned as he discovers "America is a barbaric country without culture (Mignone 1998:113).", thus is introduced another significant branch in the myth of America. Cesare Pavese's book *La luna e I faló* (The Moon and the bonfires 1949) portrays an America of opportunity, but also as a land where money precedes moral values (Mignone 1998:114). Thus America has been and is seen in conflicting and ambiguous terms, that sharpen into focus. For some, epitomized by former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's political rhetoric, the 'American way' of free-enterprise, 'family values', convenience, consumption, and Disney, is something to be emulated if even in Italian translation. Thus the creation of Milano Due the idealized planned community for employees of the Fininvest empire. Italian social commentator, Beppe Severgnini jokes in his book *Confronti: gli italiani e tutti gli altri* (*Confrontations comparisons: the Italians and all the others*), that an American baby's first words are "I am the greatest!". For some Italians such an attitude is attractive, for others it is *brutto* (ugly, nasty).

The other America that is perceived through American television programs, films and sensational newspaper articles is said to be a violent, racist, gluttonous land of serial killers, (like Andrew Cunanin, killer of Gianni Versace), armed citizens, fast-food, strip-malls and woeful taste. If Americans are portrayed as 'go-getters' who 'take-charge', they are also portrayed as gluttons who gorge on fattening foods. Portions are huge compared to those of Italy. For instance, Coca-cola bottle's of about 125ml are found in stores - the average being 355ml in North America. A large bottle is 1.5 L as opposed to 2L in North America. This is one of many examples. It is an America epitomized by the terms

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'jumbo', 'extra-large', king-size'. According to Italian social commentator, Beppe Severgnini, the most important thing about food in Italy is that it tastes good, while in America it is that it fills you up. An article in *Io Donna* (no.28, 12 luglio, 1997) warns of the increase in frequency of obesity in Italy, noting that 15-20% of children in Italy have weight problems. It is then implied that this problem is one that is patterned after the adoption of American habits. This information is followed by the statement that

If there is not a reverse in the trend, the World Health Organization predicts that by the year 2230, 100% of the American population, who already has the biggest problem, will be obese." In so many words, America is presented as the world leader in gluttony. Set in relation to the general discourse that states Italian social trends emulate those of America, the article may also act as a warning against the American way of life as diet - fattening.

While this is an interpretation of the article and only one possible message that might be read into it, it is not an unlikely one given the associations that people in my milieu made with food and diet and national identity.

In practice multiple visions of America meld and cleave at different points on different occasions with a complexity that could be the subject of a paper in itself. An article on American food in the weekly newspaper supplement *Io Donna* titled: 'Strange Eating' by Stefano Bonilli: *Food the New Barbarians: Journey among the shelves of an American Supermarket* (*Io Donna* no. 31 August 1997.) imparts some of this ambivalence:

Our palates, our taste and our Italian and European eating habits: We have the habit to eat well, to find in the simplest of foods definite flavours. An Italian knows what the taste of extra virgin olive oil is, and that of butter, eats different types of bread, of pasta, has Mediterranean produce at his disposal, that is to say stupendous fruit and vegetables, also wine, vinegar, and balsamic. And of cheese we have an infinite variety. The multinationals of food have tried to colonize our palates importing hamburgers that are in reality our *polpettoni di carne*; Coca Cola, that is caffeine with other ingredients, that is basically our *chinotto*; the club sandwich we have domesticated, enriched, lightened and perfected; but as to snacks: from potato chips to peanuts (do you remember *Peanuts*?) it is here in truth that we have been colonized.

Here the author claims prototypical American foods as commensurable with 'native' Italian dishes: Coke and a hamburger aren't so foreign. The club sandwich is 'made' Italian through local adaptation, but there is food — 'snacks', which is alien to the Italian palate. In fact Italians have adopted the English word 'snack' to refer to a particularly American way of eating associated with what English speaking North Americans call 'junkfood'. 'Snack' thus is not a neutral term in the Italian context. In the context of the author's metaphor of colonization, the snack is something that potentially turns Italians into Americans. There is another popular image of the American as American football player: hulking, aggressive — simply a bully, and it is this guise that 'Americanization' can take in the imaginations of some Italians.

The way in which Americana circulates in Italian daily life as I knew it seems typically to be met with ambivalence. For instance Roberto loves jazz, blues, rap and rock, Coca Cola, Marlboros and Camels. However the same week that Italian fashion designer Versace was murdered in Miami, he told me that American culture was a culture of death. He pointed as well to the death penalty and activities of the American government (like the bombing of Libya under the Reagan administration) and an American obsession with guns. From this topic he shifted to one that explained the relationship of America to Italy as one of master to servant. He told me that Italy was effectively an American colony. And yet he still enjoys American films like *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs* and listens to American music from Marilyn Manson to Miles Davis. Curiously he engages some American cultural productions as critiques of aspects of American culture itself and therefore are able to be incorporated in his general negative vision of America.

I recall another conversation with Italo a student at the University of Milan. He

told me “There is a process occurring in which we are all becoming more the same. Its Americanization, like this”, He showed me the gum that he was chewing, “ or these”, he pointed to the Nike runners he wore, “the vocabulary — but still people don’t know a lot about what is outside the country”.

In my own social setting the primary perspective of America was decidedly that of ‘the American Nightmare’. There was a unanimous outrage for instance that Americans had the death penalty, from both right and left perspectives. As well from left perspectives of Roberto, Rosa, Francesca, Maria and others that Americans had military bases in Italy and that they were a racist society were emphasized. Rosa in particular felt indignant about the treatment of American natives. One of the most notable news stories of the summer of 1997 in reference to the USA was the pending and eventual execution of Joseph O’Dell. It was front page story. The television news provided up to the minute reports on events. There were rallies in the streets. The Pope spoke out against the death penalty specifically on behalf of O’Dell. After his execution his body was flown to Sicily and buried on Italian soil. Roberto told me that Italy was one of the first countries to outlaw the death penalty. For whatever other reasons O’Dell’s case was so emotionally embraced by the Italian public, it was clear that one element of it, at least for Roberto, was that it put Italy on a higher moral ground than America. In this respect he felt Italy could “out perform” the super-power, he otherwise felt was infringing on Italy. Roberto’s sense of being Italian was spurred in his responses to what he saw as American colonization. He articulated his own sense of being Italian with leftist political rhetoric about America.

Italy is not a society without its share of violence. There is a history of terrorism,

of Mafia killings; kidnapping and rape are not uncommon crimes. In fact another news story that was being covered in depth that summer concerned a young student in Rome, who had been shot in the head from a University window by a mysterious assailant. There was a way, however, in which America was characterized as a dangerous and distant land, contrasted with a safe Italian home. At this extreme, Isabella and Maria who have traveled all over Europe are afraid to go there. Rosa refuses to consider it as a possibility. In the same mainstream newspaper on the same day (*Corriere della sera* 1997) the following stories about the USA appeared : "Car theft, license to kill: Tomorrow in Louisiana Citizens Can Shoot at Suspected Thieves". Accompanying the article is a picture of a man and two boys with the subscript, "Americans learning to use arms". The story also refers to the 1992 slaying of a Japanese boy mistaken for a thief in Baton Rouge wherein the man who shot him was found innocent. On the same page are two other stories, "Slaughter in Detroit; Woman and four children slain", and "USA: Sadomasochist Restaurant, Waiters Are Slaves". These stories were not unusual and dozens more could be cited. The point I wish to make here, is that this image of a violent, immoral, even perverse America, is part of a dialogue about the future, about the 'modern world' in which ideas of 'progress' are challenged. The argument that Rosa and Roberto made could be expressed as "If America is the most advanced country in the world, why is there so much violence and racism in their society?". Even Aldo who frequently travels to the United States on business characterized America as a 'crazy' place due to such things as his perception of crime, but also of consumer culture: "Everything is so big.", he told me, although his portrait was softened by his encounters with actual Americans whom he found to be very congenial.

Italy, despite its entry into industrialized consumption society has maintained a different flow of life than one finds in North America. Certain features were represented to me by Rosa, Francesca, Maria, and Roberto as emblematic of an Italian 'civility' or quality of life that stood outside the quickened pace of other western countries. For instance, in Milan, one doesn't find twenty-four hour convenience stores. Most shops close from 1:00 to 4:00 in the afternoon for lunch. Fresh produce is more common than processed food. People take long holidays usually of two to four weeks in the summer (Milan in August is virtually a ghost town as nearly everyone leaves the city for vacation. This time is called *ferragosto*). Some changes in particular could be characterized as foreign. For example, more strip malls are being built and suburbs are expanding around the urban centre of Milan. I remember a trip with Aldo to a new mall outside of Milan. Inside it could have been anywhere in North America. My father in law said. "I don't like this. It's not nice, but I am afraid that this is the future". Aldo, who is a businessman, expressed that this sort of change was inevitable as part of the progress of the modern world. Others like Maria pointed out that such malls were something foreign to Italy, something from outside. For her they marked an Americanization of the Italian 'way of life'. However, she didn't think this would prevent anyone from shopping at them as she herself did on occasion.

Needless to say there could be found alternative perceptions of America, such as those that reflected an admiration for the country and its values, but these were the ones I encountered as a participant-observer. The way people I met in daily life drew the boundaries of what was Italian in relation to America, though not consistent, were generally in reaction to an America perceived as powerful and culturally homogenizing. In



this way I saw America play the role of both scapegoat (Lucia, “Americanization is the real threat to identity”) and excuse (Aldo, “I’m afraid this is the future”) for what were seen as undesirable elements of ‘modern’ life.

## **Europe**

As is the case with America, there are a variety of perceptions of Italy’s relationship with Europe that are maintained by Italians. There is Italy as the underdog: maligned and misunderstood — patronized by the dominant European nation-states. There is Italy the mother of European civilization ( by way of the heritage of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance). There is Italy the member of the European Community. Given changing global political and economic dynamics the idea of Europe takes on a new significance. The European Community is perceived by some as a rival to the ‘super-power’ status of the USA. Some see in the European Community a way to challenge ‘Americanization’ as did Lucia who said “ I see the EC as a positive thing, — wonderful — not at all a threat to identity. It is an important guard against Americanization. That is the real threat to identity”. An article in the daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera* of June 26 1997 titled ‘Hegemony USA’, proposed a Europe resisting America’s role as ‘World Leader’. The story told about the G8 meeting in Denver. It stated that wearing of cowboy hats by the world leaders was an emblem of American hegemony. That Jacques Chirac and Helmut Kohl refused to wear the hats signified an important rejection of American hegemony. The article related that there was a growing division between European and American interests and said that there was a European social model different than the liberal path that the Americans would like to universalize.

As well there were those like Aldo who expressed the idea that participation in the EC will discipline Italy: encourage accountable government, better public services, a stronger economy. There is also the fear that this same disciplining force will change

Italy's 'nature', altering an Italian way of life. At a political level Europe as the EC may be used as scapegoat for austerity measures such as high taxes and cutbacks in spending on social programs by the government. The word 'sacrifice' in association with entry into the EC is commonly heard and was begrudgingly believed to be necessary in our household. As Rosa said, "If we are left out of the EC we will be finished."

I encountered much ambiguity over Italy's place in Europe. In some contexts individuals spoke of Italy as other than Europe and then in the same breath talked about being European. Being European seemed to be very abstract to people. It seemed to be most meaningful relative to other areas of the world such as America Africa or Asia and so forth. Few of the individuals that were a part of my research said that they felt at home in other European countries. Rather Europe was generally understood as being a collection of foreign countries; neighbours perhaps, but with the exception of Spain in some peoples minds, not necessarily of the same 'breed' as Italians. It was also pointed out to me by Maria, Roberto, Rosa and Isabella, that there were great animosities between European countries, born of warfare, and that these terrible events of the past could not be forgotten so easily. It was expressed to me that the project of European unity was 'artificial' but also necessary in order to compete in the global market. Italians in fact have been statistically among the greatest supporters of the EC (Economist Nov., 8-14, 1997). However any feeling of being European was usually said to be something that would come in the future.

**Italo:** I don't feel European. We don't have anything in common with the other countries like Sweden. Europe has been born out of diversity.

**Ida:** We will never make it economically into the community, we resist, we are too individualistic — it will be hard. The middle class and business are more open to being European as in the north of Italy here they are closer mentally as well as physically (geographically). Some in the south will feel this same way, but many will not. They have no contact with Europe. They may not even feel completely Italian. My mother for instance as a European would feel nothing. The goal of European unification is the movement of people, but I think that people will — people already do —

resent foreigners who come to 'take jobs'.

**Ida:** Europe is defined by a common history, cultural movement it intertwines through the monarchies, but each country is very different. There may be a thread of commonality that runs through Europe, but we should respect the differences. The stereotypes that you have [as a Canadian] of a generalized Europe don't ring true. I can't really imagine what a European is. It is the nation that I identify with. Being European is not immediate in my thoughts. The only thing I feel a real attachment to about Italy is the land and the food.

**Gloria:** Italy is only 120 years old and still has a lot of differences from Europe. It is Utopian to try to feel a part of a continent — not realistic. When Italy was created people couldn't understand each other, we still have to make the Italian people. The wars are still alive in our minds. My grandfather cannot forget that. There is still tension and friction between the nations. If they (France) give us back the Mona Lisa we'll talk. Germany and Italy certainly are more similar than Italy and China, but I always feel a guest in other European countries, like Britain. There is a strong sense of being an Italian and of being a guest.

Discussions of Europe typically turned to discussions specifically of the EC, raising the issue of hegemony. Much as America has come to refer to the United States of America, Europe is frequently used to mean the European Community, and western Europe. Secondly thinking of Europe in terms of the EC, means that the primary vision of Europe was as an economical and political structure, rather than as an identity.

**Marina:** I don't believe in the EC or the "community". Its cold economics. In Spain and Italy you see people want separation and I find it strange that this is happening (EC). I see too much diversity. The EC is for rich nations to take advantage of poor nations. For example Italy has to submit to the EC and factories in Italy close because Germany decides its no good to have them open, that Italy is not competitive enough. It's about the rich versus poor.

**Rosa:** From an economic point of view it is essential that Italy is a part of the EC. To be left out would be the death of Italy. I don't believe that it will be like one country. There are still strong differences between the nations. It will never be a single unit. There are enormous prejudices that exist between peoples. Like that of Northern Italians towards Germans. it creates friction.

**Nadia:** In the future it will be necessary to be a part of the EC for economic reasons. It is a positive thing in this sense, it would be ruinous to be left out. The effort that Italy is making to get in is incredible. I will never feel European though. I think the trans-border rights are positive, but I don't want to see a north south problem on a bigger scale. England and Germany are still different. We don't have a lot in common. maybe in fifty years children may think of themselves as European

**Chiara:** The EC is purely an economic movement. It is not from the heart. I am happy about it and believe in it, but it is very artificial and has nothing to do with feelings. It is not something that is inspired within me. Trying to create this feeling of being European. Why can't we just go to London and say I have a right to be here? It's not easy for me to do this. Maybe in the future, but its all coming from the top, not the bottom. I don't see it as a problem for Italy to be in the EC. I am an individual and will be an individual as part of a bigger thing. Being Italian and European are not incompatible. It is not threatening. If you have a confidence about your culture another one cannot be a threat to you. You integrate a bit, but you remain yourself.

Many of those I spoke with understood that the new 'European' was something that was being constructed, much in the same way the Italian was manufactured, by an elite. In general people had a hard time imagining what a European was, although it was clearly a word they were comfortable with in daily use. With a common market, currency, standards and laws and government representation, common interests may develop over time. As the rest of the world deals with Europe rather than individual nation-states the process of a European identity will also be encouraged. From the time and place I stood however, it remained only an ideal. In fact the development of a European identity would have to incorporate regional and national identities. People did not generally see the creation of the European Union as a threat to their Italian identity. In part because they weren't sure what Italian meant, but more so I felt because the idea of Europe was so abstract and ill-conceived, that it couldn't be seen as a threat. The issue of 'losing' ones identity in relation to European integration did not seem to be prominent in the words and actions of the people in my social network. Change was rather put in terms of losing a 'way of life'.

### **New Italians?: Immigration and Italian identity.**

In our neighbourhood in Milan, the best pizza was said to be made at the pizzeria on our street. From my first trip to Italy in 1992 to the year of my anthropological research in 1997 the pizzeria had doubled its seating capacity by expanding into the commercial space next door. During dinnertime it was often hard to find a place to sit. What was initially pointed out to me, that made this particular pizzeria unique, was that it was owned and run by an Egyptian family. It was not an 'Egyptian' restaurant, and aside from the *pizza egiziana* which had falafel balls on it, the menu was typical of that found in any other pizzeria. The interesting thing about this pizzeria from an anthropological perspective, was that it was seen as both foreign and Italian simultaneously. The food was not exotic from an Italian perspective, in fact it was said to be exemplary of Italian 'cucina'. Contrarily the place was often referred to as the 'egiziane' (Egyptian), rather than by its actual name. I recall overhearing discussions of the 'irony' of the fact that the 'best' pizza in Milan was made by Egyptians. Thus the food was 'ours' (Italian) in general, being pizza, but 'theirs' specifically, being produced by Egyptians.

Often the young children of the owners were in the pizzeria. They of course knew Italian and went to Italian schools. I recall discussions of how "strange" it was to get used to seeing people who looked different speaking Italian. 'Were these children in fact Italian?' it was asked. 'If they grew up in Italy, spoke Italian, fit in to Italian society, then weren't they Italian?' And yet it was expressed that since they had a different heritage, maybe spoke Arabic, would learn different customs from their parents, it was difficult to think of them as simply Italian. There was a great deal of confusion on this matter and it is a great dilemma that faces Italian society today, this question of 'who is an Italian?'

Anthropologist Brackette Williams notes that collective labels usually operate as metonymic devices (1989:429). This is to say a name for a people is often used to represent a specific portion of a group. For instance, she points out that 'Americans' is

readily used to mean 'white Americans'. For instance "Americans are still prejudiced against blacks" is a sentence that could readily be used in conversation without creating puzzlement as to what is being said. However, the sentence "Americans still earn less money than do whites", comes across strangely even though it follows the same logic as the first sentence because it upsets the assumed, if unstated meaning of 'Americans', with which the word is often used. Herein is the problem with using Italian to refer to citizenship. Technically anyone from anywhere can have Italian citizenship, but in the speech and thoughts of many Italians the meaning attached to the word is something else. The category Italian as it is presently used does not readily lend itself to including people who have immigrated to Italy. In fact, I recall the first time Isabella came to Canada how confused she was to find Canadians, who said that they were Italian, despite the fact that they couldn't speak Italian, knew next to nothing about what life was like in Italy. She told me that they were not Italian. "We have nothing in common". What made them Italian was that their parents or grand-parents had come from Italy, but to Isabella this was not what made someone Italian. Her maternal family had come from Greece a few generations earlier, but in no way did she think of herself as Greek. On the one hand coming from somewhere else may exclude someone from being thought of as Italian, on the other hand, coming from somewhere else in some cases did not mean that you could automatically claim an identity rooted in that other place. Being Italian was for many about 'a way of life' it was "not about a passport" as Francesca told me.

The issue of immigration often centred around the notion of 'integration'. Integration was seen as an important element to social harmony. What the issue of immigration delineates, perhaps more than any other aspect of daily life, is that despite the acceptance of some kinds of differences within the category called Italian identity, there is an idea that there are people who are definitively Italians and people who are not.

**Rosa:** Within Italy it is hard to see if integration is possible. Immigration was unplanned and now there are a lot of problems. like the Albanians who come haphazardly. Italy was not prepared for this. The movement of

populations has always been a part of Europe, but new immigrants have no economic position now. People are afraid because of unemployment and economic difficulties. The worse thing that could happen now would be a war between the poor classes. People have a fear of the unknown. they are scared because they don't understand them. If they integrate into Italian society why would this be a problem? There is not such a strong racial problem in Italy as people are mixed. Italian is not a race. To be Italian is to be mixed and diverse. Black people and Chinese people could be considered Italian, but there are stereotypes of the immigrants as well. It is said that all Africans are *marrochini*. Eastern Europeans are said to be violent; the women are prostitutes, the men pimps. The Chinese are said to be hard working, quiet, and business minded. That Philipinos make good maids and domestic workers. People don't really blame the immigrants, it is the government that is the focus of anger in the end. It's not the Albanians fault. Why doesn't the state organize things better.

There was an openness expressed by people in my social circle, about immigrants, about cultural difference, but there was also trepidation about a changing society, an example of which is expressed by Nadia,

It's important to carry on your traditions. I would do the same. Here people do the same, they have synagogues, or you see people praying to Mecca on their carpets. It is natural to recreate what you left. It would be sad to let a new country swallow you. When I think of myself having to give up my ways it makes me very sad. Sometimes I feel that my city is changing too much. It takes a slow process of reflection. As on Sunday in the *piazza del duomo* and there are so many different people, I feel like I am in a different country.

Some differences may be taken as greater difference than others. In fact, Isabella related what she thought was the hierarchy of difference in Milan. Americans and Europeans were seen as unproblematic they were 'like us'. Asians were generally liked, because they were 'businessmen' with money. They were seen as 'civilized', but certainly foreign in their language and customs. At the bottom were Africans who were usually in Italy as black-market labourers or more visibly as street vendors. They were probably the subject of the most unwelcome acts and speech as far as I could see. It should be noted that skin colour was not usually as important in this hierarchy as ones economic status or where one was perceived to be from. For instance black Americans were not categorized the same as black Africans and lighter skinned people from north African countries seemed to

be put in the same category as dark-skinned Africans. I would add to this hierarchy a split that was evident in the general associations that people made, between western (wealthy) Europeans and eastern (impoverished) Europeans. This is not to say that there is a strict criteria as to who or who isn't 'acceptable'. In fact within the immediate social network that I moved in this hierarchy generally didn't seem very meaningful, and certainly wasn't reflected in practice. However, people were aware that this kind of hierarchy represented a kind of mainstream scheme of difference.



"It's not fair that our work goes to pay the pensions of the old folks..."  
 "Tell me about it... They aren't even my relatives..." (Corriere della sera 1997)

### **'Italiani Buona Gente': Tolerance and (in)difference**

There is a popular expression in Italy: 'Italiani Brava Gente', which means that Italians are a well-meaning and tolerant people. Mario Mignone's words on the matter are typical: "apart from a few isolated incidents of antagonism against immigrants, Italians do not have discriminatory feelings. Italians have traditionally been less xenophobic toward other people and more open to outside influences (than the French or British) (1998:218)" It is common to hear from Italians that "we are not a racist people", people



speaking in terms of appreciating difference. Not all Italians however agree with this self-image. As Chiara told me:

Italy has to show Europe that it is a good host country, but we don't really accept differences in reality. In the piazza duomo one finds Senegalese and Peruvian groups (street vendors and musicians) and this upsets some people. We aren't as open to changes as we like to project. We aren't as 'jolly' as the reputation we have. This intolerance of difference is found between the regions of Italy as well. We don't really accept differences between internal groups. As when people from the south go to the north. They are forming small communities of their own. This intolerance is seen between city and city as well. As with Verona and Vicenza or Padova and Venezia or Gorizia and Udine. There are sayings that express the hatred of one group for the other. You might hear a young person say one when seeing the licence plate of someone from the rivals place. When people from other backgrounds work together, it is something they put up with. People don't look for a reason to work together. The other day a friend from Verona saw someone from Vicenza and said "I wouldn't want to talk to him." There is a prejudice against people from certain regions, by certain regions. Even within cities this is true. In some *cittadine* (towns) in Lombardy people from the older parts don't accept people from other parts of the city. They won't let you in. When I wanted to open my gallery I had to go through an old man from the old part. They will chase you out otherwise. I work with a woman from the old part, but I am shut out myself.



"There are good immigrants and bad immigrants"  
"For me there are only too many immigrants"  
(Corriere della sera 1997)

An open admittance such as this, that there was intolerance to difference in Italian society was not usual in my experience. Generally people I met incorporated the notion of tolerance into their sense of Italian difference. I have found that Italians both in my local experience and reflected in media voices will state that racist incidents are caused by 'ignorance'. For instance, Isabella and Rosa would say that people are not really prejudiced but uneducated. For example, Isabella explained to me that in Milan people would tend not to sit next to black people on the subway if there were other seats available. In her opinion this was because black people were alien to people's experience. She told me that this was based on 'ignorance', rather than a genuine intolerance. Italian author Dacia Mariani writes:

I always remember having heard, from my childhood on, that Italians "by nature were immune to racism". "Italy was fascist" it was said "out of ignorance, out of conformism, out of fear, but it was never blinded by racist hate". "How many Italians in Africa," someone added, "paired off with black girls, and even had children". (Cole: 1997:9)

A Headline in the *Corriere della Sera* of Monday August 18, 1997 quotes a Senegalese man 'Italians Racist? No, Only Great Ignorance' :

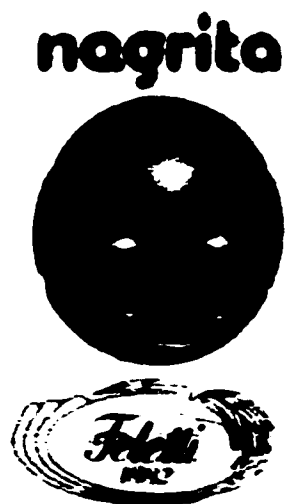
"They call you 'nasty negro' and you don't know how to react; whether to turn your heels and go, or to start to talk", says Mohamed Iamine Gueye 38 year old, Senegalese interpreter for the penal section of the tribunal of Rome... "It's true at first when I arrived in this country in 1988 it was hard. I didn't understand a word of Italian, but at the bar downstairs I found some friends, we went around in a group of kids to Centrocelle and I started to integrate. I don't believe that it is the nature of the Italians to be racists. It is just a problem of ignorance."

Mohamed goes on to explain that immigrants and native Italians do not have relations with each other outside of work or commercial transactions, and that for this reason people do not understand the problems of the other. While this was a Senegalese man's words it reproduces the local notions people, such as Rosa and Francesca, expressed

about themselves, and was of course chosen as a headline in an Italian newspaper. The racism that is directed at southern Italians may also be characterized as a case of 'ignorance':

**Italo:** There are differences between the north and south. I feel like a Southerner in the north., but it is not a threatening feeling. In the Bergamo valley, in Brescia someone might hurt someone, [from the south] but like a child with a gun this is all about ignorance.

The popular Italian view that Italians are by 'nature' welcoming and open resists defining actions as racist. The idea that to be racist is not an Italian characteristic or a social reality, means that racism has to be explained in other terms. Ignorance takes away the malice. In fact, racism in Italy generally seems to be perceived in terms of violent acts against minorities such as those committed by *naziskins*. Meanwhile one can see images of whites in black-face in advertisements, or stereo-typed images of 'blacks' and Asians in old American cartoons, orientalist imagery abounds in *fumetti* (comic books) rarely were these received in my social milieu as problematically racist despite the general tolerance for difference that was embedded in general leftist perspectives that people had. For instance the candy wrapper depicted below is an example of a kind of imagery that is not uncommon to come across in daily life. Rosa brought some of these candies to Canada on a visit, and Isabella gave some to a friend who happens to be 'black'. I asked her if she didn't consider that the friend might find the imagery offensive. She asked me why? Ironically the friend ended up making jokes about Italian 'racism' to her when receiving the candy and Isabella was hurt. As she explained it the candy was related to her sense of Italian tradition, not racism. That such imagery might be offensive had not occurred to her and judging by the general public acceptance of such imagery she was probably not alone.



Popular Italian candy wrapper 1997.

Until recently, there has not been the degree of emigration from other countries to Italy that there has been for European nations such as France, Britain or Germany, nor did Italy have the extensive colonies that created links with and complicated issues of citizenship and nationality in other European nation-states. Italy was in fact a country of immigrants to other countries such as Canada, USA, Argentina and Australia . Since the beginning of the 1980s emigration to Italy has increased dramatically. Lombardy, the region in which Milan is located has received among the largest concentrations of immigrants (about 15% of the total in 1990 Cole 4 1997). "Among the first to arrive were the Tunisians, who toil in the fields, vineyards and fisheries, Cape Verdian, Mauritian and Filipino women served as domestics in homes of the urban rich" (Cole 1997:1) Other immigrant groups include Moroccans, Senegalese, Egyptian, Polish, Iranian and those from ex-Yugoslavia (Montanari and Cortese 1993:290 cf Cole 1997: 4) as well Albanians, Chinese and Americans many come from other European countries.

In 1985, Italy had one of the lowest rates of racially motivated violence in Europe (Andall 1990:153). However, 1992's Eurobarometer, the opinion 'that there are too many non-EC foreigners in the country' was highest in Italy, at 65% . In the summer of 1997

there were a number of incidents that put into doubt any special Italian immunity to racism: most notably the torture of Somalis by Italian UN peacekeepers, and the death of a young man, a *marocchino*, thrown off a bridge in Turin by University students. As well there were reports of the *Lega Nord camicie verdi* (green shirts), monitoring the beaches to keep *marocchini* from harassing citizens. There are also the ‘*naziskins*’, skinhead gangs like the *Skinheads propatria* who openly declare themselves “Racists, fascists and proud to be”.

The Friday July 1997 of the *Corriere della sera* contains an article which tells of police investigation into the activities of openly racist groups called *Operation THOR*. In 1993 the Mancino law made it illegal to organize groups whose aim was to incite and practice racial discrimination. The article explains that in early 1997 there was an explosion of racially motivated attacks in Italy. Police operation from Naples to Milan resulted in numerous charges based on the Mancino law: in particular against a group of ‘*naziskins*’ called the ‘*Hammerskins*’ in Rome. It was shown that they were linked to racist groups throughout Europe. In 1996 over 300 acts of racially motivated aggression were reported in Italy according to the article. Circumstances such as this meant that the individuals such as Roberto, Rosa, Maria, Francesca, Chiara and Marina were uncertain about the characteristic of ‘tolerance’ being definitively Italian. The Italian ‘we’ for instance was a tolerant, open ‘we’. Rosa could say “There is not such a strong racial problem in Italy as people are mixed. Italian is not a race. To be Italian is to be mixed and diverse. Black people and Chinese people could be considered Italian” but in the same conversation say that she feared what might happen if the Italian working class went to ‘war’ with immigrants. Maria as well saw a need for actual tolerance. She like Nadia saw a possible common ground between Italians and newcomers in the shared experience of immigration. Maria explained:

In the future I hope that we can be more open to people from other countries. Our country will still have its own traditions, but it will be enriched. Now people come here to work and they are closed out. They

don't really fit. I hope we can surpass our prejudices, especially those we have of Eastern Europeans. The Albanians, the Czechs, Russians. They are seen as bringing drugs and prostitution. They're seen as being here to bring trouble. Its a generalization. I think Italians don't remember history. We accuse immigrants, but we were immigrants. We went to other countries and we tried to reproduce our way of life. They needed to feel Italian.

Not everyone remembers history as Maria says. Not all Italians are a part of families that emigrated, though many are. Of all the nation-states in Europe Italy has the most open borders for both legal and illegal immigrants. As the other nation-states in Europe tighten their borders, Italy has increasingly become a choice for migrants to settle or enter point into Europe.

### **Outside In**

We not only think of people and territory in terms of nationality but of ideas, practices, objects and images, thus one may say, "These are Italian shoes" and "That is an American snack". Some things from 'outside' may be received as being foreign, while the foreignness of other things also from 'outside' is not an issue. In an age when the radiation of ideas, practices, objects and images is commonplace, though not always obvious, it becomes extremely difficult to speak in terms of authentic belonging , such as is required to label such things with a nationality. For instance few would reject the statement that tea drinking is a British custom that itself contributes to defining something called Britishness, and yet when one pauses to think about it tea-drinking has a relatively short history among the British and tea is not even grown in the UK. Tea however is not seen as being culturally 'outside'. The truth probably is that most people don't even think about whether such things as their running shoes or playing the electric guitar is 'foreign' or not in the course of daily life. Many things may be received under normal circumstances neutrally: clothing, cigarettes, spoons and forks and other objects of daily use. Others however that are just as much a part of daily life may be emblematic of

another nation. Symbolically they signal a division between an 'us' and a 'them'. In Italy Coca-Cola can evoke America with positive or negative associations, but more often seems to be just a drink.

There was a weekly television program in Italy, that I watched with Rosa, that was a nostalgic remembrance of Italian pop culture of the nineteen-seventies. What constituted Italian pop culture as presented by this program, was in part what constituted Canadian and American pop culture. That is to say along with Italian and European, performers, programs, and music, there appeared American ones. Guests on the show included, singer-songwriter Jackson Browne, David Soul of *Starsky and Hutch* and Lou Ferrigno (the Incredible Hulk). They were all part of a general nostalgia for a recent Italian past; part of the iconography of people's lives. In this sense they belonged. While the hosts spoke directly to Lou Ferrigno in English, he did not understand the Italian comments that were being made in essence, behind his back; that he was being teased and mocked. He sincerely didn't take himself seriously, and was hamming it up, unaware that the laughter was for the most part, prompted by the snappy patter of the host. For the anthropologist, this broadcast raises the issue of context. The Hulk that Lou Ferrigno was offering the audience, was not the one the audience was reacting to. There is no objective Hulk. Although clearly originating in America there is a Hulk that belongs to a collective Italian imagination. He is simultaneously outside and inside. Gloria raised the issue of belonging in a discussion we had on Italian identity.

Jovanotti sings rap, but he makes it Italian, its different than the American rap, but a Milanese can do Belly-dancing perfectly, but not feel it like someone raised in the middle-east. It could be technically right, but not a part of her. Someone like Jovanotti can't feel rap like an African-American. I can't feel the blues like a black person from the USA. There is no past in it for us. The past is very important. Jewish pain for the holocaust can be empathized with and this is a severe feeling in itself, but it could not be as deep as that of someone who has that link. Jovanotti took a foreign form, but he reflects something about being Italian.

Belonging is not only imagined in terms of space but of time. What is new can be seen as

alien, because it has no understood place in society. That which can be deposited in the past, can be seen in terms of tradition. It has its history, as Gloria pointed out. On the one hand it is tradition that is an important constituent of a sense of identity. On the other hand, as Ida points out tradition implies a conservatism that can be stifling:

Things from outside are a part of life. There are subtle changes that occur and I am scared of a future in which everything is the same. I am afraid of losing what we are: maybe we will all be the same in the future. I can't really picture what it is I'd be losing. Identity is where you live and are born. Things introduced from the outside feel different. For instance we use English or French words in daily life. When you do this you become like the other person. You have to identify with the other when you use their words. Like the computer. I rejected this at first, but now I deal with them. Culturally things come from the outside too. You have to make them a part of your life, to consciously make them belong to your life. My mother says "computer", when she says it, she is like she isn't the person I knew. I wish that she used a different word. I am afraid of the insidiousness of the process of change. This is a loss of identity. The language of objects is important. To have a strong sense of identity you need one place, one city with a strong sense of tradition. No outside influences. A link to the past is important. And yet There are two pressures. The family pushes one way the other pressure is to explore. There is a pressure that others try to tell you who you are. In my case my parents moved, but my grand-parents have a very strong sense of tradition. For me there is a sense of conflict.

Like identity, what is traditional changes with each generation. New technologies, new patterns of consumption, new recreational activities are adopted, some more tentative than others. What is sure however is that what is Italian will change as these things do. Italian can become more inclusive or exclusive or disappear as a meaningful identity altogether.

### **Conclusion**

Building stereotypes of "self" and "other" occurs simultaneously. America, Europe and immigrants were some of the areas around which people situated their own identities. Stereotypes such as the "tolerant" Italian were confronted by the societal tensions that



immigration prompted in media productions and in everyday life. Some constructed images of an America that were often inconsistent with their actual responses to things American, but were useful towards delineating a sense of Italian distinctiveness. Italy was viewed as both European, but on occasion as other than Europe depending on what it said about who the Italian 'we' was. Fundamentally this illustrates the relationship of contingency that exists between individuals and how they situate themselves in relation to a collective identity such as that of Italian. There is another element to the contingency of identities however that is the focus of the final chapter. That is the case in which an Italian national identity is depicted as incompatible with an alternate identity.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN. LEAVING ITALY: THE VIRTUAL NATION-STATE OF THE LEGA-NORD**

The people who were a part of my daily life used certain stereotypes repeatedly about who they were as Italians and who Italians were as a community. The balance of the views I have so far provided are sourced and filtered from the perspective of Rosa's household. This does not mean that I am not aware of other distinct views of what Italy is. An alternate perspective to the general one I was engrossed in within Rosa's household comes from Aldo.. As an entrepreneur Aldo had different politics and social views than Rosa and her son Roberto. This chapter is a view of a perspective both as political movement , but also as personal views of Aldo in which Italy is rejected as a desirable social and political entity. The ambivalence of Aldo in relation to this movement will be contrasted with the certainty projected by the movement itself.

### **L'Italia undone**

Probably the incident that has most to do with my interest in Italian identity was sparked by a musical protest along the *navigli* on my first trip to Milan in 1992. A band on a makeshift stage was singing "*lega la lega*", which translates as "tie up the league". It was explained to me that they were protesting the racist policies of the *Lega Nord* who wanted to split Italy into three Republics at that time. This moment turned all my preconceptions about Italy inside out. It was explained to me that the band was singing in 'dialect' — another language than Italian. This opened up the door to my understanding that other languages were still spoken throughout Italy and varied from town to town and that people didn't always say "I am from Milan". Some said "I am Milanese" and so forth. Second I became aware of the distinctions people made between northern Italians and southern Italians. Finally I was exposed to an Italy in which political separation was as big an issue as in Canada, albeit for very different reasons. Simple images of uniform Italians were replaced with visions of thousands of city-states speaking Napolitano,

Friulani, Sicilian and Milanese. I realized that most of the mental imagery I had of Italians was more 'southern' than northern. Where I once saw gondolas, pizza, David, and Mafioso as all part of a single cultural snapshot, within Italy they could each be situated as belonging to different cultural groups.

### **The Tanks in San Marco**

On May 17, 1997 Isabella and I were met at the airport by Rosa, Aldo, Maria and Francesca. As Aldo drove us from the airport to his home, he exclaimed that the day before some separatists of the *Veneta Serenissima* had occupied Piazza San Marco in Venice in an armoured car. They had raised the war flag of the old Republic of Venice on the piazza tower. He told me that they had all been arrested. Five years after my initial encounter with northern separatism the *Lega Nord* no longer called for a federalist restructuring of the Italian state. By this time a new nation called Padania had been conceived. Aldo supported the formation of this new state. Like other small to middle scale businessmen he saw Rome and its powers of taxation as a scourge on the north.

### **The Invention of Padania**

The tensions that are born of an Italian identity positioned ambiguously between modernity and conditions estimated as backwards has made constructions of a 'northern' (*settentrionale*) and 'southern' (*meridionale*) Italy extremely pertinent. As recalled in chapter five, northern Italy has been constructed as industrialized, modern and European against a supposedly feudal and backwards Mediterranean south. One reaction that is met in Italian discourse on the north and south of Italy locates all of Italy's perceived faults in a southern Italian culture. This was a perspective shared by Aldo. For instance, he told me of a vacation he took to the south of Italy. One day he drove to the seaside. A gentleman approached his car and asked him if he needed parking. Aldo said, yes and followed the man to a grassy field that was roped off. Aldo explained to me that this man

had the gall to ask people to pay to park in a field. He said, "This would only happen in the south". He saw this as characteristic of a southern laziness : "they couldn't be bothered to build a real parking lot", and criminality: "it probably wasn't even his land" (and yet Aldo paid the man to park in the field). This argument shifts from one in which Italy in general is 'backwards' to one in which southern Italy specifically is backwards and which holds northern Italy back from entering the spotlight of the modern world stage upon which other great nation-states act. This anyhow was the argument Aldo consistently made.

In recent years federalism has moved from the periphery of Italian politics to a topic discussed as a serious political alternative in the Italian parliament. A number of regional movements began appearing in northern Italy starting with the *Liga Veneta* in 1979. Such movements typically fought to have their pre-Italian 'roots' formally recognized and maintained. Concerns with regional identities became quickly intertwined with frustrations over income and government. At the end of W.W.II industrial activity greatly expanded in the northern Italian regions. By the 1980's a considerable decline in the quality of life (i.e. excessive pollution, increases in population density) in conjunction with one of the highest tax burdens in Europe, stimulated vocal dissatisfaction with the governments policy of redistributing a significant portion of the wealth produced by the industrialized regions to the underdeveloped south. Regional movements thus found political expediency in the advocacy of a federalist political system in which greater regional autonomy, including the right to collect and allocate the expenditure of their own taxes, could be expected. While this construct of north and south Italy has existed at least since the time of unification, it is only in the past decade that it has been evoked at a meaningful political level. This has been with the greatest effect through the political party the *Lega Nord*.



"Italy is twenty and indivisible" (*Corriere della sera*)

### **The Lega Nord:**

It was the *Lega Lombarda* founded by Umberto Bossi in 1984 that became the primary force in pushing federalism into the fore of Italian political debate. The *Lega* was known for its severe criticism of the centralist system of government and its practices of patronage politics and kick-backs. In the 1990's major political scandals tore at all of the major traditional parties, whose already frayed credibility came completely unwoven. This put the new regionalist movements in an ideal political position since from their inception they had taken the stance of being an alternative to the traditional parties. As outsiders they were untainted by *tangentopoli* and even looked upon as populist heroes by some. With the ascendance of the *Lega Lombarda* after the 1990 regional elections, a new element was introduced into Italian political discourse; "The crisis of the main Italian parties coincided with the emergence of an anti-centralist movement which sought to

make territory rather than class or ideology the main basis of political identification (Gallagher 1994: 456).” For the first time since the Risorgimento regional politics were of some consequence. After the *Lega Lombarda*’s outstanding success in the 1990 regional elections in Lombardy, the *Lega Nord* was formed in association with similar movements from Piedmont, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, and Tuscany as well as the *Liga Veneto*.

The *Lega Nord* proposed that the political structure of Italy be reconstituted as a federation of three largely autonomous republics in order to reclaim control over regional identity as well as locally produced wealth that was seen as being misappropriated through government taxation. As this proposal had been met with resistance (to put it mildly), by legislative bodies, the *Lega Nord* formed its own legislative assembly, (not officially recognized by the Italian government), and unilaterally declared the regions of northern Italy to be the Republic of Padania in a symbolic act of rebellion.

Having failed to institute its platform for the restructuring of Italy along the proposed federalist lines, the *Lega Nord* retreated from its stance of political legitimacy to the borders of extremist politics where it began. In the summer of 1997 the *Lega* was holding its own public referendum calling for the establishment of the independent state of Padania. An entire parallel Padanian government complete with its own parliament, representatives and constitution was established. One can even purchase Padanian currency to be used at ‘Padanian’ events. Federalism however is now a legitimate subject of parliamentary debate, a topic that Italians have become used to hearing about.



"After the virtual pet, there's the virtual child: If you neglect it, it runs away from home."

"But that's nothing. Bossi has invented the virtual Legist.... If you say 'Taxes' he begins to yell 'Padania! Secession! Revolution!'"

### Heading North: Celtic Italy

An explicit effort is made in the *Lega's* literature to edify 'Padania' as a 'northern' culture. Historically the Lombards were a semi-nomadic people who settled in northern Italy around 526 AD and soon adopted Romanic customs, language and the Christian religion. It is from their name that the region of Lombardy (*Lombarda*) receives its name. Although speculative, they are often portrayed as Celts. Celtic itself has vague meaning but is associated most strongly with Ireland, Scotland in some circles with France,

especially northern France. A Celtic identity is useful to the *Lega Nord* in the respect that it links 'Padania' to an already established identity that is distinctly not Mediterranean but has currency within areas of Italy. Umberto Bossi in fact claims that *Braveheart*, the story of Scottish rebellion against England is his favourite film. As well the *Lega* was a strong supporter of the Celtic games that were being held in northern Italy in the summer of 1997. The *Leghiste* would gladly disassociate themselves from a Latin, Roman, legacy in favour of a continental heritage which the Celtic identity may provide. In fact *Lega* literature likes to point out that the Italian Peninsula actually begins much farther south than the Pontida, the area of Italy that would be the heart of a Padanian state.



Map of Europe showing where Padania would be and Padanian flag set in flag of Europe

The invention of Padania is potentially a powerful political and social tool in that it is an attempt to follow all the rules recognized for the establishment of sovereign nations: by claiming a unique history, culture, identity that is shared by northern Italians.

Aldo's feelings on the party's position about a Padanian culture vary. On the one



hand he is very proud to be Milanese and a northerner. On the other hand he at times characterizes this as quintessentially Italian, saying it is the 'southerners' who are, "not really Italian." He openly admitted that Padania was just a ploy. It was his feeling that very few people actually cared about a Padanian identity including himself, the real issue being economics. What was most troublesome to me however was how easily he picked up on the *Lega*'s racist rhetoric to explain why northern Italy should separate. He explained as does the *Lega* that the two cultures, northern and southern were too different to live together: that it wasn't natural. Of course the rhetoric of difference between north and south was not invented by the Lega Nord. This in fact is why it is so insidious. It joins these distinctions with its own nationalist arguments to essentialise its politics of separation.

Contrarily many Italians, as evidenced in the major newspaper editorials and in my own regular conversations, view the Padanian project, negatively. Lucia, a Torinese, called the Lega's arguments of cultural differences as "a misuse of history". Franco a university student of southern ancestry characterized the movement as "a joke", and a "fairy-tale". Nadia who was born in Milan but whose parents came from Puglia in the south said:

Padania doesn't exist. It is a crazy idea. I don't even listen anymore. Bossi upsets me. I think its an outdated idea to start a new country. Federalism is maybe not a bad idea and I would like to know more about it. I want a solution that includes the whole country. I think of my own father who came from the south and went to work in Switzerland. he worked hard all his life and he needed to work for emotional reasons. Lots of people from the south want to work, but some organizations want to preserve the status quo, like the Mafia. They are a stabilizing force. Each time a capo is arrested its like a revolution. The jobs are tied to his presence. It's a different life. I sometimes wonder what it would have been like to live in Puglia if my parents had stayed. Bossi's statements are based on ignorance. I hope that the new generations [in the south] will fight to have a good life where they were born rather than having to move to the north. Bossi is absurd. Rome devours everything its true, but at the same time I cannot accept a divided Italy I can't understand how we can be a part of Europe and be separated from Italy.

That Padania doesn't have any legitimacy, historically or socially was nearly the unanimous sentiment within my social network, with the exception of Aldo. However even Aldo doesn't see Padania or a Padanian identity as the real issue. He says it is about economics not identity:

If there were two countries it would be better for both the south and the north. In the south they have the Mafia and this has been imported to the north. There are a lot of Mafia in the north now. We really need to divide because we cannot carry the weight of the south. In the south the conditions of life are different. Things cost different. If you take the same salary that one has in the north and you have that in the south it is really worth more. Things cost about half as much in the south. Things in the north are more expensive. If we could do like the Czech's and the Slovaks it would be a peaceful division that benefited both. This thing of Padania versus Italy is not the important thing. That's just about a name. The north pays more tax than the south. The nationalism of the *Lega* is not important. What is important is "Why do we have to pay for them?".

Aldo's relationship to separatist politics and the idea of a new country called Padania was variable. I have heard him speak of Italy and Italians in glowing terms, while at other times agreeing that the north must separate from the south. He often repeated rhetoric about the "lazy, conniving southerners". While the *Lega* has no monopoly on such notions, they have managed to legitimize these to a degree by tying them to arguments about economics and political sovereignty. Without the *Lega* it would be difficult to imagine the sorts of arguments about separation being made by Aldo. He agrees that Bossi is loud-mouthed and arrogant, but like other supporters, he sees the *Lega*'s policies as a way to distance an 'industrial' north from a 'feudal' south.

The people I lived with and met were generally well educated, and cynical about nationalist politics in general, but especially of the *Lega*'s brand. Italo said succinctly when the topic was broached "Padania doesn't exist." Many felt that the *Leghiste* were playing a game of let's pretend. Roberto told me how Bossi had staged a 'sacred journey' through 'Padania'. He began at the source of the Po river where he took some water in a glass vessel that looked like something a medieval alchemist would own. He followed the

Po which runs through the plains of the Pontida (Po valley), and empties into the Adriatic Sea, south of Venice. Along the route were booths for people to vote in a referendum to separate. "You had to prove you were a supporter to vote" he said. They had barbeques and sold *Padanisti* gadgets. Roberto thought the whole affair to be pathetic. However even for those who dismiss the *Lega Nord* as a joke the categories of a northern and southern Italy is a part of common way of seeing things. One need not accept the legitimacy of the Padanian to think that southerners compose a culturally different group.

### **Virtual nation-state**

The *Lega Nord* once called for the dissolution of all European nation-states in favour of a regionally based European federation. At the time of my research however the *Lega* had changed its strategy for local autonomy by promoting what many call a virtual nation-state. That is to say Bossi and the members of the Lega, have established their own parallel government, constitution, currency history and 'culture' to that of Italy. They speak of and on behalf of the Padanian 'people' which as a category includes a majority who do not believe there is any such thing as a Padanian. The *Lega* keeps close contact with other autonomist movements including those of the Catalonians, the Basques in Spain and France, the Bretons in northern France, as while as movements in Scotland and Quebec. How they are received is another issue. As Italo stated it "How could anyone accept a people who doesn't exist?"

### **Drawing the line**

Bossi is well aware of the fact that people as well as information and currency are highly mobile, however while the latter is regarded as a good thing the former is definitely viewed as a problem. On the one hand Bossi has written that the *Lega* supports a "valuing of multi-culturalism and the debunking of the statist myth of a homogeneous culture (Bossi 1992)". On the other hand if they had their way they would close the

borders to all immigrants in a new Padanian state, "The migratory waves, especially those coming from the Magreb and in general from Arab countries, can induce the destructive elements of intolerance or of ethno-cultural conflict; therefore should be controlled and regulated"(Bossi 1992).

Our party's strongly critical attitude toward migratory policies stems from our specific concept of mankind. A human person is not simply an economic agent: s/he is also made up of affections, cultural values, and identities which can find their best expressions in separate historical and environmental communities. Immigrations, having a purely economic value, break up this equilibrium which forms a vital part of human nature. The theorization of a "multi-racial society" as the predestined future for mankind is both vain and openly instrumental (1992 *Lega Nord* political program cf. Mario Mignone 1998:212).

The kind of multi-culturalism they envision is one of well-defined internally homogeneous regions. The multiplicity of identities should not overlap with each other. The argument he makes is that Italy should not be a nation-state because it does not actually follow the rules of nationalism. There are diverse peoples not a single Italian people. Therefore a solution is found in the division of territory into culturally homogenous zones. Bossi proposes in his text *Revolution*, that

These bodies must be designed on the basis of a few homogeneous characteristics, which can ensure their cohesion. But what homogeneity? An ethnic one does not appear convincing...however there exist other homogeneous elements which identify Padania and make it different from the rest of the country: They are cultural and above all economic elements.

That the *Lega Nord* engages in racist rhetoric is not doubted, but how might individuals responded to their message of exclusion in daily life. On the one hand I was introduced to two gentleman who were avid supporters of the *Lega*. One was born in Italy, but the other was from Sri Lanka. The Italian said to me "You ask me how a white and black can be together in the Lega?" The Sri Lankan then explained to me that "the *Lega* is about earning money, not stealing it like the poor want to do. They don't want to work, so they get rich off of the work of others." He cited Rome as an example of how this worked. The Italian insisted the *Lega* was only about economics and was not a racist group. There was

a lot of tension in the room as these men made their case in Rosa's kitchen, in front of Rosa whose parents had come to Milan after the war from Puglia. Clearly she was offended, but said nothing. Is it true that for all Italians the *Lega* only represents an economic argument? I wonder, as this person had on other occasions made extremely derogatory statements about blacks after a trip he made to South Africa.

On the other side of the argument about north and south is Francesca who identifies herself as being from the south as her parents came to Milan to work after the War. One day we were walking near the Piazza del Duomo when I saw a tent in the square. Inside were Padanian paraphernalia, pamphlets, flags. I was curious to go close and see what it was all about. My wife came with me, but Francesca didn't want to go. She seemed uncharacteristically quiet and wandered off while we took a look. My wife told me that the *Lega* made Francesca nervous, that she might joke about what buffoons they were, but that their attacks on southerners really got to her. For me this was a defining moment. The *Lega* was no longer phenomena to be studied from a distance, but a presence of hate that hurt people I knew, even if that harm was produced verbally. In fact as the summer progressed I realized that some 'southerners' like Francesca and Italo reacted to the *Lega* by acting as if it didn't exist, while 'northerners' like Roberto and Maria seemed to speak more openly about its racist politics.

The *Lega Nord's* invention of a Padanian identity did not generally appeal to individuals whose views I was familiar with. As indicated previously even a supporter of the party, such as Aldo, saw Padanian identity as "an excuse" for political separation, which the *Lega* was said to hide behind. Elements of Bossi's arguments however are incorporated into peoples sense of Italian identity such as a distinct north and south. Celtic imagery was popular in Milan outside of the *Lega's* claims to such. For instance in our neighbourhood the *erboresteria* (herbal medicine store) sold clay figures of gnomes and fairies that were said to be 'Celtic'. Identical figures were available along with books, jewelry and other crafts in 'The Celtic Shop'. Maria had a particular affinity for these

things but in no way linked them to the *Lega*'s rhetoric. In summation the *Lega Nord*'s rewriting of Italian history and construction of a neo-Celtic, pan-northern identity seemed a secondary concern to both its supporters and opponents as I encountered them. Rather the economic relationship between an industrial north and a 'feudal' south was seen to be a real issue that needed to be resolved in some manner. Bossi's fusion of economic issues to cultural ones in the way of a Padanian identity follows the model of the nation-state which emphasizes the political representation of a people expressed in a sovereign state. The invention of the Padanian and Padania are offered as direct substitutes for the equally invented Italian and Italy. The major difference being, in so far as I was able to ascertain from a local vantage point, was that while Italy and being Italian were sometimes met by individuals with ambivalence, ultimately they served as arenas in which a shared intimacy was felt to be experienced. In the case of being Padanian and Padania this intimacy did not exist. As Aldo said earlier, "This thing of Padania versus Italy is not the important thing. That's just about a name".

## CONCLUSION

While it is well documented that the uniform and static identity of nations is largely an ideal rather than a reflection of actual circumstances (Nairn 1977, Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Williams 1989, Hylland Eriksen 1993, 1997), the same can be said for individuals as they situate themselves in relation to multiple collective identities. An individual may, for instance, be Milanese, Italian, European, western, Mediterranean, even northern or southern Italian simultaneously (having parents of different backgrounds). For the purposes of analysis I have broken down my findings concerning issues of identity into four interrelated areas within which people negotiated a sense of Italianess: 1) Representations of a fractured Italy, which included the people, *'la gente'*, in opposition to the state, divisions made between a northern and southern Italy, and representations of Italy as a constellation of distinct local entities conveyed through the ideas of *cumpanalismo* and *localismo*. 2) Representations of a unified Italian nation in which there is a sense of shared Italian identity evoked through assemblages of symbols, such as those concerning food, notions of a particular Italian creativity and patrimony for instance. 3) An Italian identity defined against the 'foreign' represented by other European nations, American cultural and political presence and the increasing visibility of immigrants and various 'new' practices they bring with them into Italy. 4) Finally, a complete rejection of Italy as a meaningful category was a possibility that some adhered to. Given these apparently contradictory points of reference one might ask if individual identities as they articulate with the collective are necessarily any more stable or cohesive than the identity of the nation writ large. This statement however, raises a second issue. Do these apparent contradictions appear as such to the individual in his or her daily life.

Katherine Verdrey notes that state-making is typified by the demand that individuals situate themselves within a single identity (1994). This 'either/or' notion which is evident in nationalist thought may also inform analytical approaches to collective identity. The fluctuating and unstable quality of identity thus may be a problem for the social scientist but need not be experienced as such by individuals.

Collective identities on the grand scale certainly are constituted in various localized ways as evident from my research in Milan, however, it has also been shown that individually people are engaged with collective identity circumstantially which raises the issue of power relations involved in defining the boundaries of an 'us' and 'them'. As Fredrick Barth has noted boundary maintenance between groups reflects their production within specific historical, economic and political circumstances (Barth 1994). That individuals may feel themselves to be 'x' in one circumstance and 'y' in another often points to political, economic realities within which identities are negotiated. For instance, Francesca was born in Milan, but her parents are from Crotone in the south of Italy. She told me "When I went to Edinburgh I said to people, I'm Italian, from Milano". However, she added that when she went to visit family in the south that she was not just Italian, she was of Crotone. That Francesca's preferred identity in Milan was generically Italian speaks to the prejudice faced by southerners in northern parts of Italy. To situate herself exclusively as a southerner would be to distinguish herself as an outsider to some degree, whereas as an Italian she is one amongst others. As she was born in Milan she could in theory distinguish herself as a northerner, however this would likely be met with some resistance from other northerners, as well as serve to distinguish herself from her parents and family, serving to alienate her from her immediate social environment. In fact people



may even adopt identities motivated by the climate of power relations one inhabits. Isabella's grandmother who came to Milan from Puglia in the south was said to have become "More Milanese than people born here". It was explained to me that she was motivated to adopt "Milanese ways" by the prejudice against southern Italians by northerners, which in turn she herself adopted.

Clearly collective identities are not insignificant in the world no matter how accurately they may be reduced to works of the 'imagination' there are real social dynamics active in making claims to specific identities. Who is or who is not an Italian is hardly a trivial question as it asks about belonging. It is about setting symbolic boundaries between one group and another which are then manifested in action. It speaks about formal rights to healthcare, to work, to reside within or enter a specific territory. It determines obligations to pay taxes, to serve in the military and so forth. Boundaries however are maintained informally as well as institutionally. Those who have a right to act and to speak legally may find that local prejudices inhibit such practices. Whether one will be employed or otherwise integrated or ostracized occurs through the informal doings of daily life as well as through legal channels. Informal judgements are situated within history which feeds contemporary mores. Thus the categorization of others than oneself is not completely arbitrary.

The foundation of the Italian nation-state occurred in the context of an evolving modernity, which included notions of political sovereignty as well as moral and technological progress. The transformation of the Italian nation-state to a Fascist regime was buoyed by a desire to emulate the colonial/imperial projects of France and Britain, which had since reached their peak, but nonetheless, served as markers of achievement

within the context of modernity. They served to define the path of progress bathed in the light of power that many Italians wished to follow. That Italy came to such a project late and unsuccessfully, in conjunction with its military defeat by these former powers which included America in World War II, contributes to a sensibility on the part of many Italians that Italy as a country has failed. Characterizing an Italian north as modern, and an Italian south as primitive or feudal, serves to put blame for Italy's perceived failures entirely on those characterized as southerners. Thus the rise of the *Lega Nord* must be seen in the context of a desire to belong to a Europe of 'winners' defined by ideals implicit in modernity: of progress writ as economic and political power through advanced technologies, and knowledge production. Within this schema the alternative is to be characterized as 'backwards' to be defined as developing countries are from euro-centric perspectives of power, as impoverished, passive and subject to the whims of the powerful centre. Throughout this dissertation the ways in which identity at the collective level is played out can be seen to occur in relation to the situation described above. Even in cases where individuals reject the conjunction of the nation and state they speak to the idea of nation ie the Italian people as '*la gente*'. Romanticising the south as the location of lost values also speaks to issues of modernity.

Siting instances in which a persons sense of belonging to a collectivity is present is not always easy, and yet during the course of my research it was apparent that on some level people were confronted by this issue everyday. Peoples awareness of categories of collective identity were entangled in the 'trivia' of the everyday. "Italian beer is not very good" said Maria. "We are wine drinkers." Attached to such a simple statement were unarticulated ideas about Italian character posing the dichotomy of beer drinking countries

versus wine drinking ones. That Roberto would state that McDonald's food was too American while enjoying a Marlboro cigarette, told as much about how individual boundaries of identity are marked as of thoughts on specific products. The distaste for McDonald's was set in terms of identity, while the equally American cigarette was met, in this case, neutrally. The boundaries of collective identity that individuals locate themselves within are confronted daily by ideas words, people and goods from 'outside'. People are forced to negotiate the boundaries that they situate themselves within on a regular basis: "I find it strange when I see a black person speaking perfect Italian," said Isabella. "I know that they can be just as Italian as me, but when I imagine Italians this is not what I see".

In this dissertation I have tried to show how a set of individual Italians of various regional backgrounds and political inclinations integrate the particular with the general. I have tried to replicate the ways in which individuals construct their own identities selectively and contingently, but nonetheless embedded within a general level of social discourse. Thus I have woven the particular and the general in order to present something of the way in which the nation lives simultaneously within the local and the national.

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## **Appendix I The Interviewees**

**Aldo:** He is in his fifties and owns his own business as an importer of photographic equipment from Japan, Germany, the USA, the UK and Ireland. He travels frequently for business and pleasure. He speaks Italian, Milanese, English, French and a little German. Aldo was born in Milan and considers it the most beautiful city in the world. He considers himself Milanese as well as Italian. His support of the *Lega Nord* party is somewhat erratic but generally agrees with their policy to separate from Italy and establish the state of Padania, for economic reasons. He lives in a large, by Milanese standards, apartment in the north of Milan with his companion, near his office/warehouse and his parents and siblings.

**Rosa:** Was born in Milan and is in her fifties. Her parents moved to the north from the region of Puglia in the south, to find work. Her father worked in Switzerland for a time after the war and due to the degrading treatment he received, does not generally think highly of the Swiss. Rosa works in an office in central Milan and lives alone in an apartment near the *navigli* (canals) in the same building as her son Roberto and near her sister Nadia. She was married to Aldo, but they divorced in the 1970's when it was made legal. Rosa has a wide range of interests including history, mythology, and alternative medicine of which she is very knowledgeable. She has a particular affection for Brasil, its people, music and culture. She has close friends there whom she keeps in regular contact and visits when she can. She has studied Portuguese, and understands some English and French but for the most Italian is her sole language. Unlike Aldo she detests the *Lega Nord*. Her politics could be characterised as being to the left, but are articulated in very personal ways.

**Roberto:** He is the son of Aldo and Rosa and is in his early thirties. He lives one floor above Rosa and works as graphic designer, creating everything from button designs to

album covers and fashion shows. He also teaches computer design courses in Turin a few days a week. He likes to travel and has been all through Europe. He lived in Madrid for a time and worked in a bar in Barcelona for about a year. He has been to Canada, South America and India for extended periods as well. Aside from anything to do with design, he is interested in music of all sorts. From jazz, blues, and classical, to the latest sounds from around the world which he keeps abreast of. He also takes an interest in 'fringe' politics (which in Italy doesn't necessarily mean marginal in the same way it might in North America) and is a supporter of *Radio Popolare* an independent radio station known for its outrageous fusion of the political and entertaining. He speaks English fluently as well as French, and Spanish. He was the only one who conceded that Italian identity was going to disappear in years to come. In conversation on Italian identity he emphasised the 'mediterranean' aspects of Italian identity as opposed to the 'European' ones.

**Nadia:** Rosa's sister. She works for a major Italian bank and lives with her husband and daughter in the same building as her mother in the same middle-class neighbourhood as Rosa and Roberto. She spends a good deal of time aside from work caring for her mother who is ill. She traveled extensively in Eastern Europe when it was still part of the Soviet world and to the United States. Her politics are closer to the political centre on the right, than Rosa's a point of contention at family gatherings sometimes.

**Lucia:** Born in Turin. She now lives in Montreal with her husband who is from Egypt. They have two sons, one who lives in Miami and the other in Hong Kong. As her husband works for the UN, she has lived in many places. Among them Vienna, Tripoli and , New York. She has a particular affection for Vienna and returns there as well as to Turin frequently. At the time of my research she was completing her BA in Italian at Concordia. However it was in an Alpine village in Valle d'Aosta where she has a summer home that she formally participated in my field research. She speaks German, English, French and studies Latin and ancient Greek as well as Torinese and Italian. Her sense of Torinese identity is very important to her and supersedes her sense of being Italian in

words and deeds. Politically she would be centre-left.

**Francesca:** In her late twenties, she lives with father, brother and three sisters in an apartment in a working class neighbourhood near the city limits. Her parents moved to Milan from Crotone an economically impoverished village in the south of Italy to find work. The immediate family locates its roots as being in Crotone and members return to visit friends and family on a regular basis. Francesca likes to tease 'northerners' about their 'cold' and 'miserly' ways. She is very proud to be 'from' the south, though she was born in Milan. She also has relatives living in the United States whom she has visited. She knows some English. She attends the university of Milan where she studies Italian history and takes courses towards becoming a public school teacher. Her politics are generally characterised as to the left.

**Maria:** She was born in Milan where she has lived all her life. At the time of my field work, Maria was completing her thesis on the deer populations in the national park at Grossetto. She studies animal biology and works part time as a guide at the Museum of Natural Science in Milan. She is in her late twenties and has been to Canada and worked in Ireland as an au pair for a time where she learned English. She presently lives in an apartment not far from Aldo, with her mother and brother. Her political leanings would be characterised as to the left. She was worried about what the future held for an Italian identity somewhat in relation to European integration, but more so in relation to the divisive politics of the *Lega Nord*

**Ida:** Her family is from Naples, but she now lives in Milan. She is a friend of Francesca's and goes to the University of Milan where she studies. She works part time in an office and somewhat unusually, even still for an unmarried woman in Italy, does not live with her parents, but on her own. She felt that Italian identity was somewhat threatened, particularly by American cultural imports. Like all the students I knew her political leanings were to the left.

**Gloria:** She is in her early twenties and studies Italian literature at the University of

Milan and commutes from her home where she lives with her family in Bergamo where she was born. There is a distinct Bergomascian identity that is seen as rival to that of Milanese, but this did not play an obvious role in her sense of identity. She has traveled through Europe, which she says made her realize how Italian she is. She was a friend of Italo's and was otherwise peripheral to the core of the social network I lived within.

**Italo:** He lives in Varese a city close to the Swiss border. He is in his early twenties and is a friend of Gloria's and also studies history at the university of Milan. His family originates in the south of Italy, having come north to find work as so many did after the Second World War. He says that although he has no problems living in the north, he does feel like a southerner. Unlike others I interviewed he emphasised the role that family played to his sense of Italian identity.

**Chiara:** She lives in a village about an hour from Milan. She is an artisan and an art curator. A friend of Rosa's who shares her interests in alternative medicine. She follows the religious practices of Brazilian Candomble. Her politics are centre of left. She was very cynical about the stereotypes that she said most Italians had of themselves. For instance she said that it wasn't true that Italians were easy-going with each other or tolerant of foreigners. She gave examples of inter-village rivalries and of Italian racism to illustrate her thoughts on these matters.

**Marina:** She is a friend of Chiara's and lives in another village outside of Milan. She has lived in Lombardy all her life and teaches primary school part-time. She is also a professional astrologer. She felt that Italian 'vitality' and 'creativity' was being squelched by what she saw as growing consumerism and a shift towards materialism. She also emphasised differences between north and south Italy (in astrological terms even). She saw these differences as a source of tension for Italian society, but did not support the

separatist platform of the *Lega Nord*. Rahter, she declared that north and south could learn from each other and could live together. As well she stated (again in an astrological context) that north and south lived together in a symbiotic relationship, of producer/consumer thus reproducing the stereotypes employed in *Lega* rhetoric, but turning them on their head as something potentially positive.



## **Appendix II The Italian Political System and Parties**

As of July 1997 the population was estimated at 56,830,508 with a negative growth rate of -0.08% (1997), with an average life expectancy of 78.25. At 294,020 sq. km Italy is less than one fifth the size of the province of Quebec. Italy's geography consists primarily of a mountain ridged peninsula with some coastal lowlands and plains, extending into the Mediterranean Sea from the base of the Alps in southern Europe, and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. It's territory shares borders with Austria, France, Slovenia and Switzerland as well as the Vatican City found in the midst of Rome and the tiny city-state of San Marino located on the Adriatic Coast between Ravenna and Ancona. The Italian climate is primarily of the Mediterranean type, but is categorized as Alpine in the extreme north. Natural resources especially fossil fuels are few, meaning that Italian industry is heavily dependent on imported raw materials and energy sources (.

### **Judicial/Political System**

The Italian legal system is based on civil law with an influence from ecclesiastical law due to the long standing influence of the Roman Catholic Church on Italian society. Suffrage is universal at the age of 18 (except for senate elections age 25). The government is divided into three branches: the executive branch, the legislative branch and the judicial branch. The executive branch is formed by the Chief of State (President), the Head of Government (the Prime Minister, a.k.a. the president of the Council of Ministers), and the Cabinet (Council of Ministers) who are nominated by the prime minister and approved by the president. At the time of my fieldwork in the summer of 1997, the office of president was held by Oscar Luigi Scafaro who took seat on May 28, 1992. The office of the prime minister was held by Romano Prodi who took office on May 18, 1996. The legislative branch is a bicameral Parliament and is composed of the Senato della Repubblica (Senate) and the Camera dei Deputati (Chamber of Deputies). the Senato della

Repubblica consists of 326 seats. 315 of these seats are popularly elected of which 232 are directly elected and 83 are reserved for regional proportional representation. The remaining 11 seats are held by senators who are appointed for life while the other members may serve five years. The Camera dei Deputati has 630 seats of which 475 are directly elected and 155 are reserved for regional proportional representation. As with the Senate members serve for five years. The judicial branch of government is the Corte Costituzionale (Constitutional Court) which is composed of 15 judges of which one third are appointed by the president, one third are elected by the parliament and one third are elected by the ordinary and administrative supreme courts.

### **The Italian Regions**

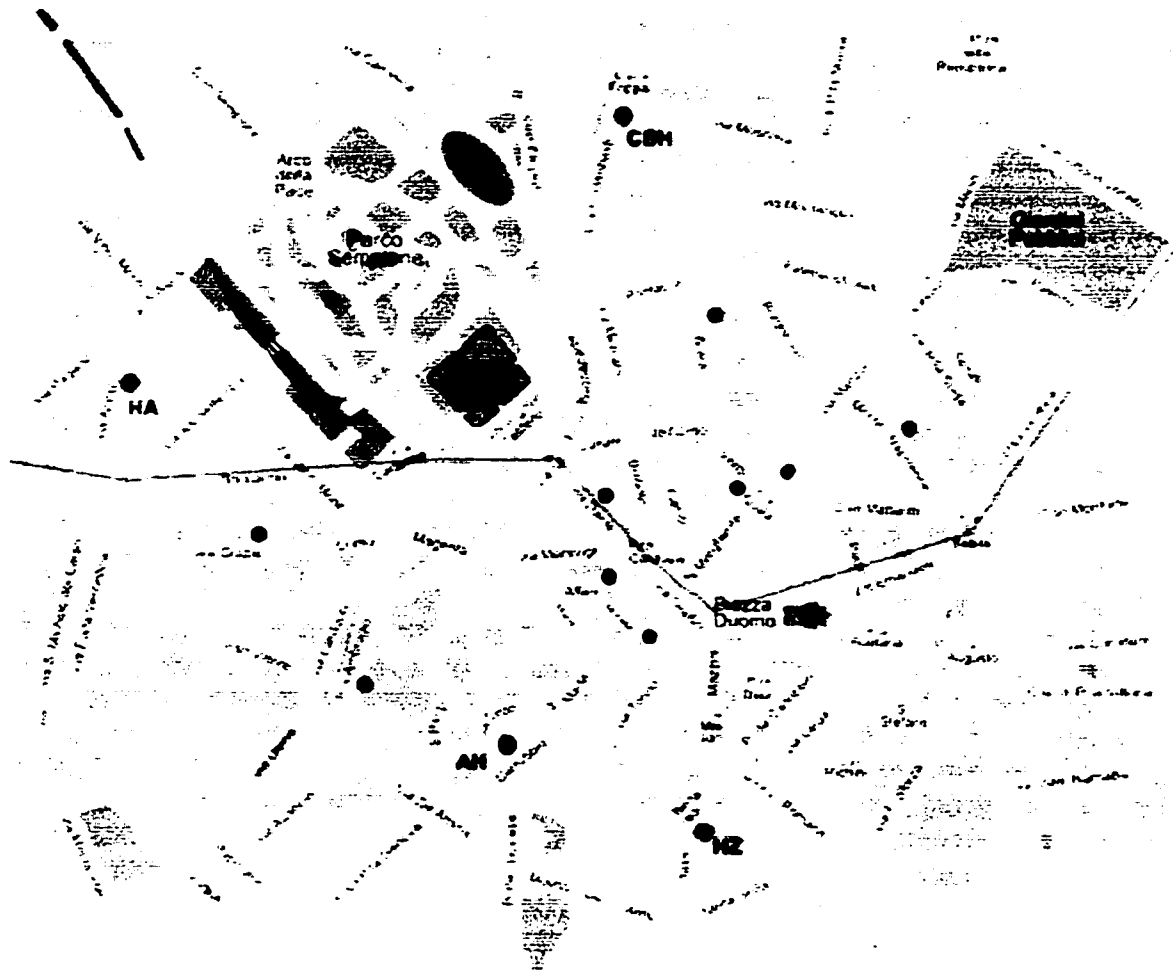
The Italian territory is divided into twenty regions each with its own regional level of government. Of the twenty regions five are designated as 'special regions' which are granted a greater degree of autonomy than the standard regions. The 15 regular regions are Piedmont (*Piemonte*), Lombardy (*Lombardia*) Veneto, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany (*Toscana*), Umbria, Marche, Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata and Calabria. The five special regions are Sicily, Sardinia (*Sardegna*), Valle d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

### **Political Parties**

Party politics are dominated by two large party coalitions one of the political left, *Ulivo* (Olive Tree) and one of the right, *Polo* (Freedom Pole). *Ulivo* consists of the PDS the *Partito democratica della sinistra* (Democratic Party of the Left) which was formerly the PCI, *Partito comunista italiano* (Italian Communist Party), *Verdi* (the Green Party), the R, Italian Renewal, and the PPI, *Partito popolare italiano* (Italian Popular Party). the Freedom Pole consists of the FI, *Forza Italia*, the AN *Aleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance), the CCD *Centro cristiano democratico* (democratic Christian Centre and the

CDU *Cristiano democratico unione* (Christian Democratic Union. The third significant Italian political block is the *Lega Nord* (northern League).

**Appendix III Maps**



**Map I Downtown Milan**





Map 3 Pre-unification Italy, 1559-1796 (Duggan 1997).



Map 2 Italian Unification (Duggan 1997).



- (A) Albanian-speaking communities
- (C) Catalan-speaking communities
- (G) Greek-speaking communities
- (S) Serbo-Croat-speaking communities

**EXAMPLES OF DIALECT VARIATIONS**

	<i>'Thursday'</i>	<i>'Boy'/'Child'</i>		<i>'Thursday'</i>	<i>'Boy'/'Child'</i>
ITALIAN	Giovedì	Ragazzo	TUSCANY	Zovedi	Bimbo
PIEDMONT	Giòves	Cit Bambino	LAZIO	Giovedì	Regazzino
LIGURIA	Zogia	Matòtu	ABRUZZI	Giuveddi	Quatràro
LOMBARDY	Giuedi	Bagar	CAMPANIA	Iueri	Guaglione
VENETO	Zioba	Putèto	CALABRIA	Iovi	Pedi l... Quatrar
FRIULI	Iorbe	Frut	SICILY	Ioviri	Carusu, Picciottu
EMILIA	Zobia	Puten	SARDINIA	Iovia	Pizzinnu

Map 5 Linguistic Variation (Duggan 1997)