

“Regionalismo e identità glocal nelle migrazioni italiane dal 1911 agli anni Trenta”

**Glocal identity and regionalism in Italian migration from 1911 to the 1930's**

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In my presentation I'll analyze the relationship between Italian migrants and the Italian state from the aftermath of Italian unification to the fascist era. This time span was particularly relevant to the development of multiple “ethnic” identities: identities tied to the village of origin which we now call local, national identity related to Italy, the identity of the new country. Local identities, in turn, went from village/campanile identity to territorial and regional identities. We'll see how local identities – which were often much stronger than the Italian identity not only during the nationalistic period, when a sort of italianità started to develop within ethnic communities, but also during Fascism – deep rooted in the italics culture survived and were capable to renovate themselves through time. I'll concentrate for a moment on the history of the construction of Italian Regions, or as we will see the invention of Italian Regions, to have a better understanding of Italian glocalism.

**Italy “il paese dei mille campanili”**

The late constitution of the Italian State, brought up to the Risorgimento a strong tradition of local autonomies as the geographer Lucio Gambi has reconstructed in a seminal work “Le regioni italiane come problema storico”, what characterizes Italy's development as a nation and differentiated it from other European countries is that Italian nation building happened without either the progressive loss of the single local cultures or the complete internal colonialism by one single region, Piedmont or Rome in our case, as well illustrated by the historian Giovanni Levi. In many cases Regions developed from a pattern established at the turn of the eighteenth century by the French administration in order to overcome the hundreds of municipalities who in some cases behaved as states by their own, up to the end of the eighteenth century. While some regions have historically been well characterized by a long administrative tradition dating back to pre-unification, states such as Piedmont and the Veneto, respectively heirs of the kingdom of Sardinia and the Republic of Venice, others, such as Lazio, were born recently from an aggregation of territories belonging to two different States, the Papal State and the Kingdom of Naples. Another case in point is the regione Marche which up till the French invasion did not even exist. This explains why here every small town had its own theatre and local newspapers. To give an idea of the diversity up till 1862 6 money systems were at work in the new nation, and 236 different currencies used. The administrative borders of the new created Regions not always coincided with social, economic and cultural identities.

The regionalistic organization in the Kingdom of Italy had only a statistical purpose, and no administrative relevance, it was adopted to counteract the stronger cities', provinces' and municipalities' identity, based on a long established tradition of cultural and economical homogeneity, in other words to overcome local identities, in order to build the new state. In order to govern such a diversified territory, one of the first Italian Prime Minister, Marco Minghetti proposed a law which would give partial autonomy to regions and provinces' role, but was not accepted.

Evidence of the differences came up also in 1910 attempt to give Regions a symbol *stemma*: some Regions used the old Latin name which often did not match with the bureaucratic territories, other mingled emblems of traditional medieval and Renaissance republics and principalities (Lombardy, Veneto, Liguria, Tuscany, Piedmont, Sardinia and most regions of the South) and inventions inspired by the cult of ancient Rome (Lazio, Umbria, Marche, Venezia Giulia).

During fascism the regionalistic approach was reconfirmed but regions had to demonstrate their support to the national unity. Emilio Bodrero, president of the National Commission of Popular Arts, in 1936 explained the regions' new role:

*“La regione deve dimostrare l’apporto che essa ha dato alla grandezza e all’unità del paese ... dobbiamo insomma distinguere il valore politico della regione dal suo valore spirituale e ammettere che il primo di essi deve scomparire per dar luogo a un valore veramente e unicamente storico ed estetico”.*

The regions have to show their contribution to the country's unity and majesty... we must distinguish between the regions political role and the the spiritual one and recognize that the former must vanish to live room for an exclusive historical and esthetical role (Cavazza, 111).

Diversity was tolerated only aesthetically (Cavazza).

In 1947 the republican constitution empowered the Regions that became political and administrative institutions with legislative power, but still there was a debate about territories entitled to become regions and conflicts around borders: Salento and Emilia Lunense (Lunezia) disappeared; Lucania was called Basilicata, Friuli and Venezia Giulia were unified, as Abruzzo and Molise which only in 1963 will gain autonomy.

### **Migrants' localism**

Local cultures and national culture were perceived in a different way according to class: in general while Italy's upper classes at home and in emigration embraced both local and national cultures, lower classes kept longer associated with the local dimension: the neighborhood, the village, the craft (Levi, 728). In Argentina where was a strong political *élite* made up of Risorgimento exiles, and a more homogeneous population made of Liguri and Piedmontese, the italianità spread more easily as is testified by a huge number of Italian associations, most of them dedicated to XX September, the day Rome was annexed to the kingdom of Italy in 1870. Speaking of associationism, in the United States in 1905 was founded the Order of Sons of Italy (OSIA), the largest umbrella organization that brought together thousands of Italian associations to break the traditional regional and local bonds and promote the integration of Italians in American society.

Historians have also shown how the great emigration helped to develop a national identity among Italian lower classes by easing their contacts with Italian institutions and pointed out how the confrontation with the other helped to develop an Italian identity: abroad they were perceived as Italians.

Nevertheless before WWI the majority of migrants showed very little their italianità. Edmondo De Amicis wrote some important pages on emigrants' feelings towards Italy. In *Sull'Oceano*, watching the ship sailing he noticed the hostility of the emigrants toward the country who forced them to leave:

*Vicino al castello di prua una voce rauca e solitaria gridò in tono di sarcasmo: Viva l'Italia! E alzando gli occhi vidi un vecchio lungo che mostrava il pugno alla patria: è il vecchio toscano.*

Around the foredeck, a hoarse voice cried alone in tons of sarcasm: "Long live Italy! I looked up and saw an old man showing his fist: it was the old Tuscan.

The conversation with the disappointed *garibaldino* illustrates how difficult the relationship between migrants and Italy might be:

*eppure, osservai quando sono in America, ricordano e amano la patria... Egli rispose: la terra, non la patria. Nemmeno lui rimpiangeva la patria... Essa era riuscita troppo al di sotto dell'ideale per cui si era battuto.*

Yet, I observed once in America they remember and love the homecountry ... He said: the land, not the country. Not even he regretted the homeland ... It was too far below the ideal for which he had fought.

Local division, perceived by Italian observers of the ethnic communities as an obstacle to national unity, were often denounced. Luigi Villari noticed in New York divisions according not only to regional but also to local identities:

*Alcuni quartieri sono abitati esclusivamente dagli oriundi di una data regione; in uno non troviamo che siciliani, in un altro i soli calabresi, in un terzo gli abruzzesi; vi sono poi certe strade dove non si trova che gente di un dato comune; in questa via è la colonia di Sciacca, in quello la colonia di San Giovanni in Fiore, in quell'altra la colonia di Cosenza.*

Some neighborhoods are inhabited exclusively by natives of a single region, in one we find just Sicilians, in another only calabresi, in a third one only people from Abruzzo, then there are some streets where people are all from the same municipality, in this street is the colony of Sciacca, in that the colony of San Giovanni in Fiore, there we have the colony of Cosenza.

Amy Bernardy, journalist and historian, the first expert on Italian communities in the world, developed the argument by noticing (1911):

*Che cosa abbiamo infatti nella Piccola Italia se non una serie di villaggi? La massa immigrante e tutta in questo momento accentrata intorno a tanti nuclei, polarizzati intorno a tanti leaders quanti sono in Italia i villaggi, i campanili, le chiesuole da cui si è mosso ciascun individuo emigrante e di cui ritrova al di qua dell'Atlantico l'eco ed il nome nella persona del compare o del paesano.*

What do we have in Little Italy if not a number of villages? The mass of immigrants is all at this time centered around many nuclei, polarized around as many leaders as the number of the villages, the campanili the small churches in Italy from which moved each individual immigrant who on this side of the Atlantic find a compaesano.

In 1931 things had little changed:

*In complesso, l'emigrato italiano, tanto settentrionale che meridionale, ricordò sempre più la piccola patria che la grande. Della patria avendo percepito solo elementi particolari, la famiglia, il campanile, il pezzetto di terra, ebbe nostalgie regionali e domestiche, quindi elegiache, sentimentali, limitate; nessuna aspirazione nazionale di ordine superiore e collettivo, se non nei pochissimi differenziati.*

Overall, the Italian immigrant, both northern and southern, always remembers more the

small country than the great. The country had received only particular elements, the family, the Bell Tower, the piece of land, had nostalgia regional and domestic, and elegiac, sentimental, limited, no national aspiration of a higher order and collectively, except in a few different.

The immigrants themselves testified the divisions within Italian settlements. Rose, protagonist of the most famous biography of an Italian emigrant in the U.S in the late nineteenth century, drew a sort of regional hierarchy of immigrants: "The Tuscans were not good as the Lombard, but not as bad as the Sicilians [...] the Piedmontese are a bit ' worse than Lombards. The Lombards are the latest in the world to be dishonest.

During the fascist years the issue of reconciling regionalism and nationalism was resolved by inserting diversity in a frame of patriotic unity going back to the cultural tradition of Romanità and Christianity. According to the circular written in preparation to the Third Congress of Ethnography in 1934, the new discipline "would bring out the common fund from which all national and historical traditions derived to approach more and more the spirit of unity of the homeland". On the pages of *Rinascita regionale*, published by Libreria del Littorio, Amy Bernardy analyzed, in a sort of self-consciousness, the reasons that had brought Italy to neglect the rich cultural heritage of the lower classes:

*"sia perché si temeva che lo spirito di regionalità potesse deformarsi in campanilismo o degenerare in separatismo da una parte, sia perché si pensava di sembrare antiquati e provinciali dall'altra [...] sicché ricordare e accentuare qualsiasi caratteristica di regionalità poté parere alle coscienze timorate e tremule quasi un attentato all'unità ancora recente e con tante fatiche costituita [...] l'Italia che cresceva allora ebbe [...] paura di apparire piccola e goffa, e di rimanere "provinciale" e "pacchiana", conservando, o rimettendo in onore certe forme della sua vita e della sua arte paesana; e cedette agli allettamenti della modernità commerciale, livellatrice e 'standardizzata'"*.

both because it was feared that the spirit of regional parochialism might deform or degenerate into separatism, and because it was thought to look outdated and provincial [...] so that recall and accentuate any feature of regionalism appeared like a bomb to the unity (of Italy) recently and painstakingly set up [...] Italy [...] feared of appearing small and clumsy, and remain "provincial" and "tacky" by maintaining or recovering some forms in honor of his village life. In so doing Italy succumbed to the blandishments of commercial and standardized modernity.

She feared that standardized modernity would destroy local cultures.

Nel 1934 Bernardy, ormai affermata etnografa, scriverà nell'Introduzione al bellissimo volume di Emma Calderni, *Il costume popolare in Italia*:

*dal 1870 in poi l'emigrazione tendeva automaticamente ad eliminarlo [il costume popolare] anche nelle regioni che ne erano più tenaci; l'immaturità spirituale e l'insufficienza culturale dei partiti sovversivi gli muovevano opposizione bestiale [...] Quindi è che lo studio critico e l'osservazione comparata delle forme caratteristiche dei nostri costumi popolari possono effettivamente costituire un non indifferente contributo alla conoscenza del paese e dello spirito della razza, dei suoi atteggiamenti e delle sue tendenze spirituali, giungendo attraverso lo smistamento dei suoi elementi costitutivi, e alla sua ricostruzione del suo carattere etnico e storico, e in ultima istanza, pur nelle sue infinite ramificazioni, alla*

*constatazione dell'unita della popolazione italiana dalle Alpi alle isole; e diciamo pure dell'italianita spirituale prevalente da Nizza a Malta e dalla Corsica alla Dalmazia e oltre, per le vie del Levante che furono italiane e ne serbano le tracce, per chi sa leggere [...] Il costume popolare testimonio del passato sulla soglia dell'epoca industriale e livellatrice.*

from 1870 onwards emigration tended to automatically delete it even in regions that were more tenacious; ... our costumes can actually be a considerable contribution to the knowledge of the country and the spirit of the breed, its spiritual attitudes and tendencies... to the rebuilding of its ethnic character and history, and ultimately, even in its infinite ramifications, to the unity of the Italian population from the Alps to the islands, and let's say the prevailing spiritual italianity from Nice to Malta and from Corsica to Dalmatia and beyond, through the Vie del Levante [...] The popular costume witness of the past on the threshold of the standardizing industrial age.

Beyond the rhetoric of fascism, here is captured, perhaps for the first time, the importance of local cultures in a world on the eve of globalization. But will it be fascism to adversely affect both the relationship between the Italians in the world and the motherland and the whole concept of italianità and italicità. It was not until the seventies of the twentieth century with the empowerment of Regions the dialogue between the Italians (and their descendants) in the world and the country of origin will be reopened. In the 1970 the Regions were reinforced and became democratic elective structures. In the reconstruction of the history of their own territories they included the migratory movements, this moment was the beginning of the launching of several initiatives, local and regional museums, exhibitions, local history research, and so on were started. Abroad, there was a new impulse to regional associationism, local associations changed their name in regional ones: Piemontesi, Abruzzesi, Toscani nel mondo, La regione Calabria emigrazione.... Abroad were made not only what I would call "sentimental national identities", in the sense that as WWII experience had showed were not political, but also regional identities.

To conclude Italian glocal identities are due to various factors: the rich variety of the cultures of the people who lived in the Italian territory is of course the first to be mentioned, but the intermingling of various other factors has also to be mentioned: the policy of the Italian state and that of the country of immigration, but also the social acceptance or discrimination met and so on. Italy's image abroad played also an important role; it changed much over time: from a peasant preindustrial country which saw the great emigration, to the aggressive racist and imperialist one during the fascist years, to the Bel Paese della dolce vita, discovered with the advent of mass tourism, but anticipated by the coming of fashion of the little italties with café and restaurants which offered glimpse of the Italian way of life. In the 1980's Italian design and moda changed for good Italy's image in the world. Italian descendants started to appreciate another Italy to be associate to the local sentimental family one. In the 1990's local culture, survived thanks also post WWII immigration, were refreshed by the ICT which helped develop new forms of italian glocal identities. Diasporic communities made use of the web in various circumstances: in making research "to find their roots" in the data base on passengers list in order not only to obtain Italian citizenship, (and in this case sometimes not out of economic need but because of admiration for Italy's culture, as a status symbol) but also to establish contacts with the ancestors' birthplace through media, blogs, on-line communities, low cost travelling and so on. The identity of the Italian diaspora was strengthened through the new opportunities: the new media helped to establish glocal contact quickly and directly.

The strengths of Italian cultural diversity helped manage the "standardized modernity" to quote Amy Bernardy, in a globalized world trough the development of glocalism, an element essential to the italicità.

