

CHAPTER I

ITALICITY: GLOBAL AND LOCAL

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“ITALICITY”

The first question is: why speak of "Italic peoples" rather than in the more usual and traditional term "Italians"; what distinguishes the concept of "Italic peoples" from that of "Italians"?

By way of introduction a concise answer is provided here, but it will be developed, expanded and analyzed below.

First and foremost it must be made clear that this is not a “literary” reply, something originating from discoveries made "in books", but rather an existential one, originating from long experience in different institutional roles of throughout the world, in meetings and contact with communities, institutions, and people, in relationships and shared (planning) experiences with the preeminent "Italic" business communities everywhere (but especially here in the Americas).

In short, by "Italic peoples", and so by "Italicity", what is meant is a belonging in the widest "cultural" sense: not as ethnic or linguistic belonging as with those of Italian origin or who speak the Italian language or as the legal or institutional belonging of Italian citizens.

In this sense, the concept is similar to that described by George McLean, when he speaks of the "Re-emergence of Cultural Awareness" and stresses the centrality of the conscience and of cultural values in building identities.

IT is a transnational community found, to varying extents, on all continents, and not only here in the Americas and characterized by shared values and interests. Historically, its roots lie in Italian emigration throughout the world, but it has since undergone many changes and now extends well beyond those roots.

It is a community many tens of millions of people. It is estimated that there are at least 60 million people of Italian origin throughout the world; if this estimate is extended to include "Italophiles", it may rise to 200 million. It comprises many different human or social groups:

- Emigrant Italians and their second, or third generation descendants, many of whom no longer speak the Italian language and have not retained Italian citizenship.
- The family members of these emigrants, born in the “new” countries of residence, and who, though differing in origin and language, at least share a good measure of values and interests.

- The most problematic part of this concept of "Italicity" -- all those who, setting aside ethnic or linguistic belonging and citizenship, in some way "feel" Italic, precisely because they like and share the group's values and interests, which they have come to learn through their encounters with people, things (*Made in Italy*) and "tokens" of the "Italic world": information, art, the cinema, and all the technological instruments that feed our "collective image bank". In this connection, it should be pointed out that the mobility of people, things and tokens increasingly characterizes the globalization process, for which reason opportunities for these "encounters" everywhere intensify and multiply.

Truly to understand who the Italic peoples are, the focus must be on the concept of diaspora, rather than of migration. The diaspora is a transnational and for many centuries has been crossing and re-crossing the world, nourishing its interconnections and networks.

It is not the only diaspora in the global world, but it has interesting and peculiarly distinctive identities and for this reason may make an original and significant contribution to building a more humane and peaceful global world. This is the more so after the tragic and highly disturbing events of September 11th, which have thrown all Western certainty and security into crisis.

THE HISTORIC ROOTS OF "ITALICITY": ITALIANS IN THE WORLD OVER THE CENTURIES

The Italians are, in effect, the Genoans, the Venetians, the Florentines, the Milanese, the Lombards and so on, that is, all the numerous different regional and local "identities" into which Italian history is subdivided. Since the early years of the second millennium, they have traveled the world's highways and high seas. Beginning in the Middle Ages, colonies of Italian merchants could be found in London or Constantinople, Antwerp, Seville or Aleppo.

In 1271 the Venetian Marco Polo, at the age of 17, undertook his famous journey to the Far East with his father Niccolò and his uncle Matteo. His travels throughout Asia were to last 24 years, including a long stay at the Imperial Mongol Court. Marco Polo returned to Venice only in 1295. In 1283, there were 14 Italian banks in London's *Lombard Street*; in Paris, the *Rue des Lombards* had 20 Italian banks by 1292.

But not only merchants and bankers moved throughout the known "pre-Colombian" world. There were also artists, university teachers, architects, artisans, churchmen, and political exiles. A popular 15th-century proverb bears witness to the great mobility of the inhabitants of Florence: "Sparrows and Florentines may be found throughout the world". When Vasco de Gama reached India, after a long, adventurous circumnavigation of Africa, he found that some Venetian merchants were already there. A citizen of Chioggia – Nicolò de' Conti – lived and traveled in India and Indonesia between 1415 and 1459.

With the "discovery of America" and the birth of the new world, the horizons of the Italian diaspora were extended. Navigators and merchants, monks and churchmen, artists and intellectuals began to travel not only in Europe, Asia and Africa, but also in the Americas. Under Spanish rule, though emigration to the Americas was prohibited to foreigners, between 1535 and 1538 (thanks to exceptions granted to Italian states that were subjects of Spain or its allies) there were already 6 people originating from the Kingdom of Naples, 2 from the State of Milan, 3 from the Kingdom of Sicily, 1 from Lucca, 1 Florentine, 14 Genoese, 1 from Turin, 1 from Piedmont and 1 from Cremona in the new world.

Clearly then long before the Unification of Italy and the great mass migrations of the late 19th century, the numbers of Italians were steadily increasing in both American hemispheres.

As may be seen from studies carried out in recent years in the United States, in an area like Philadelphia, an initial community of Italian origin formed and consolidated in the period between the eve of American independence and the 1870s. During that period, leadership made up of tradesmen, businessmen and entrepreneurs emerged as the first "ethnic" intermediaries between the Italian community and the United States society. At the same time, significant community institutions were created, such as the first parish for Catholics of Italian origin (1852). The first Italo-American Provident Society, the Italian Association of Union and Brotherhood, was formed in 1857, by Italians who first and foremost were Ligurians.

Italian emigration to America, it should be recalled, was not only an economic emigration. As the historian Ruggiero Romano has written, "there were more than a few Carbonari, and in general Italian patriots who, after the failure of the various revolts, uprisings and revolutions of 1821, 1831, 1840 found refuge in America". Political exiles, too, were part of the panorama of Italian "mobility" before Unification, anticipating a significant dimension of the mobility of people in our global world.

In the year of the Italian Unification – 1861 – many Italians, though they considered themselves Piedmontese, Lombards, Venetians, Tuscans, Sicilians and so on, had already settled throughout the world.

According to data from the General Census of 1861, 77,000 were living in France, 14,000 in Germany, 14,000 in Switzerland, 12,000 in Alexandria, 6,000 in Tunisia, and above all – for the purposes of this study – 500,000 in the United States, and the same number in the rest of the Americas.

The key point, then, of this short and partial historical breakdown is that the Italian diaspora in the world has old roots. In some ways it belongs to the essential characteristics of Italian identity even before the country achieved national unity, before the first unified state and citizenship were born, before the Italian language truly became a spoken language used by the great majority of the inhabitants on the peninsula. All this occurred only gradually over a long process destined to be completed only with the birth of television after the Second World War.

Running the risk of the "anachronism" inherent in such opinions and language, in essence it may be said that over the centuries the Italian diaspora has been a precursor to the "glocal" community.

It is a diaspora of "localisms" (Venetians, Genoese, Florentines, Milanese and so on) typical of the many urban and regional identities that are interwoven into the country. At the same time it is a "global" and cosmopolitan diaspora, traveling the world in the name of values. For example, the Roman Catholic faith, the thirst for knowledge, the spirit of adventure. It also sought interests: money which spurs merchants and bankers to travel and profit which derives from production and business. All were by characterized a "universal" vocation.

Behind the "imagined community" of Italic peoples, there are centuries of trans-territorial mobility of the peninsula's inhabitants, their cities, and their various constituent political bodies. This preceded transnational mobility, that is, even before the modern "nation" was born.

This mobility was not only migration; there were many different reasons behind it. It took place in different ways, involving not only leaving, but also returning. It is significant, in this sense, that of the 14 million Italians who left the country between 1876 and 1914, there was a high repatriation rate. More than half of them returned to Italy; many were to emigrate more than once during their working lives.

In connection with ‘returning’, it should be noted that recently , there has been a massive return to Italy by Argentineans of Italian origin: another significant and current example of mobility.

To conclude this point, the ‘Italic peoples’ are the descendents of this centuries -long process of mobility and of diaspora. They did not have behind them – unlike other great transnational diasporas – the long history of a strong and unified nation state, an exclusive and ‘protected’ identity politically and militarily. Rather, their roots lie in a history divided into different smaller identities, which only recently have come together into a joint identity. For this reason, it maintains an unusual and significant ‘acceptance of differences’.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE DIASPORA: THE ITALIC PEOPLES AND THEIR VALUES

Over the last few decades, the world has gone from the age of internationalization to that of globalization. The first age, which began in the late 19th century, was one of great mass migrations originating primarily from Europe. It was stimulated by need and, at the same time, attracted by the "American dream".

During this period, the United States absorbed and assimilated peoples. It gave rise to an original "nation of nations", and created the extraordinary *melting pot* so widely known today.

In the second period – today’s globalization -- the glocal, founded on the global interlinking made possible by the technological revolution, has thrown the *melting pot* into crisis. This has been transformed it into a new, more complex, more divided reality, in which belonging, loyalties and identities tend increasingly to be multiple.

Today’s globalized world is increasingly one of transnational diasporas: from the ‘historic’ Jewish, Spanish and Anglo-Saxon diasporas to the Chinese, Indian, Arab and, last but not least, Italic diaspora.

As has been said, it is, inevitably, a world of multiple belonging, where ‘transidiom’ is used. This linguistic phenomenon is the post-modern offspring of people’s mobility and the triumph of electronic communications. ‘Diasporic public spaces’ are formed and cultivated, made up of a growing set of transnational relationships. These are physical, but also virtual via the web which today is available at least potentially to everyone.

One of the consequences of this phenomenon is the transformation of the traditional concept of ‘identity’. It should be noted that the United States at the center and ‘heart’ of the world increasingly is seen not in the traditional image of the *melting pot*, but rather - in the words of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, an Indian who lives and works in the United States – as ‘a node of a post-national network of diasporas. . . . They are no longer a closed space where the magic of the *melting pot* may operate, but one of the many diasporic points of exchange, in which people come to seek their fortune, but without any longer resigning themselves to leaving their country of origin behind.’

In our glocal world, identity is increasingly less a ‘given’; increasingly it is more a ‘process,’ built up through social practices that take place in increasingly numerous and extensive ‘spaces.’ These extend from territorial and local spaces where the communities of the different diasporas live together and interweave, to the virtual-global spaces of the web. In these the

imagination is nourished by encountering people, things, and tokens. It plays a new and decisive role, not comparable with any experiences of the past.

In this way, throughout the world human groups are formed that we could define as “communities of feeling”. These begin to imagine and feel things in common. For the first time they have the opportunity to know and choose existential possibilities and life models that are different and are practiced by “others” and “elsewhere”. In other words, communities whose identity is not so much, and not only, ethnic, linguistic or political-institutional, based on citizenship, but rather are culture- and value- based.

In this context, identities appear to be increasingly “fluctuating.” They are constructed, transformed, interwoven, and subjected to constant and completely new challenges and tensions. Loyalties and belonging differ and multiply. In some cases they enter into conflict; in others they give rise to new and original cultural and value-based “cross-breeds”.

In the light of these considerations and in this frame of reference, it may be possible better to understand “Italicity” and how Italicity can differ from, and go beyond, “being Italian”. Undoubtedly it has strong historical roots in terms of identity, linked to centuries of Italians’ trans-territorial and trans-national mobility. But it is not limited to these roots, although it continues to nourish itself through them.

In the age of globalization and post-national and trans-national diasporas, the Italic peoples have become, in substantive terms, a diaspora interlinked internally by a “common feeling” more than by a common ethnic-linguistic and national belonging. What is this “common feeling”; what are the essential values – and the shared values of Italicity that are being described, the “essence of Italian culture”?

On the basis of experience and reflection, the author can try to outline a general picture, an initial, partial and provisional “repertory” of shared values and connected interests.

These are values that to some degree have a particular global configuration. They originate from long experience in many particular “places” (small villages, towns, the regions of the “Boot”). But over time people have been forced by the need to emigrate in search of work or have chosen for exploration, business, or religious vocation to travel and encounter the “globe”.

In brief, these great values are:

- Multiple belonging and the acceptance of differences. The values are linked to the history of multiple local identity traditions, and at the same time to the short, late and “weak” experience of a nation state. They long coexisted and in some respects still coexist with other pre-existing identities. Today increasingly they coexist also with the new-born European identity.
- A conception of belonging that is essentially cultural and existential, rather than ethnic-linguistic or legal-institutional. Thus, at least potentially, they are more “malleable” and open to dialogue with those who have a “different” belonging, as well as to contributions from other identities. It may not be by chance that after the Second World War Italian public opinion was one of the most favorable in Europe towards European integration which entailed an attenuation and dislocation of national sovereignty at a new European Community level.
- The central role of the family and of family relationships in the fabric of social relations. This pre-eminent value runs transversely through state and national belonging. It contributes

to “attenuating” and to “softening” the traditional harshness of power and force incarnating in the modern, Hobbesian “Leviathan-state”. Even when Italy took the path of the ethical, totalitarian, militarized state, fascism had to come to terms with this historical, anthropological background, and it is clear, in the end, who were the winners and losers.

- Christian, and more precisely Roman Catholic values, that have contributed and still contribute to forming in many respects the identity of Italians and of Italic peoples. Here values of the person and family are pre-eminent over those of state and nation; values of universalism and cosmopolitanism, linked to feelings of humanity; values of a “non-economistic” conception of economy which cannot be separated from an ethical view of life.
- The aesthetic sense and the values of good taste and beauty. These have played a large part in Italian history, and are embodied not only in the extraordinary heritage of art and culture that distinguishes the country, but also in lifestyles. These are universally known today thanks to the triumph of *Made in Italy* and more recently have been discovered and loved by millions of people throughout the world.
- The values of enjoyable and creative work, whose roots run deep in Italian history, from the centuries-long artisan traditions often bordering on art, to the more recent experience of design and Italian style built into ones – including technological products – of the Italic genius.

It should be made clear that this repertory of values does not take the form of a claim to a superiority or exceptionality of the “Italic peoples” compared to other peoples and diaspora in the world. That would be some sort of “masked chauvinism”. Two considerations bear witness to this warning and to this sense of the limits Italians have and must preserve.

First, it is known full well that each of these values has “another face” in the form of potential negative values, oft-experienced in history. Pluralism and tolerance always risk becoming relativism and indifference; love for the family can turn into “amoral familism” with little respect for institutions and public ethics; Roman Catholic values *became* the Inquisition, and more recently *have been* tempted towards closure and fundamentalism; creativity in life and work risks becoming disorder and lack of organizational purpose. Clearly, all of these are traditional and well-known negative Italian “stereotypes” that the first generations of emigrants had to pay for.

Second, Italian history contains not only peaceful religious, intellectual or mercantile experiences of traveling around the world, but also colonial conquests, fascism, and forms of organized violent crime exported to other countries.

But what is to be stressed is that today’s Italicity – as a “community of feeling” arises from a selection and a synthesis of positive values. It comes also from what is now a consolidated defeat of totalitarian and imperial experiences. Finally it comes from the more recent, but equally consolidated fading of the “stereotypes” that have long given a negative image to Italian emigrants throughout the world.

What is open to “reconciliation” is the Italy of art, science and culture; of religiousness of transnational humanitarian volunteer work, both religious and secular; of cultured, welcoming tourism; of beautiful, functional *Made in Italy* products; of small-scale yet dynamic and courageous entrepreneurship; of the organized creativity of the famous “industrial districts”; and of a greatly admired and sometimes envied ability to “know how to live” and “live well”. In this sense, Italicity is a great resource to be used to tackle the challenges of the global world. This is clearly a theme that merits reflection.

“ITALICITY” AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE GLOBAL WORLD WHEN CERTAINTY IS IN CRISIS

The tragedy of September 11th 2001 for the first time struck the world’s greatest power “at home.” It placed the “variable” of unpredictable planetary and technological terrorism squarely on the world stage so that the global world now shows all of its ambivalence.

On one hand, there is the extraordinary potential for development offered by scientific and technological innovation, by the increased production of goods and services, by the opening of countries and markets. On the other hand, there is the increased inequality and level of conflict (among states, ethnic groups, social groups), the consequently increased disorder and insecurity, and the increasingly evident inadequacy of the global system’s capacity for governance.

It is increasingly clear that no “empire”, no great power – not even the greatest in human history – can alone guarantee order and security. Above all, no power can do this only or chiefly using the tools of military might, without an overall strategy for the intelligent use of all resources – human, cultural, technological, institutional, and others. Enemies who “network” (international terrorism first and foremost) with “other networks” must be countered using the same acentric and *bottom-up* rationale that characterizes the enemy networks.

The great post-national and trans-national diasporas – and, in particular, that of the Italic peoples – are among these resources. They criss-cross the planet and interconnect it; they have a *glocal* nature that enables them to “act locally and think globally”; they know what it is to live as the “different” people; they are thus potentially able to act as “intermediaries” among different cultures and peoples. The Italic peoples, in particular know and practice this multiplicity of belonging and loyalties.

For the United States seen now not as a *melting pot*, but as a “node of a post-national network of diasporas” awareness of the positive potential of the great diasporas which run through it is becoming an urgent necessity.

The diasporas, too, can have something of an ambivalent nature. Diasporas such as, for example, the Islamic cultural matrix, which is possibly the most “dissonant” with regard to Western society, may bring connections and resources, as well as conflicts, to the countries they move through. Multicultural societies, as is known, always oscillate between the “royal road” of integration and risks of conflict and separatism. In Italy, too, people have begun to discuss these concerns, since migratory processes towards the country have become notable.

The strategic question for countries that are “nodes of diasporas” is therefore: how to enhance the positive potential of their diasporas in order to face the challenges of the global world - - peace, development and social unity? In other words, how to “take the best” from each of the diasporas; how to “metabolize” their best universalist, cosmopolitan, non -fundamentalist aspects?

It can be said in this general framework that the diaspora of Italic peoples stands as an original resource, and is among the least ambivalent ones.

The values of this diaspora already outlined above are:

- a “compliant” identity with no hegemonic claims deriving from strong colonial and imperial traditions;

- “unresentful” as is often the case of peoples who have undergone, or are still undergoing, domination and oppression, and who therefore feel “humiliated”;
- “aesthetic,” sensitive to the universal value of beauty;
- “affective,” aware of the deep and non-rational dimensions of human life; of the value of feelings expressed in the experience of family life; of the value of “sympathy”, understood etymologically as an instinctive “feeling close”;
- “universalist,” based on the search for universal and shared values;
- “cosmopolitan,” which expresses itself in the desire to deal with the “other,” in an intellectual and aesthetic attitude that is open to different cultural experiences, and in a personal capability to succeed in other cultures and populations by listening, asking, looking, touching, intuiting and reflecting.

The Italic peoples may make a contribution to dealing with the challenges of the global world with identities and values of this type. Perhaps, from this standpoint, it is neither naive nor Utopian to think that “another world may be possible”.

We fully realize the dramatic nature of the challenges with which the United States is faced today. We know full well that, as the leader of the global world, most of the burdens and responsibilities for the future of this world lie on its shoulders.

But that is exactly why we are interested and willing -- as "Italic peoples" -- to open a dialogue on our possible role and on our possible contribution to a strategy that will be able to meet these challenges, aware that we can win only by working together.