

## **Negotiating Italian Identities**

In recent years, a number of critical theories—ranging from psychoanalysis and feminism to Marxism, structuralism, deconstruction, rhizomatics, gender, post-colonial studies and beyond—have converged in questioning the traditional and orthodox view of identity as a fully centered and autonomous source of meaning and agency. While many important differences exist among the theories mentioned above, they nevertheless all point towards an understanding of identity as a relational process created in a dynamic exchange within the world and the collectivity within it, and carried by and through symbolic activities. Yet, it is perhaps the relatively recent theory and practice of Cultural Studies that has placed the issue of identity at the core of its inquiry, conceptualizing it as a continuous set of ever-evolving subject-positions negotiated and articulated within the wider contexts and sites of acculturation that are available to us at any given stage of our personal and public histories.

The dramatic economic, social, and political transformations that have characterized the Italian peninsula from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards make it a privileged site for an examination of processes of identity-formation. From the years of the post-war reconstruction to the contemporary period, Italy has evolved from a mostly rural society to an industrial and a post-industrial one. With the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s, phenomena of urbanization, rural exodus, and mass consumption have modified the collective models of integration upon which traditional Italian society rested. Since 1968 further transformations have occurred. Not only have the protests of workers, students, youths, women, and gays additionally undermined older forms of integration, but Italy's joining the ranks of post-industrial economies has led to a sharp increase in particularistic and secularized forms of identity-formations.

Recent political developments have continued this trend. In the last two decades the integrative authority of traditional parties has lost legitimacy and the practices of political corruption, patronage, and opportunism of "Tangentopoli" disclosed by the investigation of the judges of "Mani pulite" has led to the demise of the "so-called" First Republic in 1992 and the subsequent rise of regionalist groups, such as the Northern Leagues; i.e., Liga Veneta, Lega Lombarda, etc. The electoral successes of the latter, which have gone as far as calling for the creation of an independent state, or "Padania," reveal the emergence of new sub-national identities. At the same time, they clearly testify to a further weakening of the already highly problematic concept of a unified national body wished for by Risorgimento and pursued by governments from the Liberal State to Fascism and beyond. To the complexity of this panorama, one

must also add the new forms of identities that are taking shape as the country strengthens its European economic and institutional integration, partakes to the accelerated effects of globalization, and experiences an unprecedented flow of immigrants from Eastern Europe, North Africa, India, South America, and China. These current developments are enabling further intersections and boundary crossings and will tend to reshape Italian society and culture into a myriad of identities ranging from sub- and supra-national to diasporic and hybrid forms.

In light of the important structural changes that are reconfiguring Italy, *Annali d'Italianistica* devotes its twenty-fourth issue to exploring the dynamic negotiations and formalizations of Italian identities from the post-war era to the present. Without claiming to provide an exhaustive, overarching panorama, *Negotiating Italian Identities* collects the work of scholars whose different methodological perspectives and fields of specialty explore the articulation of local, national, and supranational identities in relation to the many locations and sites of cultural production: high and low print culture, media and visual culture, patterns of consumption of the everyday life, ritualized forms of behavior and lifestyles, sites of memory and forgetting, and so on. The reach and scope of the essays, however, extend well beyond case studies to investigate the often competing and conflicting claims of national and supranational communities and organization in relation to diasporic, hybrid, regional, gendered, class, and generational identities.

The essay that opens this issue, "The European-ness of Italy: Categories and Norms," by Roberto M. Dainotto, pries open Italy's desire to be part of the supranational community of Europe by examining the rhetoric underpinning a variety of juridical, philosophical, historical, and narrative texts. Such a desire, whose origins Dainotto traces all the way back to the years of Unification, not only created the well-known *topos* of the "Southern Question" (i.e., the South as a region of historical backwardness and belated development to be remedied for it to reach the modernity of the North), but also the *ou-topos* of Europe as the imaginary solution to the problems and contradictions of the nation at several junctures of its past and more recent history. Dainotto concludes by reflecting on the peculiarity of Italy's cultural legacy; namely, a politics of identity based on a dream of sameness to be achieved by the erasure of difference, and therefore of identity itself.

The antinomies of Northern and Southern regional identities, with their corollaries of progress and backwardness, are also central to the essays by Clarissa Clò and Tullio Pagano. In her "Visions of Italy beyond the North/South Divide: Regional Documentaries and Global Identities," Clò discusses a set of documentary films about the area known as "Padania," that is, Emilia-Romagna and the Po Valley. She argues that these recent documentaries challenge the construction of Italian national identity based on mutually exclusive separations between North and South that are exemplified by the "Southern Question" as

well as by the separatist agenda of the Northern Leagues. Clò's subtle readings reveal the presence of a discourse that implicates the North in the ideological construction of the South and therefore invalidates the ideological assumptions at the core of the "Southern Question." Like Clò, Pagano also questions the mutually exclusive separations between the Italian North and South that have shaped national identity-politics from the time of Unification onwards in the essay "Liguria: una precaria identità conflittuale." While the collective imaginary represents Liguria as a land of picturesque coastal beauty and affluent cities, Pagano makes a case for the region's schizophrenic identity. From the categories of locale, memory, and network developed by P. W. Preston in *Political/Cultural Identity*, he recovers Liguria's repressed half: the lost cultural heritage of the Apennine where a frail economy developed from banditry, wet-nursing, and seasonal work before the mass exodus towards the Americas--an exodus that generated considerable profit for the coastal shipowners-- led to the abandonment of the mountainous countryside.

The topic of migration and the negotiation of more fluid models of identities that it facilitates are addressed by Teresa Fiore and John Gatt-Rutter. In her "Lunghi viaggi verso 'Lamerica' a casa: straniamento e identità nelle storie di migrazione italiana," Fiore discusses the current migratory flow to Italy from the lenses provided by the country's long tradition of emigration. In her close readings of literary and cinematic texts — namely, Leonardo Sciascia's "Il lungo viaggio," its cinematic adaptations by Alessandro Blasetti and Nello Correale, and the films *Lamerica* by Gianni Amelio, and *Tornando a casa* by Vincenzo Marra — she detects expressions of empathy towards the recent immigrants. Based upon a shared diasporic experience, these expressions might lead to a rethinking of an identity founded upon rigid boundaries between "us" and "them."

Gatt-Rutter, in his "*Bello the Bilingual Cockatoo: Writing Italian Lives in Australia*," charts the varied forms of identity in fourteen Italian Australian life-narratives: from an hyphenated Italian-Australian identity to the "return home," where differences between the hyphenated individual and the Italian are revealed. Gatt-Rutter's examination also makes clear that diasporic identities are perpetually mobile because they are subject to a dynamic evolution propelled by the specific contexts of mass migration. This reasoning partially explains why the forms of Italian-Australian identity that these writings express do not fit the evolutionary interpretative grids elaborated by scholars of Italian-American literature.

The essays by Valerio Ferme, Ellen Nerenberg, and Max Henninger investigate identities negotiated on the basis of gender, generation, and class. Ferme, in "Gay, Feminist and *Arbërische*: Marginal Italian Identities in the Fiction of Aldo Busi, Rossana Campo and Carmine Abate," focuses on the borderline identities symbolized by gay, feminist, Southern, and more generally cultural other writers Aldo Busi, Rossana Campo, and Carmine Abate. It is

Ferme's contention that Busi, Campo, and Abate, having confronted their otherness as Italians in foreign countries, can engage in identity-projects that, at both a macroscopic ("Italianità") and microscopic levels ("gay," "feminist," "Arbërische"), highlight the faulty foundations of normative and essentialist models.

From the intersecting narratives of broadcast and print journalism as well as prose narrative that mushroomed following the double murder committed by Erika De Nardo and Mauro ("Omar") Favaro on February 2001, Ellen Nerenberg, in "Sono stati loro': Imbrications of National, Regional, and Generational Identities in the 2001 Erika and Omar Murder Trial," discusses the unstable identity of the modern subject that result from national, regional, and especially generational divides. In the horrifying violence of the De Nardo and Favaro's case, Nerenberg reads the failure of the post-1968 community of parents, educators, spiritual leaders, and politicians towards contemporary youth as well as a deep *méconnaissance* of generations on both sides of the divide.

Max Henninger, in "Post-Fordist Heterotopias: Regional, National, and Global Identities in Contemporary Italy," examines the impact that the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy following Italy's joining of European and global markets has had on a class-identity that was historically tied to the integrative authority of traditional parties. Henninger discusses at length the new post-Fordist selves as "multitude" theorized by Aldo Bonomi, Paolo Virno and Antonio Negri; that is, the "multitude" conceived as the residue, as that which is left after the wane of concepts of class and of a people. Henninger concludes by examining the viability of the concept of the "multitude" in a case study of a city that exemplifies post-Fordism: Turin.

While, by and large, the essays described thus far investigate processes of identity negotiations with regard to large socio-political developments, the contributions that follow illustrate how identity-negotiations can occur in relation to many locations and sites of cultural production, including ritualized forms of behavior and lifestyles as well as media and popular culture.

In her "Studi culturali e *Fashion Theory* nell'Italia dell'ultimo decennio, tra attivismo intellettuale e pratiche sociali," Patrizia Calefato makes a strong case for the importance of fashion in the formalization and articulation of identity. As a system where the roles, social hierarchies, and imaginary constructions of the clothed body are endlessly created and re-created, fashion is a privileged text to read the current experimentation with identities, which ranges from the transnationalism of *Cosplay* to the socio-cultural and political tensions embedded in the *Prêt-à-revolter* and the *Yomango*.

Alessandro Carrera, in "Di *mondegreens* e altri malintesi: poetica del fraintendimento e fonetica dell'identità," illustrates how complex phenomena of identity can take place in the minimal phonetic and semantic units of the malapropisms of the genre of *mondegreens* of Italian folk and popular music. After having discussed a vast sample of malapropisms, Carrera focuses on the

songs of Giancarlo Angelo Cinelli. Emblematic of a negotiation of the regional identity of the Val Trompia, in Northeastern Italy, Cinelli's songs use *mondegreen* as a weapon whereby the substitution of English with dialect, or the use of dialect instead of English, are not simply nostalgic gestures to recapture a past tradition, but effective means to articulate the paradoxes and contradictions of the experience of modernity seen from a local perspective.

Veronica Pravadelli, in "Visconti's *Rocco and his Brothers*: Identity, Melodrama and the National-Popular," casts her discussion of Luchino Visconti's film in terms of the popular genre of the melodrama. Drawing upon Gramsci's definition of melodrama as the sole national-popular form of Italian culture as well as building upon the insights developed by theorists of the Hollywood family melodramas of the 1950s, Pravadelli argues that *Rocco and his Brothers* depicts an unresolved conflict between social/familial/gender demands and individual desires. In the confrontation that pits the patriarchal (Southern) rural family against the nuclear bourgeois (Northern) family, which will result in breaking the unity of the Parondi family, Pravadelli detects the tension between residual and emerging modern models of identity that became available in the post-war era, when the country's evolution from a mostly rural to an industrial society forced individuals through a difficult process of re-negotiating previous models of integration.

While the essays by Tota, Carrera, and Pravadelli make a case for the importance of fashion, music, and popular art forms in the articulation of identities, it is well-known that the "high" print culture produced by the *Repubblica delle lettere* has been just as instrumental in cultivating specific integrative models. The idea of "Italy" and of "Italians" that circulated from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance among members of the intellectual elite, whose names range from Brunetto Latini and Dante to Boccaccio, Petrarch and Machiavelli, was revisited during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by Vittorio Alfieri, Ugo Foscolo, Alessandro Manzoni, and Giacomo Leopardi, among others, in order to promote an Italian identity based upon an imaginarily shared linguistic and cultural heritage. With the achievement of territorial unity in 1860, writers joined the nation-building efforts of politicians to disseminate in their works of poetry and narrative strong models of national identity to create a unity in a country that remained deeply fragmented across lines of class, race, and language. *Mutatis mutandis*, these integrative efforts can be traced uninterruptedly from the time of Unification to Fascism, the Resistance, the First Republic, and beyond. However, in the essay by Thomas Peterson and Massimo Lollini, "high" print culture does not emerge as an instrument at the sole service of strong and often exclusionary models of national integration, but discloses unsuspected possibilities for more flexible articulations of identity.

Peterson, in his "Italian National Character as Seen Through the Figure of the Poet-Scribe," revisits the debate over cultural nationalism by examining key artists and critics from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present before closing on works by

Sergio Solmi, Leonardo Sinisgalli, Mario Luzi, Vittorio Sereni, Giovanni Raboni, Nelo Risi, and Cesare Viviani. Steeped in an intercultural space, the institutions of poetry and criticism that these authors exemplify formalize national identity as a heterogeneous mosaic. In a symbolic labor that traverses and cuts across traditional divides, critics and poets undo the rigidity of dual identity-systems based upon the opposition of “sameness” versus “otherness.” Lollini, in his “Trieste e l’*antico mare perduto* di Umberto Saba,” confirms Peterson’s intuition and discusses the heterogeneous identity of a canonical author of Italian literature: Umberto Saba. In the poetry of Saba’s *Canzoniere*, and particularly in the verses of the section *Mediterranee*, Saba, like many writers of the Jewish Mitteleuropa, proposes an epistemology of space open to cultural exchange and transmission, encounter and dialogue. Thus, Saba is of extreme relevance today in that, as Lollini illustrates, he allows readers to inhabit a space that can be intersubjectively shared and, by so doing, provides an answer to the dangerous attempts to create exclusionary models of ethno-cultural and religious identity that have become part of our daily 21<sup>st</sup>-century lives.

Peterson’s and Lollini’s revisiting of “high,” canonical print culture is complemented by the contributions of Joseph Francese and Christopher Larkosh-Lenotti, who reflect on the sharpened self-awareness of our identity as scholars and critics of the humanities that is facilitated by contemporary cultural theory. In “Renegotiating the Role of the Intellectual in the Age of Globalization,” Francese argues that the emergence of Cultural Studies has contributed a great deal to a redefinition of our place in the world of the academy. He also notes that, at a time of resurgence of reactionary forms of identity-politics, our self-definition must recover the social incisiveness of an “old” historicism in order to enhance the socio-political relevance and oppositional sphere of our subject-positions. Along similar lines of inquiry, Larkosh-Lenotti, in his “On Gramsci, ‘Epistemic Interference’ and the Possibilities of *Sud-Alternity*,” discusses the circulation of Gramsci’s writings, especially the concept of “subaltern” that is often found in academic theorizations by Subaltern Studies groups. Yet, as is the case of Francese, Larkosh-Lenotti contends that the integration of Italian political and cultural history within a global context that was provided by Gramsci’s work must be extended by scholars to the spaces that encompass racial, ethnic, geographic, and linguistic factors, as well as questions of gender and sexuality. In a second phase of the paper, Larkosh-Lenotti examines processes of identity-negotiation in Italy and the Global South before concluding with a personal account of his own life-narrative as a diasporic, sexually migrant, working-class/‘new collar’ subject of the humanities.

While all the essays presented up to this point, notwithstanding their diverse methodologies and fields of inquiry, investigate processes of identity-formation in relation to concrete, embodied, and highly visible locations and

sites of cultural production, the last two contributions, by Anna Lisa Tota and Barbara Zaczek respectively, examine the negotiation of Italian national identity from the perspective of forgetting and oblivion, that is, from the void of symbolic memory.

Drawing upon the pioneering work of Maurice Halbwachs, Robin Wagner-Pacifici, Barry Schwartz, and John Gillis among others, in her “Se una nazione cessa di ricordare: lo spazio del passato nelle identità nazionali,” Tota examines a forgotten and repressed event of our national history; namely, the terrorist attack on the Naples-Milan 904 train that occurred on December 23, 1984. While Tota acknowledges that the investigative reconstruction of the attack remains most complex and subject to much debate, she also contends that a nation that avoids remembering its past, and therefore naming both the victims and the victimizers, can only lead to incomplete and mutilated forms of identity.

Zaczek, in her “The Past is not Dead. It’s a Bestseller. Confronting the Trauma of the Civil War in Giampaolo Pansa’s *I nostri giorni proibiti*,” focuses on Giampaolo Pansa’s bestseller *I nostri giorni proibiti*, a novel about the Italian civil war of 1943-45 that pitted fascists against anti-fascists. Zaczek’s illustrates how Pansa’s novel brings to light the forgotten memories of cruelty and perversion perpetrated by Italians on Italians that were repressed in the post-war era, when the nation sought to construct its identity on the basis of a solid democratic heritage. Applying to Pansa’s novel the categories developed by trauma theory, Zaczek charts the narrative’s insertion of the private story of the individuals into the common space of a collective memory that must recover conflict and division from oblivion, as these are essential, if painful, elements of the country’s political identity.

In conclusion, the contributions of this issue of *Annali d’Italianistica* probe the articulations and formalizations of identity propelled by such major social and political developments as the Italian diaspora, modern industrialization, the cultural revolution of 1968, the advent of post-Fordist era, the rise of sub- and supranational communities, and the recent phenomenon of large-scale migration to Italy. A number of contributions also investigate identities in relation to many sites of cultural production and discuss symbolic practices ranging from canonical literature to fashion, popular music, film, documentaries, journalism, and more. More significantly still, all these essays address the conflicting claims of integrative models while accounting for the enabling possibilities that identity-negotiations based upon inter-subjective exchange and dialogue can have in our political, ethical, and affective mobilization as individuals of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.