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The politics of Christopher Columbus and World War II

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In imagery and biography, oratory and hagiography, Christopher Columbus has provided a touchstone to measure Italian American anxieties. Italian immigrants individually had always expressed ambiguous feelings toward Columbus. Although many took pride in the bold achievements of the navigator, not a few associated him with the suffering and hardship they endured in the New World. *Maledetto Cristoforo Colombo e quando ha scoperto l'America!* (Damn Christopher Columbus and his discovery of America) was a refrain heard in many immigrant households¹.

If some immigrants were uncertain about Columbus, the celebration of Columbus Day, in its multiple observances, has played a critical role in shaping Italian American ethnicity. Public celebrations of the Genoese navigator in the United States date to 1792, when New Yorkers observed the 300th anniversary of discovery. In the 1860s, Italian colonies in the northeast championed Columbus in ceremonies which grew in the 1890s.² By the turn-of-the-century, the function had become the symbolic expression *par excellence* of the dual identity characterizing Italian Americans. The details of Columbus's career quite literally allowed Italians to place themselves at the very beginnings of American history. Thus they served to legitimize Italian American claims to Americanness at the same time as they permitted immigrants to take pride in their *italianità*. Not a few recent arrivals responded to nativist jibes by claiming, «My ancestors did not arrive on the Mayflower; they arrived on the *Santa Maria!*» By combining courage in the face of adversity and a willingness to explore distant new environments, the exploits of Columbus also served as a metaphor for the Italian immigrants' experience in industrializing America. The precise ways in which these connections were made, of course, changed over time as Italian Americans employed different representations of Columbus to respond to particular historical circumstances. In short, the great mariner proved to be just as malleable and inherently «political» as other symbols.

Columbus Day assumed a special position in the shaping not only of the public ethnicity of Italian Americans, but also in sorting out the complicated internal power relationships existing within various Little Italies. Since the celebration was so important to the community, the many decisions involved with mounting a public commemoration to the mariner afforded countless possibilities for aspiring leaders to demonstrate their power, prestige, and popular presence. An examination of the dynamics surrounding Columbus Day celebrations, therefore, affords insight into how Italian American ethnicity and the political relationships attached to it underwent change.

The events of the 1936 Columbus Day commemorations in New York City suggest the diversity, intensity, and complexity of the process of negotiation taking place. Pro-fascists, anti-fascist unionists, and leftist progressives, all needing a forum in which to express their appeals, sponsored separate observances in which the figure of Columbus served as the subject of interpretation as well as a vehicle for the legitimization of certain political and cultural options existing in the United States.³

The day's largest ceremony began at 10:00 a.m. as a crowd of 20,000 Italian Americans gathered around Columbus Circle. This event was under the sponsorship of both the Sons of Italy and Generoso Pope, wealthy owner and publisher of two important Italian language dailies, a power in Tammany politics, and head of several prosperous contracting companies. Pope, America's most prominent pro-fascist, who had spearheaded numerous fund-raising drives in support of Mussolini's initiatives, endlessly praised the regime in his papers, and willingly accepted several decorations bestowed personally by *il Duce*.⁴ The Italian Consul, Gaetano Vecchiotti, and New York Governor Herbert H. Lehman sat with Pope on the reviewing stand.

Phonographs blared out music as two black-shirted marching bands presented renditions of the «Star Spangled Banner,» and «Giovinezza,» the fascist anthem. A detachment of uniformed fascists in

military formation drew up around the Columbus monument to hear speeches. Using the mariner's voyage as a springboard to discuss American values, Lehman praised the «spirit of tolerance and understanding and sympathy on which we have built since the time of the early pioneers.» He continued that Columbus Day should be celebrated by everyone since «it commemorates the life and achievements of a man who is the common heritage of all American peoples.» He only drew applause when he observed that «half the courage displayed by Columbus would resolve the problems of this generation.» Pope and Vecchiotti favorably compared Mussolini's greatness to that of the explorer. Reporters noted that at one point the Governor waved amiably to the throng, but exhibited embarrassment when his greeting was returned by hundreds of palms raised in the fascist salute.⁵

His discomfort no doubt stemmed from the outraged response he had earlier received from anti-fascist critics who had denounced his willingness to speak at the rally. Lehman had weakly replied that his appearance «would not advance the fascist cause,» because the gathering had «no political or partisan character.» He was forcibly reminded of their anger since the Italian Anti-Fascist Committee sponsored a competing assembly a few hundred yards away at the northeastern edge of Columbus Circle. Composed primarily of members of the Italian communist party and other leftists, the spokesman for this ceremony was socialist newspaper editor Girolamo Valenti.⁶

When Lehman finished his remarks, the anti-fascist crowd raised clenched fists and loudly booed the Governor as having «betrayed the workers and supported a fascist cause.» Speaker Peter Allegra shouted, «As a Jew, the Governor ought to know what fascism means, and yet he is over there speaking to those fascists and pro-fascists and accepting the fascist salute from them.» Valenti then excoriated Pope by observing that Columbus discovered an America that had always fought against tyranny and for democracy, «and yet Pope advocates fascism and fascism stands for slavery.» As the two crowds lunged toward each other, a special police squad composed of 256 officers afoot and on horseback arrived to keep them separated.⁷

Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who had had his remarks at the previous year's Pope-sponsored gathering cut short by anti-fascist boos and catcalls, avoided the day's proceedings entirely. He was originally scheduled to make an address under the auspices of the Sons of Italy, but at the last moment delegated the task to New York Supreme Court Justice John J. Freschi. Sensing that he stood more to lose than gain, LaGuardia tersely told reporters, «I'm going to the automobile races on Long Island; I'm entitled to one day off once in a while.»⁸

In the evening, more than 6,000 people gathered at the Hippodrome for a rally sponsored by the Italian Dress and Waist Makers Union, Local 89, of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU-AFL). Led by prominent anti-fascist Luigi Antonini, General Secretary of the local and Vice President of the ILGWU, the meeting also attracted Governor Lehman and ILGWU President David Dubinsky. Antonini was a major figure in New York's union circles, as well as a lifelong opponent of fascism and an unwavering foe of the communists. While praising the successes of Italian American workers, he reminded the audience that «what Columbus achieved in the field of discovery, our great humanitarian President is achieving in the realm of social legislation.» Lehman also extolled the accomplishments of Columbus in discovering America and beginning a series of momentous changes, but «no greater change has come to the nation since Columbus sailed» than the recognition that «workers be given the opportunity of dealing, through collective bargaining, on an equality with strong organizations.» After these remarks, he received a «prolonged and loud ovation.»⁹

These three celebrations represented the principal divisions then existing among Italian Americans, each using Columbus to address the special needs of the moment as various spokesmen defined them. They all placed Italians firmly in an American context, recognizing not only their immigrant pasts, but also the present world in which they were living. The blending of emblems and anthems spoke to a complex, contest-filled world in which Italian Americans were attempting to adapt.¹⁰

The War Approaches

As war clouds darkened, both Italian Americans and government officials changed their approaches to the celebrations surrounding the great navigator. The sense of increased insecurity and fear present in Italian American communities forced numerous alterations of Columbus Day commemorations. In some locations residents dropped celebrations entirely. In 1940 New Haven's Italian Americans canceled all parades and banquets, and elsewhere throughout Connecticut Columbus Day activities were very muted. Traditional leaders in San Francisco's North Beach abandoned the customary Columbus Day celebration, prompting an outburst from some community members.¹¹ In the same year, Buffalo's Federation of Italian Societies

canceled the Columbus Day parade outright after announcing that «younger delegates objected to displaying the Italian flag.»¹²

Instead of canceling events, other communities scaled back ceremonies to more modest dimensions and/or changed the rituals and iconography. The 1941 Columbus Day celebration in Des Moines, Iowa featured 300 students from St. Anthony's school «each bearing small American flags,» one of whom delivered the main address on the theme «I Am An American. «Money collected at the event went to the United Service Organization (USO). In the same year Newark's Italian Americans turned over the planning for Columbus Day, «which had been used as a grand day for the politically ambitious, «to the Colonel Francis Vigo Post of the American Legion which accepted only the «advice and suggestions» of local notables.»¹³ Philadelphia's main celebration saw Judges Eugene Alessandrini and Michael A. Musmanno lay a wreath at the foot of the Columbus statue in Fairmount Park, but in an unprecedented move, the two *prominenti* then led «a pilgrimage sponsored by the Italian Columbus Day committee» to lay wreaths at the Washington monument and the Franklin statue.¹⁴ Marchers in New York City's principal parade broke precedent in 1941 by carrying no Italian flags, but many wore collar buttons with the Italian colors.¹⁵ Soon even they would disappear.

As important as Columbus Day was to factions within Italian American communities, its significance was not lost on political officials at the local, state, and national levels. They understood clearly not only the political advantage that could potentially accrue from participation in celebrations, but also the symbolic uses to which Columbus might be put in advancing their own causes. The Roosevelt administration had been sensitive to these facts well before the advent of war. In an effort to recover from the political damage caused by his 1940 dagger speech President Roosevelt sent formal messages to be read at New York's principal gatherings. The president wrote separate messages to both Antonini and Pope, the first asserting that «a confident America can count on the undivided allegiance of all Americans of Italian ancestry,» and asserting that «America would never have been discovered if Columbus had been an isolationist.» The second message trumpeted the glories of famous Italian figures from the past, including mention of «the matchless genius of Marconi in our day,» but pointedly avoided any reference to fascism or Mussolini.¹⁶

Even before American participation in the war, Italian American leaders also used the celebration as a forum for voicing their views of the European struggle. Many of the prewar statements came to be instrumental in shaping ethnic (and national) policy toward Italian Americans after American entry. Perhaps none was more significant than those uttered by Luigi Antonini. In a thundering 1941 Columbus Day speech delivered at the national AFL conference in Seattle, Antonini offered an interpretation of the war and the Axis alliance. In the labor leader's view, Italy's «sawdust Caesar» had delivered the nation to the control of Hitler, a decision taken without the consent or participation of the Italian population. He warned the audience that in thinking of oppressed peoples, to remember that «the Italian people are today amongst the world's most oppressed. Italy was the first land to be struck down by the Fascist scourge. Italy today is an occupied country, a pawn in the clutches of the Hitler war machine.» Reminding listeners that «America would never have been discovered if Columbus were an isolationist,» Antonini urged that America must be the «arsenal and bulwark of democracy.»¹⁷

The War Arrives

The first full year of war posed special challenges to the celebration of Columbus Day. As the principal public celebration of a suspect minority, the event attracted government attention in ways that had never happened before. The commemoration of the great mariner appeared to offer fruitful opportunities for a variety of interests to display the qualities they felt were particularly relevant to the moment.

The federal agency most directly involved with the effort to shape Italian Americans into loyal supporters of the war effort was the Foreign Language Branch of the Office of War Information (OWI), headed by Alan Cranston. An Italophile who had spent several years in Italy during the 1930s, Cranston determined that the most effective means of influencing the mass of Italian Americans was «to mobilize them in an anti-fascist celebration on Columbus Day [1942],» and implement a program of «democratic education» which would wean Italian Americans away from fascist teachings and toward the government's notions of proper Americanism. Cranston believed this particular Columbus Day was sure to attract special notice as it was the first celebration, to take place during the war, and it marked the 450th anniversary of the discovery. Perhaps even more significant Cranston knew that Attorney General Francis Biddle was to make his dramatic announcement on that day removing Italians from the enemy alien status. The opportunities for positive results seemed boundless.¹⁸

Preliminary work on these initiatives revealed, however, that the OWI would be «forced to deal in most communities with groups which are thoroughly fascist and have long records of fascist collaboration in their respective fields.» Even those leaders who were anti-fascist remained so bitterly divided among themselves that they appeared unable to agree on any strategy. As Cranston explained to a subordinate «the Italian American organizational picture is in such a critical state that virtually no national leadership exists. . . Italian American leadership has proven its bankruptcy clearly.»¹⁹

As a means of responding to deficiencies in leadership and political education, Cranston proposed a two step plan involving the development of an antifascist manifesto to provide ideological reference points and the creation of Italian American Victory Councils in the nation's various Little Italies to implement policy.²⁰ He believed that the particular value of these plans rested in the fact that they were «broad enough to encompass all [Italian] groups». The matter of timing was important to Cranston and other officials since they knew that many anti-fascists refused to work with Italian American leaders who had arrived late to the table of loyal patriotism.

The prospect of unifying this much-splintered ethnic group glimmered tantalizing close. In Cranston's view, the Victory Councils would be ideal long-term vehicles for the dissemination of government news releases, educational campaigns, and Americanization efforts. He optimistically predicted that they would «eliminate much of the confusion and internal strife existing... provide clear-cut leadership amicable to the position being taken by our own war effort leaders and set the stage for the development of a clear-cut anti-fascist educational program among the leading elements.»²¹

Preliminary to mounting fully this campaign, Cranston went to the wolf's lair to confront what he regarded as the nation's most important pro-fascist organization, the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA). On Sept. 26, 1942, Cranston addressed the assembled Grand Venerables of the organization who came to a special meeting in New York City to consider ways of aiding the war effort. While praising the efforts of the group to buy war bonds, Cranston pointed out what remained to be done. Observing that «the Italian American community is badly confused over the real issues involved in this war,» he charged the notables with the task of countering enemy propaganda.²²

Knowing full well the equivocation and slanting of the war that had characterized so many utterances of the *prominenti*, he specifically challenged them to deny publicly many of the pro-fascist claims that had appeared in previous years. He tactfully avoided mention of the fact that many of the very gentlemen seated in front of him were the most ardent proponents of these assertions. «You must see that your people renounce whole-heartedly and fully all vestiges of the old fascist line which sought to corrode their souls through the twenty years of its infiltration in our midst,» thundered Cranston, adding that «failure on the part of any Italian-Americans to demonstrate an abhorrence for Fascism and all it stands for will cast suspicion on all Italian-Americans.»²³

Buoyed by his speech in New York, spirits were short-lived. Plans to establish Victory Councils around the nation and mobilize their power for unity in the Columbus Day celebrations of 1942 almost uniformly met with failure. Attempts to build the necessary coalitions in city after city became hopelessly mired in the «individual jealousies, ideological splits, mistrust, and misunderstandings,» that characterized the internal worlds of Little Italies. One OWI worker reported to headquarters with a lament that could be taken as a coda for the entire enterprise. «This is an Italian labyrinth in which men like you and me can wander for days and weeks and get nowhere... Nobody representing the American government can afford to be drawn into their endless disputes, rivalries, jealousies, discussions, and feuds.»²⁴

Not only did OWI efforts to impose unity from outside and gain control of the language of patriotism and Americanism fail, but also in some locations OWI interventions actually undermined the anti-fascist cause. Events in Pittsburgh serve as an illustration. OWI officials recognized that Pittsburgh was the seat of a very active Fascist consulate which had marshaled Italian American sentiment in favor of the regime and secured on numerous occasions the cooperation of city authorities. For example, the «Italian Room» in the Cathedral of Learning in the University of Pittsburgh was a noted center of fascist propaganda, and the city's principal Italian language newspaper, «La Stella di Pittsburgh», had been one of America's most ardent pro-fascist publications.²⁵

Another variation on the theme occurred in Philadelphia. The prominent Italian American author Jerre Mangione has described some of the exchanges taking place. Cranston had approached Mangione to assist in a unity drive for Philadelphia. Local Italian Americans had been planning for the usual three separate Columbus Day parades representing the old-line *prominenti*, the anti-fascist liberal elements, and the communist labor forces. Cranston wanted one huge parade that would incorporate all elements of the Philadelphia Italian American community, thereby projecting the appropriate wartime message of harmony and common purpose. What happened at a meeting of community leaders was, in Mangione's words, «a spontaneous drama as farcical as anything Moliere might have written on the theme of men, who, while

trying to impress authorities with their intense patriotism for the US and their willingness to undergo any personal sacrifice, were actually demonstrating their determination not to make any concession that might suggest the slightest loss of personal position or prestige.»²⁶

Mangione reported that all listened attentively to Cranston's plan, outdoing one another in agreeing that Italian Americans must present a united front in this year's local Columbus Day celebration. But when it came to determining how the three parades would be combined and who would lead the consolidated procession, all unity disappeared. During the debate, a prominent Italian American judge, known as the father figure of the Italian American community, actually ripped open the front of his shirt and beat his bare breast with clenched fist as he declared his undying love for the United States and democracy.²⁷ No one present reminded the judge that only a few years earlier he had accepted a decoration from Mussolini personally and had filled the pages of newspapers with praise for *il Duce*. As the discussion dragged on Cranston proposed that since they could not agree on who would lead the parade, perhaps they might well revert to the words of the Bible and choose a child to lead them. He further suggested drawing lots to determine the positioning of various groups in the parade.

Community leaders promptly hailed Cranston as a new Solomon, but then immediately began wrangling among themselves as to whose child would lead the procession. They were still arguing some hours later when Cranston and Mangione threw up their arms in resignation and left.²⁸ In the end there was a «unity parade,» but it reflected the power realities of the community as clearly as if separate celebrations had taken place. The breast-beating judge persuaded the Columbus Day Committee, which he chaired, to consent to anti-fascist participation, but the ordering of the parade and subsequent rally told the true state of affairs. The anti-fascist contingents came at the very end of the procession, and their principal spokesman appeared as the last speaker at the parade's end.²⁹

In New York even these limited gains eluded the OWI. Five separate major celebrations took place, illuminating clearly the deep divisions that continued to exist.³⁰ As in 1936, the day's events began with a great rally in the morning at Columbus Circle organized by Generoso Pope and the old-line *prominenti* representing the traditional Italian societies. The crowd of some 25,000 heard the principal speakers develop the themes of loyalty and the sale of war bonds. LaGuardia changed topics to extol FDR as «the new explorer setting forth to bring freedom to the oppressed people of Europe,» and to declare that under Mussolini, «the *cagnolino* (little dog) of Hitler, Italy had become part of Nazi-occupied Europe.» «To all liberty loving Italians,» he proclaimed, «Italy at present is looked upon as *Italia irredenta*.»³¹

In the afternoon, the Mazzini Society and the Italian American Labor Council (IALC), the nation's two most effective Italian anti-fascist organizations, gathered at the Metropolitan Opera House to hear direct denunciations of fascism delivered by Undersecretary of State Adolf A. Berle, Jr. followed by Governor Lehman and Mayor LaGuardia. Luigi Antonini took the occasion to trumpet that «Mussolini and his gang of Quislings and not the mass of Italian people are the enemy in this war.» To give added import to this gathering, FDR sent a special message to be read during the proceedings which endorsed the concept of «American Victory is Italy's Freedom,» a slogan that had been earlier coined by Antonini's IALC.³²

The Italian communists staged a rally at Manhattan Center at dusk to hear Congressman Marcantonio, Professor Ambrogio Donini, and New York City Councilman Peter Cacchione stress the need for unity in the war effort.³³ In pressing for a «United Front» against the Axis, speakers pointed out that just as Columbus was able to bring together a diverse and often divided crew, so too must the anti-fascist forces draw together now. Councilman Cacchione staged a pageant which allegorically dealt with the life of Italians in America from the time of Columbus to their present participation «in the common struggle for democracy and national independence.»³⁴

No such comity characterized a Knights of Columbus (KOC) rally at Columbus Park in lower Manhattan. The 3,500 people in attendance heard organizer George A. Timone, chairman of the New York chapter of the KOC, declare that the Columbus' discovery of America «marked the genesis of our American civilization and the way of life we are fighting to preserve.» In describing the American way of life, he devoted most of his speech to a denunciation of communists, whom he described as «inimical forces on the home front as deadly as Hitler's panzer divisions.» The indefatigable LaGuardia spoke here as well, observing that «like your parents and mine, Columbus could not get what he wanted in his own country, so he went elsewhere and made good.»³⁵

Finally, Italian Americans of all factions attended a huge rally at Madison Square Garden in the evening held under the sponsorship of LaGuardia (but assisted by the OWI) to hear Attorney General Francis Biddle personally deliver his much-awaited speech announcing termination of the enemy alien status for Italians.³⁶ When Cranston had concluded some weeks earlier that no chance existed of having a single celebration in New York, he confided to an associate that he was aiding in the Madison Square

Garden rally so as «to obtain a resounding demonstration of Italian American democratic sentiment. . . [and] to at the same time blanket other demonstrations which are being planned for Columbus Day by those who still have fascist sympathies.»³⁷

Generoso Pope and other *prominenti* defused much of the impact of the evening's announcement by proclaiming loudly that their interventions with President Roosevelt were instrumental in achieving the enemy alien cancellation.³⁸ These spokesmen also rushed to interpret the speech itself in ways that were guaranteed to reinforce their own prestige. Few were as unashamed to take full credit as were the leaders of Pennsylvania's Sons of Italy. «All people know now how strong is the bond of the common ideals and aspirations among Italians, «the state's official organ intoned, «The proof is found in the dignified and yet highly patriotic conduct of the Italians in America, led by the Sons of Italy.»³⁹

Faced with the depressing failure of the unity drive, OWI officials redirected and intensified their efforts following Columbus Day. A central figure in these renewed exertions was Carlo Tresca, the «elder statesman» of the Italian American radical world. For the past forty years, the anarcho-syndicalist Tresca had been a leading figure in leftist and labor circles. His tireless advocacy of direct action had led to thirty-six arrests during various working class struggles, and he had garnered international fame in 1912 for his leadership during the great textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Through his work with the Industrial Workers of the World, he became one of the foremost foreign-born leaders in the American working-class movement.⁴⁰

In the changed labor environment of the 1920s, Tresca had shifted his energies to fighting the fascist regime of Mussolini. He raised thousands of dollars to aid victims of fascist persecution and to finance the anarchist press in Italy. In New York City itself, he made sure that blackshirts could appear on the streets only at their own peril. Combining the roles of field marshal and foot soldier, he and his supporters disrupted, often violently, every public gathering of fascists in the city. He himself was the target of counter-violence, surviving at least three bomb attempts on his life during the 1930s, and he once had his throat cut in an unsuccessful assassination attempt. Meanwhile, he maintained a continuous flow of sharp-worded attacks against *il Duce* and his backers in the US through his newspaper, «Il Martello» (The Hammer), and his frequent speaking tours (*giri di propaganda*). The fascist secret police came to refer to him as early as 1928 as the *deus ex machina* of anti-fascism in America.⁴¹

Tresca did not spare the wealthy *prominenti* (whom he labeled the *camorra* coloniale – the colonial gangsters). In vitro and ink, he harbored special aversion to Generoso Pope.⁴² Starting in 1941, Tresca regularly excoriated Pope for his eleventh-hour conversion to anti-fascism (calling him a «Pearl Harbor patriot,» among other less printable terms).

Following the events of Columbus Day, the OWI renewed discussions with Tresca, hoping to pressure him again into accepting their proposals. As Cranston explained to his superior, «In New York City we are now attempting to unite prominent Italian Americans in an Italian American Victory Council where they will concentrate upon the real enemy – Fascism – and cease their internal quarrels.»⁴³ Events overtook whatever agreements may have been reached when an unknown assassin gunned down Tresca on a deserted New York City street on the evening of January 11, 1943. Subsequent investigations revealed that just prior to the shooting, he was preparing for a Mazzini Society gathering.

The assassination spelled the doom of OWI efforts to impose its broader unifying agendas on Italian Americans. The controversies stemming from the killing ultimately generated a Congressional investigation of OWI operations that nearly resulted in the termination of the agency itself. Cranston and his chief lieutenants, realizing that their hold on office was tenuous, quietly began to find other positions outside of government.⁴⁴ But before leaving, they vainly attempted to salvage their position. OWI officials insisted that they had been misquoted on the entire affair. Cranston claimed that he was fully aware of Tresca's antipathy toward communism and never stated that Tresca favored communist participation in any organization. Cranston concluded his defense with an all-too accurate insight: «the accusations hurled back and forth between the various anti-fascist groups reveal why the old fascist leaders continue to dominate the field.»⁴⁵

After 1943, the old *prominenti* reasserted their leadership by using the communist trump card to attack their leftist opponents, by building upon their enthusiastic backing of the war effort (especially their fund raising activities) and by playing an important role in shaping American policy toward Italy. Internal group contestation and ethnic invention did not cease, but increasingly the old-line leaders achieved dominance within the group and in the group's relations with the government. Thus, as the war wore on, they more and more were able to define the language of Italian American ethnicity and control the vehicles of public expression.

The ongoing negotiation between the government and Italian Americans had important consequences for the dynamics of Italian American ethnicity during the war. After early 1943, Italian

American leaders were now in a position to drive forward a distinctive interpretation of the war itself, both at home and abroad, that came to find wide acceptance. With the anti-fascist forces more splintered than ever before, and the OWI emasculated after the Tresca affair, power tended to devolve back toward the old *prominenti* who by now had largely reestablished their credentials through bond drives, patriotic rallies, and loyal support of both the war effort and the Democratic party. From 1943 onward, the traditional leaders inexorably began to reassert their positions within local communities, forcing the union elements into alliances with them and isolating the communists even further on the fringes.⁴⁶ Their ability to profit from Roosevelt's desire to solidify the Italian vote in the 1944 election only intensified these trends.

Drawing on some themes appearing earlier, the old *prominenti* now surged forth to depict the war in Italy as the sole burden of fascism and especially its leader, Mussolini. After being a positive symbol to these men for the past two decades, *Il Duce* suddenly became the single cause of all Italian misfortunes. In this conception neither Italy nor the Italian people were to be blamed for the war. As one Sons of Italy Venerable asserted, «Italy, the country of our fathers, has been betrayed by Mussolini and the fascist regime into Hitler's criminal war of aggression.» Italy became not the nation of *il Duce*, but of the great liberal and artistic giants Garibaldi, Mazzini, Dante, Matteotti, Rosselli, and other champions of human liberty.⁴⁷

In forum after forum, spokesmen asked Italian Americans not to abandon Italy, but to commit themselves to the homeland even more. Thus, the fight against Mussolini and fascism had as one of its central purposes the helping of Italy, and, almost unavoidably with the progress of the war, assisting Italy became a major task for Americans.⁴⁸ Since Italian Americans stood in a special relationship between the old and new homeland, they played important roles in this exchange, not only as definers of this conception of the war's aim, but also as implementors of the necessary policies.

These themes came to be interwoven into the numerous wartime rallies (bond drives, scrap collections, service flag unveilings, civilian defense meetings, etc.) and especially at the Columbus Day celebrations. As before, local leaders, who clearly regarded Columbus as one of their own, were able to make the great navigator speak to all the relevant issues. For example, the principal oration of the 1943 Columbus Day parade in Newark extolled Columbus thusly: «Just as Columbus in his day fought against the reactionary ruling cliques in Italy, so too the six million Italian Americans now fight. . . to destroy fascist and Nazi reaction. Just as the countrymen of Columbus came to America seeking and fighting for freedom and democracy in the following years as exemplified by Garibaldi, today all Italian Americans are determined to uphold their traditions and fight alongside all peoples for victory and democracy against the common enemy, fascism.»⁴⁹

Such an interpretive line gave Italian Americans a counter set of heroes and values to attach themselves to in seeking newly created identities. When viewed from the perspective of the great navigator, Italian Americans became as American as anyone else, and, indeed, the linking of them with Columbus and subsequent Italian heroes provided a means of demonstrating that their ancestors had traditions and values that were integral to the building of the nation. By placing Columbus at the center of their celebrations, for example, they in effect stood the traditional narrative of American history on its head, putting Italians at the very conception of the New World. One 1943 speaker left no room for doubt on this point, «Columbus Day is the birthday of our country, the birthday of America as a new world.»⁵⁰

Though an reversal of the symbols adopted by fascist propaganda, the wartime efforts of the *prominenti* achieved the result of creating allegiance to government policies toward Italy among Italian Americans. This outcome did not result from a simple «top-down» process of dictation carried out by Washington officials. Italian Americans themselves played important roles in shaping these policies. In purifying Italy from the dangers of distrusted political and ideological affiliations, for example, Italian Americans attempted to substitute the values of tried and true Americanism, but an Americanism defined at least in part by themselves.

In this process they often attempted to turn American propaganda back upon itself. By stressing the positive qualities of pluralism and ethnic diversity, they cited themselves as exemplars of the workings of the system. Their material and human sacrifices in the war only cemented these connections more firmly. A speaker at a war bond rally in 1943 caught the essence of these connections when he pointed out, «our boys are ready to consecrate with their blood the bond that ties them to Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln and to millions of other Americans.»⁵¹ Why not, then, more formally recognize the contributions of Italian Americans in the building and development of this nation and in the reconstruction of Italy?

By agreeing with these goals and assisting in reaching them, the *prominenti* were largely successful in reestablishing their power and standing. With surprisingly little deviation, even those leaders most tainted with fascist connections from previous decades were able to make the necessary adjustments to demonstrate the convergence and compatibility of their ethnocultures with national

ideals.⁵² Fittingly, FDR signaled the return to full political acceptability of Generoso Pope by agreeing to send a personal message to be read at Pope's 1944 Columbus Day parade in New York and to meet Pope personally for a White House chat.⁵³ In the end, the presence of leaders such as Pope proved necessary to Italian Americans, who required them to voice their views to American policymakers. The anti-fascists proved too splintered and factionalized to achieve this, and the Italian exiles seldom understood the dynamics of American politics. The communist and progressive/left elements increasingly lost out as the anti-communist tactics of the *prominenti* began to bear fruit.

In turn, the U.S. Government counted on the old-line leaders to control the Italian American vote, as well as to shape the attitudes of the rank-and-file toward the old country. The role of the *prominenti*, after an adjustment period, became what it had always been; they were mediators between the expectations of the Italian American community and the political-diplomatic realities of the larger society. Their ability to channel the process of ethnic activism and invention into acceptable varieties of political and cultural participation produced two main results: it guided Italian Americans through the difficult transition from the years of pro-fascism to those of the war, and it secured Italian American political support for at least most of the American policies towards Italy.⁵⁴

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Endnotes

- 1 Luisa del Giudice, *Studies in Italian American Folklore*, Logan (UT), Utah State University Press, 1993, pp. 3-4.
- 2 For earlier celebrations see Claudia L. Bushman, *America Discovers Columbus: How an Italian Explorer Became an American Hero*, Hanover (NH), University Press of New England, 1992, pp. 81-97; Gerald McKevitt, «Christopher Columbus as a Civic Saint» in *California History*, LXXI, Winter 1992/93, pp. 516-34.
- 3 Michael Berkowitz, *Americanization and Ethnicity in an Italian Community: Immigrants, Education, and Politics in East Harlem, 1920 to 1941*, Senior Thesis, History Department, Princeton University, 1987, contains a discussion of this celebration.
- 4 See, FBI File, Generoso Pope, Jr., No. 73-2920; «Generoso Pope: His Paper and His Politics,» typescript, Alberto Cupelli Papers, IHRC; «Generoso Pope File,» Papers of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Office Files (OF) 233A, President's Personal Files (PPF) 4617, PPF 1821, FDR Library, Hyde Park, New York; Philip V. Cannistraro e Elena Aga Rossi, «La politica etnica e il dilemma dell'antifascismo italiano negli Stati Uniti: il caso di Generoso Pope» in *Storia Contemporanea*, XVII, Aprile, 1986, pp. 217-43.
- 5 «New York Herald Tribune», October 12, 13, 1936.
- 6 Included among the various groups composing the committee were the American League Against War and Fascism, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Young Communist League, and the Young People's Socialist League.
- 7 «New York Times», October 13, 1936; «New York Herald Tribune», October 13, 1936.
- 8 «New York Herald Tribune», October 11, 1936.
- 9 «New York Times», October 13, 1936.
- 10 See Berkowitz for a treatment of these themes.
- 11 North Beach «Little City News», September 21, 1940. Editors of the paper attacked certain «well-meaning but ill-advised community leaders» who cancelled the festivity; John Jeffries, *Testing the Roosevelt Coalition: Connecticut Society and Politics in the Era of World War II*, Knoxville 1979, p. 64.
- 12 «New York Times», October 13, 1940; Rose Scherini, *The Italian American Community of San Francisco: A Descriptive Study*, Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 1976, pp. 183.

- 13 «The Italian Tribune», September 5, 1941; «The American Citizen», August 29. September 26, October 17, 1941.
- 14 Clipping, Philadelphia Record, October 13, 1941, contained in Pennsylvania Grand Lodge Records, Box 214, OSIA Collection, IHRC. The clipping in question contains a picture of the women of the Renaissance Lodge, OSIA, saluting the American flag during the festivities.
- 15 «New York Times», October 12, 13, 1941.
- 16 «New York Times», October 3, 1940. The main event in New York City was Generoso Pope's evening banquet, during which speeches focused on pledging allegiance to American principles of Democracy and on «loyal response to any call to arms that might be necessary.»
- 17 «Columbus Day 1941: A Day of Grief and Wrath,» in Luigi Antonini, *Dynamic Democracy*, New York, 1944, 441-43.
- 18 James Allen to William D. Hassett, September 30, 1942, FDR Library, Hyde Park, P.P.F. 781. Allen, Deputy Director of OWI, concluded with the view that «we are trying insofar as it is possible.»
- 19 Alan Cranston to Gardner Cowles, Jr., «Work with Foreign Nationality Groups,» August 14, 1942, Records of the Office of War Information, RG 208, Box 1079, National Archives, Washington.
- 20 The manifesto was important in that it adopted two themes which Italian American leaders had earlier promoted to push their own agendas throughout the war. The slogans proclaiming these initiatives were: «Fascism is not Italy – Italy is not Fascism» and «America's Victory is Italy's Freedom.» See, «Manifesto to Americans of Italian Origin,» October 28, 1942, OWI, Box 1080.
- 21 *Ibidem.*
- 22 «The Italian Tribune», October 9, 1942, reproduced the entire text of Cranston's speech, giving in front page status.
- 23 *Ibidem.*
- 24 Edgar A. Mowrer to Elmer Davis, July 23, 1942, OWI Director's Files, Microfilm Edition, reel 7. Some Italian American leaders may have found it to their advantage to keep the levels of factionalism high. In this way, they played various elements off against each other in order to solidify their own positions.
- 25 Renzo Sereno to Eugene Katz, «Candidates for an Italian-American Victory: Council in Pittsburgh,» September 26, 1942, OWI, Box 1080; *La Parola del Popolo*, July 25, 1942.
- 26 Jerre Mangione, *An Ethnic At Large: A Memoir of America in the Thirties and Forties*, New York, 1978, pp. 304-05.
- 27 Mangione's book does not identify this figure, but a personal letter has verified that he was Judge of the court of Common Pleas, Eugene V. Alessandroni, the chief promimente of Philadelphia. Alessandroni was Grand Venerable of the Pennsylvania Sons of Italy, a guiding force in dozens of clubs and mutual aid societies, a power in local politics, and a much-decorated supporter of Mussolini during the 1920s and 1930s. His mouthpiece was the newspaper «L'Ordine Nuovo».
- 28 These events can be followed in the pages of «L'Ordine Nuovo» for the relevant dates, and in «La Libera Parola», a rival Philadelphia newspaper owned by Anthony J. DiSilvestro, Pennsylvania State Senator and long-time opponent of Judge Alessandroni.
- 29 «L'Ordine Nuovo», September 12-October 24, 1942. Most telling, Attorney General Francis Biddle consented to speak as guest of honor at a luncheon banquet hosted by Alessandroni before proceeding to New York City to deliver his nation-wide radio address in the evening.
- 30 In fact, many smaller observances occurred throughout the city, sponsored by the Columbia society of Sanitation Workers, various Italian parishes, and even the Jewish Congregation Shearith Israel.
- 31 «New York Times», October 11, 1942.
- 32 «New York Times», October 13, 1942.
- 33 *Ibidem.*
- 34 «L'Unita del Popolo», September 20, 1942, had stressed the need for a unified Columbus Day celebration «to show Italian American support of U.S. foreign policy.»
- 35 OSS File, 384, «Pageant Honoring 450th Anniversary of Columbus,» October 11, 1942.
- 36 «New York Times», October 13, 1942. LaGuardia also likened President Roosevelt to Columbus, observing that he was a «new navigator looking for lands to shelter unhappy peoples.»
- 37 OSS File 542, «The War This Week», October 14, 1942.
- 38 OSS File, 315, D.C. Poole to John C. Wiley, August 8, 1942.
- 39 See the pages of Pope's «Il Progresso Italo-Americano» and «Corriere dell'America» for October, November, and December, 1942.

- 39 *Ordine Nuovo*, October 24, 1942. See, *Bulletin. Grand Lodge of Illinois*, December, 1942; Speech by Frank Gimino, December 13, 1942, George Spatuzza Papers, Sons of Italy Collection, IHRC, for additional claims.
- 40 A thumb-nail sketch of Tresca's career is provided in Max Eastman, *Heroes I Have Known*, New York, 1942.
- 41 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno. Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Casellario Politico Centrale, File, «Carlo Tresca», Busta 5208.
- 42 See, Nunzio Pernicone, «Carlo Tresca: Life and Death of a Revolutionary,» unpublished paper in author's possession, and the pages of «Il Martello».
- 43 Cranston to Elmer Davis, January 2, 1943, OWI Records, Box 1079.
- 44 The entire story of Tresca's assassination and the subsequent controversies can be followed in the OWI Records, the Tresca Papers, the pages of «Il Martello», and the FBI reports.
- 45 Cranston to Elmer Davis, «OWI Foreign Language Group Work,» January 26, 1943. See also, *Nazioni Unite*, for a summation of the OWI's positions.
- 46 The key figure in these maneuvers was Luigi Antonini, who had long pursued a strategy of accommodation with the prominenti (including most prominently Generoso Pope) and opposition to the communists. At the Mazzini Congress of 1943, he spoke of Pope's «sincere conversion» and urged cooperation with him. Antonini soon assumed control of the Mazzini Society, forcing the CIO union elements out (to form a rival organization) and elbowing aside the remaining anti-fascist exiles, who now had their attentions firmly fixed on events in Italy. OSS File, 916, «Mazzini Annual Congress, November, 1943;» OSS File, 935, Report No. B-129, «Schism in the Mazzini Society,» December, 1943.
- 47 «Il Leone», July 24, 1944.
- 48 On the foreign policy implications of this policy, especially those presaging the Cold War anti-communist crusade, see Nadia Venturini, «From Roosevelt and Mussolini to Truman and DeGasperi: The Politics of Italian American Leadership, 1930-1950», MA thesis, History, University of Minnesota, 1984; James Miller, *The United States and Italy, 1940-1950: The Politics and Diplomacy of Stabilization*, Chapel Hill (N.C.), University of North Carolina Press, 1986.
- 49 «The Italian Tribune», October 9, 1943.
- 50 Speech of Luigi Antonini, October 12, 1943. Contained in Luigi Antonini, *Dynamic Democracy*, New York, 1944.
- 51 OSS File, 594, March 2, 1943.
- 52 Miller, *The United States and Italy, 1940-1950: The Politics and Diplomacy of Stabilization* cit., 114, supports similar conclusions.
- 53 Pope to FDR, September 30, 1944; FDR to Pope, October 5, 1944, PPF 1821, FDR Papers. Evidence of Pope's resurgence was available in the 1943 Columbus Day celebrations. Governor Thomas Dewey prominently marched with Grand Marshal Pope in his parade, and for the first time, this procession took the prime Fifth Avenue route to Columbus Circle. As the head of the parade reached St. Patrick's Cathedral, Pope walked up the steps, knelt and kissed the ring of Archbishop Francis J. Spellman, who viewed the parade from that point with a group of dignitaries. Police estimated that 500,000 persons lined the sidewalks to watch the parade. OSS File, 872, «Columbus Day Celebration,» October 18, 1943.
- 54 Venturini, «From Roosevelt to Mussolini,» cit., pp. 58-60, provides an extended discussion of these points.



O antifascismo no mundo da diáspora italiana: elementos para uma análise comparativa a partir do caso brasileiro

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Entre 1922 e 1945, um conflito em especial marcou a coletividade italiana de São Paulo: o havido entre fascistas e antifascistas. De fato, por um período de mais de 20 anos, italianos pró e contra Mussolini se digladiaram pela conquista dos italianos locais e recentes análises (Trento, 1988, 1989 e 1994) tem demonstrado como a coletividade italiana, apesar de não ter aderido em massa aos organismos fascistas como os *fasci all'estero* e os *Dopolavoro*, apresentou uma firme simpatia pelo regime fascista e uma tendência a recusar a mensagem do antifascismo. Discutir essa situação e, especialmente, as causas das dificuldades do antifascismo italiano em se afirmar no Brasil é o objetivo desse texto.

Nesse ponto, é necessária uma observação. Esse artigo tem seu foco central de preocupações no fascismo e, especialmente, no antifascismo italiano em ação no Brasil e devemos concentrar o grosso de nossas análises e comentários, obviamente, no mesmo. Ainda assim, a referência contínua à bibliografia internacional sobre o antifascismo pretende não só confrontar o caso brasileiro com outros, como também fazer reflexões mais gerais sobre a questão do antifascismo no mundo da diáspora italiana, o que amplia, sem dúvida, o alcance e o significado desse texto.

Fascismo e antifascismo italianos no Brasil: um breve resumo

Desde os inícios de suas atividades, o Partido fascista (e depois, o governo fascista) procurou transferir seus ideais para seus concidadãos residentes no exterior. Nesse sentido foi feito todo um esforço no sentido de manter viva a italianidade entre os imigrantes e seus descendentes e de inculcar a ideologia fascista entre eles, de forma a manter os laços entre as comunidades italianas espalhadas pelo mundo e a Itália fascista

São Paulo não fugiu à regra¹. Desde 1923, começam os esforços fascistas para cativar os italianos e seus descendentes residentes no Estado. É principalmente a partir de 1928, porém, com a chegada dos cônsules «fascistas» ao Brasil (Cervo 1992, pp. 89-112), que os esforços fascistas serão redobrados, com todos os meios sendo empregados na tarefa de cativar os imigrantes.

E que meios seriam estes². Na realidade, o fascismo se serviu de duas vias principais para a busca do consenso no seio da comunidade italiana. De um lado, procurou-se fazer uma penetração direta nesta comunidade através da expansão da rede consular e da implantação, em São Paulo, de órgãos fascistas propriamente ditos: os «*fasci all'estero*», os «*Dopolavoro*», etc.

Ao mesmo tempo em que implantava seus instrumentos de propaganda e doutrinação no Brasil, o fascismo italiano ia agindo por outras vias no esforço supremo de conquistar as mentes e as almas dos italianos residentes em São Paulo. Nesse sentido, o consulado italiano foi agindo, no decorrer de todos os anos 20 e 30 e mais especialmente após a chegada em São Paulo do cônsul Serafino Mazzolini (dedicado propagandista do regime) em 1928, com a intenção de controlar os órgãos que davam vida à assim chamada «colônia italiana». Escolas, jornais, associações (...), esses órgãos foram caindo um após o outro sobre o controle do fascismo, que os transformava em novos instrumentos para a difusão dos valores do regime.

Uma grande estrutura de propaganda foi, assim, organizada com o objetivo de difundir o fascismo em São Paulo. Uma avaliação mais segura do sucesso dessa campanha entre os italianos e brasileiros ainda está sendo desenvolvida, mas não resta dúvida que a ação do fascismo italiano em São Paulo foi

bastante apreciável, merecendo uma atenção maior da historiografia que, até agora, dedicou-se apenas marginalmente ao tema³.

Desde os inícios da penetração do fascismo em São Paulo, porém, este enfrentou a oposição de homens que não concordavam com os atos do regime de Mussolini e que traziam esta luta para a terra paulista.

Já em 1919, de fato, periódicos de esquerda ligados à colônia italiana (como o anarquista *Alba Rossa* e outros) começam a publicar textos contra o fascismo. A primeira manifestação sistemática de antifascismo italiano em São Paulo foi, porém, a fundação do jornal *La Difesa* em 1923, por iniciativa de Antonio Piccarolo, socialista moderado italiano radicado no Brasil desde 1908 e muito ativo na vida da coletividade⁴.

Esse jornal abrigará várias correntes antifascistas (como os republicanos, os socialistas e os antifascistas ligados à *Lega Italiana dei Diritti dell'Uomo – LIDU*) no seu interior, o que levará a conflitos internos. Em 1925, os antifascistas italianos aglutinados em torno do *La Difesa* conseguem criar a primeira instituição antifascista real: a *Unione Democratica*, sendo *La Difesa* seu órgão oficial.

No início de 1926, uma assembleia da *Unione Democratica* faz com que ela se incorpore à *LIDU* e, ainda nesse ano, Piccarolo abandona – pelo que consta, por razões pessoais – a direção do jornal e, apesar de continuar trabalhando nele, a transfere para o antifascista italiano Francesco Frola, recém chegado da Europa.

Frola introduz mudanças no jornal, abrindo-o para outros antifascistas italianos como os anarquistas Oreste Ristori, Angelo Bandoni e Alessandro Cerchiai; os comunistas Goffredo Rosini e Ertulio Esposito e muitos outros. Devido a esta abertura (inimaginável nos tempos de Piccarolo) e a outros fatores (Bertonha, 1995), Frola entra em atrito com Piccarolo, disputando com ele o privilégio de se tornar o representante brasileiro da *Concentrazione Antifascista* (união de partidos políticos italianos antifascistas, com sede em Paris) e o controle do *La Difesa*. Piccarolo vencerá esse conflito em 1930, transferindo a direção do jornal para Nicola Cilla e Mario Mariani, antifascistas recém chegados à São Paulo e que conduzirão, junto com Piccarolo, os destinos do *La Difesa* até seu fim em 1934⁵.

A experiência do *La Difesa* conduzida centralmente pelos socialistas, de diferentes matizes, italianos⁶ – foi a mais importante dentro do antifascismo italiano no Brasil. Mesmo durante a existência do *La Difesa*, porém, outros grupos e correntes mantinham seus jornais e organismos de luta antifascista, como o *Bolletino del Gruppo Socialista Giacomo Matteotti*; o *Il Becco Giallo* de Nino Daniele, o *I quaderni della Libertà* de Alessandro Cerchiai, o *Italia Libera* de Pasquale Petraccone e outros. Estes grupos mantinham um bom relacionamento com o *La Difesa* na gestão Frola mas colidiram violentamente com o jornal quando ele retornou às mãos da tríade «Piccarolo, Cilla e Mariani» em 1930, gerando conflitos internos que ajudaram a minar o antifascismo.

Com o fim do *La Difesa* e da *Concentrazione* em 1934, o mundo antifascista italiano de São Paulo começou a perder fôlego. Ainda assim, ele continuou a lutar, através de movimentos contra a guerra da Etiópia em 1935 e de novos jornais, para vencer a propaganda dos fascios (Bertonha, 1995).

A brutal repressão contra a esquerda pelo governo brasileiro pós 1935 será um sério problema para o antifascismo italiano, que viu cortados os fortes e fundamentais laços que eles haviam conseguido construir com organismos antifascistas, sindicatos e mesmo partidos políticos brasileiros (com ênfase no Partido Socialista Brasileiro) entre 1932 e 1937 e amargou a expulsão ou prisão de boa parte de sua liderança como Frola, Ristori, Esposito, Rosini e outros. Todos esses fatores (que discutiremos mais a fundo em seguir), ajudam a levar o antifascismo italiano de São Paulo a um estado de quase que total apatia no final dos anos 30⁷, o que só será parcialmente modificado na experiência de 1942⁸.

Essa situação de fracasso do antifascismo merece, claro, uma boa explicação. Em princípio, o antifascismo perdeu porque o fascismo ganhou e, para entendermos como isso se deu, teríamos que abordar e discutir as complexas razões que parecem ter conduzido os ítalo-brasileiros a uma adesão concreta ao fascismo (no caso das elites e classes médias de origem italiana) ou, o que foi mais comum, a um sentimento difuso e generalizado de apoio e simpatia à Itália, à Mussolini e ao fascismo, o que é um pouco difícil.

Tratar dessa questão como ela merece demandaria, de fato, uma discussão de diversas questões – como a posição em relação ao fascismo de setores das classes dirigentes brasileiras do período e o seu porquê – que teriam de ser levadas em conta, assim como certas sutilezas do processo (a diferença geracional, o problema da inserção social dos grupos de imigrantes, as variações entre os anos 20 e 30) precisariam ser abordadas para dar um tratamento adequado ao tema.

A possibilidade de realizar isso num artigo de ambições limitadas é bem remota. Na realidade, contudo, entendemos que a relação vitória/derrota entre fascismo e antifascismo é mais complexa do que pode parecer à primeira vista.

De fato, o antifascismo perdeu a batalha em grande parte porque foi derrotado pela propaganda fascista em disputas absolutamente vitais e que vamos abordar (como a atração do apoio do governo e da opinião pública brasileiras e a identificação da italianidade com fascismo ou antifascismo) e também, claro, pelo fato do fascismo ter consolidado seu poder na própria Itália. Por outro lado, porém, o fascismo também ganhou justamente por não encontrar um antifascismo forte e sedimentado na colônia italiana do Brasil. Discutir não só essas batalhas chave do fascismo com o antifascismo como também os problemas particulares que enfraqueceram o antifascismo e o impediram de lutar eficientemente contra o fascismo será o eixo central de nossa discussão, necessária para se entender as dificuldades do antifascismo italiano em se afirmar no Brasil.

O fracasso do antifascismo italiano no Brasil. Uma discussão⁹

A questão que permeia todo esse texto é, como já foi explicitado, a busca de informações para entender como e porque o antifascismo ítalo-brasileiro fracassou e finalmente entrou em colapso no decorrer dos anos 20 e 30.

Responder a essa questão de forma apropriada é bastante difícil e uma das formas de sanar essa dificuldade é, em nossa opinião, o recurso à história comparativa, que deve facilitar – dada a possibilidade de contrastar o caso brasileiro com outros contextos e países onde se travaram lutas semelhantes – a tarefa de entender os sucessos e os fracassos do antifascismo italiano no Brasil do entre guerras.

Antes de tudo, porém, uma definição conceitual é necessária. O que se deve entender por «fracasso» do antifascismo? Como é possível definir se o movimento antifascista fracassou ou não?

No nosso entender, essa questão de sucesso e fracasso deve ser pensada de forma dupla. De um lado, deve-se observar a resultante da interação do antifascismo com o fascismo e de sua disputa pelos órgãos da vida da colônia e, especialmente, pela lealdade e apoio da coletividade italiana local¹⁰. De outro, deve-se analisar a capacidade ou a incapacidade do antifascismo de se manter como movimento ativo e de responder à propaganda fascista. Nesse sentido, podemos perceber como a discussão do fracasso antifascista gira em torno de dois níveis analíticos diversos: o resultado de sua interação e choque com o fascismo e o seu desenvolvimento interno e capacidade de auto manutenção, que também ajudam a explicar, aliás, o resultado de sua luta contra a propaganda fascista.

É bastante curioso, de fato, passar os olhos pela bibliografia internacional relativa ao tema da reação das comunidades italianas do exterior ao fascismo. É possível perceber, realmente, como em alguns dos países transoceânicos como os Estados Unidos, o Canadá, a Austrália e o Peru¹¹, as comunidades italianas mostravam mais receptividade ao fascismo, enquanto em vários países europeus (como França, Bélgica e Luxemburgo) e na Argentina/Uruguai, as propostas do antifascismo conseguiram, mesmo sem ofuscar totalmente o fascismo, maior atenção¹².

É importante observar que, sem dúvida, nem fascismo nem antifascismo conseguiram conquistar completamente as comunidades italianas emigradas e que o que houve realmente foi a presença de minorias politizadas de lado a lado disputando uma esmagadora maioria não politizada e que se inclinava apenas em termos genéricos e difusos entre o fascismo e o antifascismo. De fato, o que podemos identificar são locais onde a minoria fascista foi mais forte e a minoria antifascista mais fraca e um fascismo «difuso» (ou seja, de filiação mais emocional que ideológica e menos definida) esteve espalhado pelo grosso da comunidade italiana e outros onde a minoria antifascista teve mais força que o fascismo e conseguiu, se não espalhar um antifascismo «difuso» entre os italianos, ao menos quebrar o consenso em relação ao fascismo.

Foge aos objetivos desses artigos discutir pontualmente as razões que explicam como, em cada contexto, se desenvolveu a relação fascismo X antifascismo. Algumas dessas questões terão que ser obrigatoriamente mencionadas (como a questão do fascismo como identificador étnico ou a popularidade do fascismo entre os governos e as opiniões públicas dos países ocidentais no entre guerras), mas nos parece que o grosso de nossas reflexões deve se centrar na questão da capacidade ou incapacidade do antifascismo de se manter e de se auto sustentar como movimento autônomo e permanecer combatendo o fascismo.

De fato, tudo parece indicar que um dos fiéis da balança da luta fascismo X antifascismo era a existência de um movimento antifascista forte e capaz de contra atacar sistematicamente a propaganda fascista voltada aos emigrantes. Sendo assim, nada mais correto que centrar nossas preocupações nas razões que explicam a força ou a fraqueza do antifascismo em diversos contextos e, especialmente, no caso brasileiro.

Nesse sentido, os resultados de pesquisa sobre o caso brasileiro são bastante esclarecedores. Cremos ser desnecessário, a esta altura, retomar a história do antifascismo italiano no Brasil e demonstrar sua fraqueza e finalmente seu colapso como força organizada no decorrer dos anos 30. Alguns dados comparativos podem, porém, nos ajudar a colocar em perspectiva a dificuldade dos antifascistas em criar e manter um movimento de oposição sistemática ao fascismo no Brasil daqueles anos.

Em primeiro lugar, é evidente a fraqueza da imprensa antifascista. Realmente, os jornais antifascistas não só nasciam e morriam com imensa facilidade (com a exceção do *La Difesa*) como são numericamente inferiores aos jornais fascistas¹³. Isso causa um imenso contraste com, por exemplo, a França, onde, dos 230 periódicos italianos existentes no entre guerras, nada menos que 180 eram antifascistas (Dreyfus, 1985; Tosi, 1988). O caso belga, onde 20 dos 31 jornais italianos do período eram antifascistas (Morelli, 1981) também mostra a fraqueza comparativa da imprensa antifascista italiana no Brasil.

A questão das associações também revela imensos contrastes do caso brasileiro com o de outros países. De fato, enquanto os antifascistas italianos de São Paulo não conseguiram salvar virtualmente nenhuma das associações italianas (com a exceção da *Lega Lombarda*) da conquista fascista e nem criar associações antifascistas duradouras, aqueles presentes na Bélgica ou na França (Couder, 1993) tiveram muito mais sucesso, enquanto os residentes na Suíça conseguiram até mesmo criar uma sólida rede de escolas, colônias de férias e outras associações para se contrapor às equivalentes fascistas (Bresadola, 1974; Fedele, 1979; Signori, 1979 e 1983). Isso para não falar do caso argentino, onde os antifascistas dominaram a maior parte das associações italianas até o fim da II Guerra Mundial e geraram um «clima» antifascista tão grande na coletividade que Ângelo Trento (Trento, 1992) não hesita em classificar a Argentina como o país de imigração italiana menos receptivo ao fascismo.

Explicar essa situação de fraqueza interna do antifascismo é tarefa que requer bastante paciência para examinar pontualmente cada possível fator de força ou de fraqueza do antifascismo. Ainda assim, é um trabalho necessário e deve ser feito.

O primeiro aspecto que poderíamos elencar como fator de enfraquecimento do antifascismo foram as dissensões internas. De fato, como vimos, não só grupos anarquistas, por exemplo, viviam em contínua disputa com os socialistas e republicanos da *Concentrazione* como mesmo entre os socialistas (o grupo antifascista mais importante no Brasil) o conflito, por questões pessoais e ideológicas, era intenso, como a disputa entre Frola e Piccarolo demonstra exemplarmente (Bertonha, 1994, cap. 5).

Seria um erro subestimar o quanto essas divisões internas enfraqueceram o antifascismo ao desviar suas energias do combate principal contra o fascismo. Isso era, aliás, percebido claramente pela imensa maioria dos antifascistas¹⁴ e pela própria polícia italiana, satisfeita pelos antifascistas gastarem suas forças uns contra os outros ao invés de combater o consulado, o *fascio* e outros órgãos fascistas em São Paulo.

Ainda assim, nos parece que a importância dessas divisões internas é superavaliada. As disputas entre os grupos antifascistas e as internas aos socialistas foram realmente fortes e prejudiciais, sem dúvida, ao esforço antifascista, mas não parecem ter sido suficientes para paralisar – por si só – a ação antifascista, que, mesmo com os grupos separados, continuou se desenvolvendo.

De fato, um exame da ação dos diversos grupos antifascistas revela que, mesmo nos momentos em que as disputas estavam mais violentas, a atividade antifascista – publicação de livros e jornais, palestras, cerimônias – continuava ativa e que ao menos em parte as idéias antifascistas continuavam a circular. Uma maior união teria, sem dúvida, canalizado mais energia para o antifascismo, mas a sua falta não é suficiente para explicar sua fraqueza. Eram, de fato, fatores externos às organizações antifascistas que determinavam problemas aos antifascistas e não o simples fato de eles estarem divididos ou não. Temos, portanto, que ver o processo de forma global e não apenas internamente, de maneira que possamos ter uma visão mais clara do objeto que estamos estudando.

Um outro fator que a historiografia internacional a respeito do tema (Fanesi, 1989 e 1994; Cresciani, 1979 e 1988; Liberati, 1984a e outros) indica como explicação para a fraqueza do antifascismo italiano em diferentes contextos – a não existência de uma liderança de refugiados políticos italianos (os «*fuorusciti*») apta a reestruturá-lo e ativá-lo – não se sustenta no caso brasileiro: ao lado de lideranças já a mais tempo no país (como Antonio Piccarolo, Oreste Ristori e outros) os «*fuorusciti*» (como Frola, Rosini e Mariani) foram presença constante na luta antifascista italiana no Brasil e sua falta não merece ser elencada como fator de debilidade do antifascismo.

Uma outra questão mencionada internacionalmente como importante para explicar a força ou a fraqueza do antifascismo italiano em diversos lugares é a sua relação com as forças políticas locais. Se ela ocorre, podemos ver o antifascismo italiano com mais força. Se não, o antifascismo enfraquece.

Esse aspecto da luta antifascista merece, ao que tudo indica, ser estudado com mais cuidado. De fato, uma rápida verificação da literatura disponível sobre locais onde o antifascismo italiano não teve

tanta força, como a Austrália e o Canadá¹⁵, revela que a ausência de laços firmes com forças políticas locais teve peso chave para explicar essa fraqueza.

Isso fica ainda mais claro quando examinamos os países onde o antifascismo italiano foi mais forte. De fato, todas as informações disponíveis sobre os casos belga, francês, luxemburguês suíço e argentino¹⁶ revelam as imensas ligações dos antifascistas italianos com as forças políticas locais (especialmente os socialistas) e o quanto de oxigênio essas ligações deram aos militantes italianos. Claro que essas ligações não evitavam, por exemplo, problemas dos antifascistas com a polícia¹⁷ e nem podiam, por si só, levantar o antifascismo italiano quando outros fatores inibiam seu crescimento¹⁸.

Eram, porém, uma fonte inesgotável de energia aos antifascistas e sua presença/ausência realmente é uma das chaves para explicar a capacidade ou incapacidade do antifascismo italiano em se sustentar no exterior.

Passando ao caso brasileiro, podemos realmente notar que boa parte do fracasso antifascista no Brasil parece ter se dado pela ausência de laços fortes e seguros dos antifascistas com as organizações de esquerda locais, o que não indica, porém, que os próprios antifascistas fossem os culpados dessa situação.

Cresciani (1979), por exemplo, apresenta a ausência de contato dos antifascistas italianos da Austrália com as forças políticas locais como algo quase deliberado de um grupo relativamente isolado da sociedade australiana. No Brasil, a situação é um pouco mais complexa. De fato, podemos ver como, nos anos 20, o grupo chave do antifascismo – os socialistas –, sob domínio de Antonio Piccarolo e de suas idéias reformistas e anticomunistas hesitava, e muito, em se aliar a quaisquer grupos políticos que não compartilhassem suas idéias, o que o levava a restringir seus laços políticos com os socialistas reformistas brasileiros e o Partido Democrático. Não apenas, porém, esses socialistas reformistas brasileiros eram fracos demais para dar um apoio consistente aos seus colegas italianos, como tudo indica que, mesmo se o antifascismo tivesse aberto suas portas para alianças com outras forças políticas locais, não teria grande sucesso, pois a questão do combate ao fascismo ainda era considerada, nos anos 20, algo a ser resolvido entre italianos e que não interessava aos brasileiros¹⁹.

Nos anos 30, a maior abertura de líderes como Frola a outras forças da esquerda nacional e a própria percepção desta esquerda da necessidade de combater o fascismo ampliou os laços entre os antifascistas brasileiros e italianos e deu, efetivamente, nova força ao antifascismo italiano que, se talvez não estivesse conseguindo se impor na coletividade italiana, passou a contar com uma rede de solidariedade brasileira que foi fundamental para a sua preservação (Bertonha, 1995). A repressão de Vargas em meados dos anos 30 eliminou essa rede e isso, sem dúvida, colaborou para o colapso do antifascismo no final da década de 30.

Esse colapso não pode, porém, ser creditado às ações dos antifascistas italianos. Se, no caso do grupo de Piccarolo, há uma resistência contínua a alianças com quem não compartilhasse seu pensamento, os outros grupos agiram com vigor real na busca de apoios que os fortalecessem e tiveram sucesso nessa tarefa até a repressão eliminar a todos. Nem conflito interno, nem falta de liderança, nem política deliberada de evitar contatos com os nacionais: é no contexto de funda repressão à esquerda e de fraqueza da mesma no cenário político brasileiro do período que devemos procurar as causas do fracasso dos antifascistas em conseguir alianças mais sólidas e que lhes dessem maior força.

Um outro aspecto do contexto do período a considerar quando tentamos entender as causas do fracasso antifascista e do sucesso fascista é a aparentemente ampla e declarada simpatia à Roma dentro da opinião pública e do governo brasileiros no período. Essa é uma simpatia em grande parte dirigida à Itália e ao povo italiano, tradicionais amigos e aliados do Brasil (Cervo, 1992), mas não só o fascismo conseguiu se apropriar dessa simpatia associando a imagem da Itália a sua como alguma simpatia é dirigida especificadamente à Mussolini e ao fascismo, visto como o iniciador de uma era de estabilidade e progresso para a Itália e como o criador de um remédio apto a resolver os problemas sociais do capitalismo sem cair no comunismo.

Claro que um estudo mais pormenorizado dessa aparente simpatia deve ser feito para absorver as especificidades de período, classe, região, etc²⁰. Há indícios, contudo, que ela foi real. De fato, se quiséssemos elencar exemplos de figuras governamentais, da imprensa, do clero e outras que manifestaram seu apreço pelo fascismo no Brasil dos anos 20 e 30, poderíamos ocupar várias páginas desse texto, mas não é o caso. Basta lembrar como, apesar dos enormes esforços dos antifascistas italianos – de todos os grupos – para demonstrar a falsidade da amizade fascista pelo Brasil, a falácia de suas conquistas sociais, a repressão e a miséria dos italianos, etc (Bertonha, 1992 e 1996), eles parecem não ter tido sucesso, o que é explicável pela desconfiança geral da esquerda e pela enorme disparidade de recursos para a propaganda, em termos de dinheiro e material (Seitenfus, 1990, pp. 39-40) entre fascistas e antifascistas italianos em ação no Brasil.

Há mais, porém, a ser estudado quando pensamos na questão da dificuldade do antifascismo em promover sua causa na opinião pública brasileira. Sem dúvida, a disparidade de recursos financeiros e a falta de um sólido apoio de forças políticas locais contribuía para diminuir as possibilidades da mensagem antifascista ecoar com força na sociedade brasileira. Era também, porém, uma questão de cultura política. De fato, em países como – para ficarmos apenas na área geográfica mais próxima ao Brasil e para não mencionar o excepcional caso francês – a Argentina e o Uruguai, uma cultura mais direcionada à esquerda permaneceu forte (em boa parte, aliás, por causa da imigração italiana) e manteve um clima laico, de defesa da democracia e antifascista por quase todo o período entre guerras (Marocco, 1986 e 1993; Fanesi, 1991 e Franzina, 1995, pp. 369-371), o que teve implicações chave para os refugiados italianos.

Realmente, se preservou, nesse contexto, um espaço político onde o antifascismo italiano pôde sobreviver e germinar mesmo quando o fascismo acumulava vitórias e se firmava no poder na Itália. Isso não significa dizer, claro, que não tenha havido vozes pró fascismo nesses países, mas o fato é que o espaço político que os antifascistas italianos da Argentina, por exemplo, dispunham (graças a partidos de esquerda mais sólidos como aliados e à uma cultura política menos voltada à direita, era muitas vezes superior ao disponível para os antifascistas italianos do Brasil, o que sem dúvida é de fundamental importância para explicar a força de um e a fraqueza de outro.

Essa falta de espaço político se refletia numa questão chave: o apoio governamental. É visível na bibliografia internacional que o apoio ou a neutralidade dos governos estrangeiros era fundamental para o sucesso do fascismo e sua propaganda. E isso não apenas no campo institucional (prestigiando suas atividades, etc), mas também num sentido mais amplo: muitos italianos e descendentes de italianos nos países de imigração sentiram-se muito mais tranquilos para apoiar o fascismo quando sabiam que não teriam problemas com seus governos e nem a rejeição de suas sociedades.

Ao lado da tolerância com a propaganda fascista pela maior parte do tempo, os governos dos países de imigração italiana habitualmente dificultavam enormemente a vida e as atividades dos antifascistas italianos. Se isso era verdade até em países onde o espaço político dos antifascistas era maior (como a Argentina ou a França), que dizer de lugares onde a desconfiança governamental frente aos antifascistas era muito maior, como o Canadá ou a Austrália²¹? O caso brasileiro, onde a repressão – entre altos e baixos – era uma continuidade, parece ter sido um caso limite da força da repressão e da falta de espaço político e institucional para os antifascistas italianos.

Essa situação só poderia ter sido remediada se o antifascismo contasse com firme apoio da coletividade italiana. A vitória nessa batalha, porém, não só se relacionava com a batalha pela sociedade hospedeira, como não dependia só da ação dos antifascistas, mas também de fatores não totalmente controlados por eles, como as características de cada colônia e o tipo de emigração dirigida para ela.

O primeiro fator é realmente curioso. Com a exceção da Suíça, onde os antifascistas italianos encontraram, ao iniciar seu exílio, estruturas políticas italianas – especialmente do PSI e do PRI – já presentes desde o final do século XIX (Signori, 1983; Cerutti, 1986; Fedele, 1979 e 1989; Hugli, 1982), a maioria dos antifascistas italianos que emigraram e procuraram refazer o antifascismo no exterior tiveram que reconstruir as seções dos partidos emigrados e as organizações antifascistas a partir do que havia no grosso das coletividades italianas: uma pequena minoria de italianos politizados de esquerda unidos em sindicatos ou associações e uma imensa maioria de imigrantes apolíticos ou apenas parcialmente atraídos pelas idéias de esquerda.

No caso dos países platinos, a ação antifascista foi enormemente facilitada pela cultura política desses países (como já mencionado) e, especialmente, pelas permanência e difusão dessa mesma cultura (permeada pelo mazzinianismo e anticlericalismo) a tal nível no seio das coletividades italianas da Argentina e Uruguai que fez o projeto fascista de expansão via emigrantes fracassar em boa parte nesses lugares (Marocco, 1986 e 1993; Fanesi, 1991; Rossi, 1995 e Franzina, 1995, pp. 369-71).

A respeito desse radicalismo mazziniano, aliás, Rudolf Vecoli (Vecoli, 1989, p. 89) vai se interrogar sobre as razões dele ter fincado raízes na Argentina e no Uruguai e não, por exemplo, nos Estados Unidos. É uma questão realmente chave, pois tudo indica que a sobrevivência desse radicalismo em alguns locais foi chave para a contenção do fascismo.

De qualquer forma, nos locais onde a estrutura política de esquerda italiana não existia já pronta e onde a cultura política da coletividade italiana não favorecia os antifascistas, estes tiveram que criá-la para poder ter armas para melhor combater o fascismo. Eles só conseguiram fazê-lo, porém, nos locais onde o antifascismo era permitido e apoiado pelos cidadãos do país e onde, especialmente, uma forte emigração política italiana (especialmente comunista) forneceu os efetivos para gerar um movimento antifascista forte o suficiente para difundir a mensagem contra o fascismo e criar um «clima» e uma cultura antifascista entre a massa emigrante. Foi esse o caso da Bélgica, Luxemburgo e, especialmente, da França²².

Nos países, porém, onde a cultura política prévia da emigração não era favorável ao antifascismo e onde não houve uma emigração antifascista maciça, a base do antifascismo era muito reduzida para poder superar a imensa propaganda fascista e o resultado foi um movimento antifascista mais enfraquecido e uma coletividade italiana mais voltada ao fascismo.

Passando ao caso específico da coletividade italiana de São Paulo, podemos perceber como o contexto de apoio à nação italiana e à ideologia fascista em partes expressivas da sociedade brasileira parece ter se reproduzido no interior do grande campo de batalha entre fascistas e antifascistas, a colônia italiana. Entre a elite e as classes médias de origem italiana de São Paulo, de fato, a propaganda fascista, que ressaltava tanto o valor ideológico do fascismo como as glórias da nacionalidade italiana, parece ter encontrado um campo fértil: por sua inserção social e pelo contexto político brasileiro do período, a elite e as classes médias de origem italiana de São Paulo tendiam a aceitar a ideologia fascista enquanto os italianos natos pertencentes a esses grupos eram permeáveis a propaganda nacionalista do fascismo. A junção dessas duas fontes de atração – a nacionalista e a ideológica – confluiu numa forte adesão ao fascismo entre as elites e as classes médias de origem italiana em São Paulo. As desesperadas tentativas dos antifascistas de reverter esse quadro atraindo essa elite foram inúteis (Bertonha, 1992, 1994a, 1994b e 1996), o que representou um sério golpe para estes.

Restava aos antifascistas buscar os sindicatos e o operariado de origem italiana que, além de numerosíssimo, pareciam ser a única resposta para a sua angustiante necessidade de base popular. Como já ressaltado, contudo, o apoio dos sindicatos ao antifascismo cresceu nos anos 30, mas em nenhum momento parece ter existido uma adesão maciça e concentrada do proletariado de origem italiana ao antifascismo (Bertonha, 1994a e 1994b).

Essa situação se deveu, a princípio, a uma certa difusão e sucesso do fascismo entre os operários (Trento, 1989 e 1994), mas também ao contexto das lutas sociais e políticas brasileiras do período, onde o grupo base dos antifascistas italianos, os socialistas e seus aliados minoritários republicanos e membros da LIDU, tinha enorme dificuldade – agravada pela necessidade de moderação e neutralidade frente às lutas operárias para fugir da repressão – para fazer passar sua mensagem socialista e, no caso de Piccarolo, fortemente reformista a um operariado sem uma tradição de esquerda tão forte quanto gostaríamos de acreditar (Trento, 1994) e, especialmente, sem uma tradição histórica de adesão ao tipo de socialismo proclamado por aqueles homens.

Dessa forma, enquanto as tradições políticas e culturais e o contexto social atraíam as classes médias e as elites de origem italiana para o fascismo, essas mesmas tradições e esse mesmo contexto afastavam os operários do antifascismo, negando a ele uma base popular maior, a qual se restringiu à Maçonaria durante boa parte de sua luta (Bertonha, 1994a e 1994b).

Mais importante que esses apoios mais firmes ao fascismo ou ao antifascismo, porém, é a questão de um sentimento geral e difuso de apoio à Mussolini e ao fascismo que parece ter existido entre as grandes multidões de italianos e descendentes que viviam em São Paulo. Esse sentimento, que não indica automaticamente uma posição ideológica, é tradicionalmente aplicado, especialmente ao caso americano (Cannistraro, 1976, 1979 e 1979a e outros), como uma resposta de orgulho étnico ou de um «nacionalismo defensivo» pela qual os italianos do exterior articulavam a sua própria identidade e inserção social com o uso do enorme prestígio internacional desfrutado pela Itália e pelo fascismo no período entre-guerras.

Falta ainda precisar os limites temporais desse renovado prestígio italiano e fascista (que não parece ser o mesmo nos anos 20 e 30) e especificar as óbvias diferenças desse «nacionalismo defensivo» nos países latinos e anglo saxões. Também seria importante definir se esse «novo prestígio» italiano no entre-guerras se deveu apenas aos sucessos italianos na arena diplomática ou também ao interesse mundial pela fórmula fascista.

Ainda assim, o «nacionalismo defensivo» parece ter existido e ter sido real no caso brasileiro. Há autores (Cannistraro, 1979, p. 127), porém, que afirmam que a base da propaganda fascista para o exterior era a destinada a criar um «clima nacionalista» entre italianos e descendentes e que um dos grandes erros dos antifascistas foi ter respondido a essa propaganda nacionalista com argumentos ideológicos.

No caso brasileiro, é possível perceber que isso não é verdade (possivelmente, porque o governo brasileiro restringia menos a propaganda ideológica fascista que o americano) e que a propaganda dirigida aos itálos locais não esqueceu, ainda que enfatizasse o aspecto nacionalista, a ideologia, como muitos exemplos podem demonstrar²³.

Também os antifascistas italianos do Brasil perceberam essa dupla face da propaganda fascista no Brasil e reagiram à altura, procurando demonstrar aos italianos locais as falhas e deficiências da ideologia fascista e desenvolvendo todo um trabalho para que esses italianos não se rendessem ao orgulho nacionalista e apoiassem o fascismo por isso.

A base desse esforço antifascista consistia em convencer os italianos que as equações básicas divulgada pela propaganda fascista – «Fascismo= Itália» e «Antifascistas= traidores» – eram errôneas e que, pelo contrário, para ser italiano era necessário ser antifascista. O esforço antifascista nesse sentido foi intenso (Bertonha, 1992 e 1996) e, nos sinais de fracasso que detectamos nesse aspecto da ação antifascista (e que podemos explicar pelo real desejo de imigrantes e descendentes de reafirmar seu orgulho étnico através do uso do novo prestígio da Itália e do fascismo), está uma das chaves para explicar a vitória fascista sobre o antifascismo.

Dessa forma, enquanto em países como a França (onde o clima político era majoritariamente à esquerda), o antifascismo foi o canal de integração dos italianos à sua nova sociedade²⁴, em países como os Estados Unidos e o Brasil, foi o fascismo que teria fornecido às comunidades italianas o elemento que elas necessitavam para recuperar a auto estima e se integrar ao seu novo mundo²⁵.

Isso apenas confirma, na realidade, como a questão da aceitação ou não do fascismo ou do antifascismo pelas coletividades italianas do exterior era uma questão interna às coletividades italianas e que dependia de características próprias de cada uma delas (sua cultura política, a presença maciça de imigrantes recentes politizados e outros fatores determinando força ou fraqueza do antifascismo; as características – idade, relações de trabalho e classe, nível de assimilação cultural – de cada coletividade, etc) mas como esses fatores internos estavam conectados de forma definitiva com as suas próprias sociedades hospedeiras, o que deve ser sempre ressaltado.

O caso brasileiro é exemplar nesse aspecto. Não só a elite e as classes médias de origem italiana de São Paulo responderam muito favoravelmente, dadas sua posição de classe e a um relacionamento mais harmônico com a idéia do nacionalismo italiano, ao fascismo como o grosso da coletividade foi atingida por um sentimento fascista «difuso» gerado pela imensa simpatia dirigida ao fascismo em largos setores da sociedade brasileira, a qual fazia da adesão informal ao mesmo um excelente meio de superar velhos preconceitos (certamente não tão grandes como nos países anglo saxões, mas ainda assim presentes) contra os italianos²⁶ e de integração à sociedade brasileira. Esse sentimento marcou a coletividade italiana do Brasil no entre guerras e foi um dos traços chave da vida dessa coletividade no período.

O antifascismo poderia ter revertido essa situação, mas só o poderia ter feito se as condições da colônia fossem outras e se o movimento conseguisse se manter estruturado e ativo durante todo o tempo. O fato dele não conseguir fazê-lo, pelas razões expostas no decorrer desse texto, decidiu o destino da coletividade italiana do Brasil que, se não foi certamente a quinta coluna de invasão do Eixo que tanto preocupou alguns políticos e militares brasileiros nos anos 40, ajudou a difundir a idéia fascista no interior da sociedade brasileira, alimentando e cultivando uma simpatia sempre existente e que teve efeitos políticos nada desprezíveis na história política do Brasil ao dar força a uma direita nacional que ajudaria a conduzir os destinos do país por muitos anos além do ventênio fascista.

Notas

- ¹ Cumpre ressaltar que São Paulo não foi o único estado brasileiro afetado pela propaganda fascista. Todos os lugares onde havia comunidades italianas e especialmente o sul do país também foram atingidos. Para a situação no Rio Grande do Sul, vide Berenice Corsetti (Corsetti, 1986). e os textos de Loraine Slomp Giron (Giron, 1986 e 1994).
- ² Um verdadeiro manancial de informações sobre a ação fascista no Brasil pode ser localizado em Ângelo Trento (Trento, 1989, pp. 267-404).
- ³ Os melhores textos disponíveis no momento sobre a questão são os de Ângelo Trento (1988, 1989 e 1994).
- ⁴ Sobre Piccarolo, vide Andreucci (1975, vol. 4, p. 121-123); Hecker (1988) e Bertonha (1994 e 1994c).
- ⁵ Sobre Mariani e Cilla, vide Bertonha (1994, pp. 96-99), o processo de expulsão de Mario Mariani (Arquivo Nacional AN – IJJ 7, 1930) e as fichas de Mariani e Cilla no Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo/Delegacia de Ordem Política e Social (AESP/DOPS), Prontuários 516 e 7070.
- ⁶ Foram, de fato, os socialistas o grupo antifascista italiano mais importante em atuação no Brasil entre as duas guerras mundiais. Essa constatação, que não implica em desconsiderar as colaborações dos anarquistas, comunistas, republicanos e outros, vale tanto para os anos 20 como para os 30. Para o período 1923-1934, vide Bertonha (1994).

- 7 No fim dos anos 30 e início dos 40, de fato, a própria Delegacia de Ordem Política e Social de São Paulo registrava o colapso do antifascismo italiano e sua redução a poucas reuniões – inofensivas, segundo o próprio DOPS – nos salões da Lega Lombarda, Ver AESP/DOPS, Prontuários 999 («Bixio Picciotti»), 10569 («Lega Lombarda»), 78310 («Nicola Alessi») e 2433 («Francesco Merola»).
- 8 Para a experiência de reconstrução do antifascismo italiano em São paulo em 1942, ver Bertonha (1997).
- 9 Vários dos argumentos discutidos aqui serão aprofundados em um futuro trabalho sobre a ação do fascismo italiano nas coletividades italianas do exterior e especialmente sobre a brasileira. Um livro com história do antifascismo italiano no Brasil (cujo capítulo final é este artigo) e um outro sobre a ação fascista no Brasil estão em fase final de redação pelo autor.
- 10 No que concordamos com Adriana Dadà , que defende a proposta que temos que articular a derrota de um com a vitória do outro num todo coerente e conectado com as forças sociais e políticas em jogo em cada país se queremos entender realmente o que ocorria nas comunidades italianas do exterior naqueles anos. Ver Dadà (1979).
- 11 Para o caso americano, vide, entre outros, Cannistraro (1975, 1976, 1979, 1985 e 1995). Para o caso canadense, ver Harney (1984) e Liberati (1982, 1983, 1984, 1984a) e, para o australiano, Cresciani (1973, 1979, 1979a, 1979b, 1982, 1984, 1988 e 1996) e Montagnana (1987). Ciccarelli (1988 e 1990) aborda o caso do Peru. Obviamente, não se pretende aqui esgotar a imensa bibliografia sobre o tema nesses países.
- 12 Para o caso belga, consultar os textos de Anne Morelli (Morelli, 1981, 1983, 1987 e 1990). Para a Argentina, ver Fanesi (1989, 1991 e 1994); Gentile (1986); Leiva (1983) e Nascimbene (1987 e 1990), enquanto o Uruguai foi estudado por Gianni Marocco (Marocco, 1986 e 1993) e Juan Oddone (Oddone, 1990). A bibliografia sobre a França é muito numerosa. Ver, por exemplo, os trabalhos de Guillen (1981, 1982, 1984 e 1988); Milza (1967, 1981, 1983, 1987, 1988, 1989) e Noiriel (1983 e 1986).
- 13 Pela listagem presente em Trento (1989, pp. 489-510), de fato, há registros de 32 jornais antifascistas e 72 fascistas ou filo-fascistas no Brasil entre 1922 e 1945.
- 14 Vide Fondazione Pietro Nenni/Archivio Pietro Nenni, b. 5, f. 303, carta de Antonio Cimatti (São Paulo, 25/2/1930) à Pietro Nenni; AESP/DOPS, Prontuário 1014 («Ertulio Esposito») , carta de militante antifascista de Curitiba/PR (26/1/1931) ao mesmo.
- 15 Vide Cresciani (1979, 1979a e 1988) e Liberati (1984a).
- 16 Para a Argentina e o Luxemburgo, vide Leiva (1983) e Fayot (1983). O caso belga foi estudado por Morelli (1987 e 1987a) e Pinzani (1966) e o francês por Guillen (1978); Fedele (1976) e Di Lembo (1982). Informações sobre a Suíça podem ser encontradas em Cerutti (1983 e 1986); Visani (1957) e Zucaro (1970b).
- 17 Ver Lonne (1984), Fayot (1983) e Guillen (1978).
- 18 Como foi o ocorrido na Inglaterra e na Alemanha. Ver Lonne (1984) e Keserich (1975).
- 19 É curioso realmente notar como essa percepção do fascismo como problema italiano esteve presente, nos anos 20, até em países onde o firme apoio da esquerda aos antifascistas refugiados (por solidariedade ideológica e humanitária) foi uma constante, como a França (Di Lembo, 1982). Aparentemente, só em lugares como a Suíça – onde a ameaça fascista estava muito próxima – é que o fascismo era realmente uma questão política chave desde o início do regime. Ver Cerutti (1983 e 1986).
- 20 Como o feito por Luigi Bruti Liberati (Liberati, 1982) com relação ao Canadá.
- 21 Ver os trabalhos de Luigi Bruti Liberati e Gianfausto Cresciani, citados e, para o caso do Canadá, ver também Betcherman (1978)
- 22 Santi Fedele (Fedele, 1992) e Pierre Milza (Milza, 1983; 1989 e 1994) vão recordar que os fascistas não eram tão fracos e nem os antifascistas tão fortes assim no contexto francês. Ainda assim, parece evidente, à luz da historiografia francesa (Damiani, 1986 e 1986a; Guillen, 1988; Videlier, 1986) , que o antifascismo teve mais sucesso em espalhar um sentimento 'difuso' de apoio às suas idéias que o fascismo, no que a situação é virtualmente a oposta, como veremos a seguir, da ocorrida em países como os Estados Unidos e o Brasil.
- 23 Ver, para exemplo dessa dupla face da propaganda fascista, os discursos do cônsul Serafino Mazzolini em São Paulo em 1928. Ver Mazzolini (1928).
- 24 Vide Damiani (1994); Guillen (1982 e 1988) e Noiriel (1986). Caredda (1994) e Rapone (1986) vão por alguns limites no papel dos antifascistas italianos nessa integração, o que não parece mudar, porém, o quadro geral.

- ²⁵ Vide, entre muitos outros textos sobre o tema no contexto americano, os textos de Philip Cannistraro, citados e excelentes críticas e delimitações do conceito de «nacionalismo defensivo» e o seu uso em Venturini (1984, 1985 e 1985a). Ver, para o caso brasileiro, Font (1990, pp. 140-43). Ver também Franzina (1995). O trabalho de Ottanelli e Gabaccia (1997), demonstra, de qualquer forma, como o antifascismo era um canal mais adequado para facilitar a integração dos italianos nas suas novas sociedades que o fascismo, que só promoveu esta integração de forma indireta.
- ²⁶ Ver Ribeiro (1985). Curiosamente, esses preconceitos contra os italianos parecem ter convivido sempre com uma certa simpatia pela Itália e pela cultura italiana, como mencionado anteriormente.

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A personal essay on Italian Americans in Chicago and Illinois politics in the Twentieth century

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Chicago

Italian pride swells at the success of its emigrants around the world. Italian hospitality welcomes all «returning» emigrant descendants, but it welcomes none so extravagantly as Italian American elected officials. Whether it be the exalted Governor of New York or the more humble Mayor of Chicago Heights, the fact that the American electorate has chosen as a leader someone with an Italian name, validates us all. Together our world-wide network of Italians has discovered America!

But, alas, the news that I have to report of dramatic political success in Chicago and Illinois politics is meager. No Italian American has ever been a serious contender for Mayor of Chicago or Governor of Illinois. There have been no Cook County Board Presidents with Italian names. In fact, only two Italian-named persons have ever been nominated for statewide office by a major party. And only one of them (as of this writing), Jerry Cosentino, has ever been elected to statewide office as Treasurer in 1978 and 1986. After living in the state for a century, that's all that the population of half a million Italian Americans has gotten out of Illinois.

Exaggerated and oversimplified? Of course, but this stark record is reason enough to give us pause to learn the rest of the story. It is the purpose of this personal essay to sketch a narrative of political events in the city and state that can suggest an analysis and explanation for the comparative political weakness of Italian Americans in Chicago and Illinois. The very measure and definition of political power also come into play. Do we assess political success by counting the number of Italian-named people in elective office? Is it the behind-the-scenes power brokers who really count? Other considerations include patronage jobs, symbolic issues, and real issues like neighborhood redevelopment. Any explanation will, no doubt, tell us as much about the American political environment as it will about the Italian American political community.

Italians have been in Chicago since the 1850s. Up until about 1880, the group consisted of a handful of enterprising Genoese fruitsellers, restaurateurs, and merchants with a sprinkling of Lucchese plasterworkers establishing themselves in the central city and the near North Side.

Most Chicago Italians, however, trace their ancestry – with some important and notable exceptions – to the central and southern parts of Italy and to the poor and illiterate country folk displaced by the land and economic policies of an uncaring government. This wave of unskilled southern immigrants came to the United States between 1880 and 1914.¹ Most of them were young men, birds of passage, who intended to work for a season or two and return to their families. Many did just that. Others became part of intricate chains of migration that re-established villages and towns in Chicago's neighborhoods and suburbs. The culture they brought with them, while not quite the culture of the Roman Empire or the Italian Renaissance, was richly textured, agrarian, peasant, Catholic, and family-oriented. One writer has gone so far as to describe the South Italian culture as being so exclusively family centered (amoral familism) as to discourage the development of trust in government, the education system, and voluntary associations.² The original Italian immigrants of the peasant class were also imbued with a *campanilismo* (loyalty to hometown clans) and almost certainly brought with them a cultural bias against political participation.

As a rail center, an industrial center, and America's fastest-growing major city, Chicago offered opportunities for immigrants from all nations. In the mid-nineteenth century it was the mecca for German and Irish migration. In the early twentieth century, Italians, Russian Jews, and Poles found a place in Chicago. Later, African American from the South, Mexicans, Asians, and a steady stream of others added their presence to the city, making it today the home of sizable colonies of over eighty different nationalities.³ Chicago's Black population is second only to that of New York City; at one time or another

it has been the largest Lithuanian city, the second largest Polish city, the second largest Bohemian and Ukrainian city, and the third largest Swedish, Irish, and Jewish city in the world.⁴ But it has never been claimed that Chicago had enough Italians to be one of the largest Italian cities of the world. Being part of the complex interaction and outnumbered by the Irish, Poles, Blacks, and Hispanics, Italian aspirations for power and prestige have often been thwarted. Efforts at developing internal unity and at building coalitions with other ethnic groups have not offset their numerical weakness. And while Italians have played a significant role, they have never been as important in Chicago's mix of ethnics as they have been in New York, for instance.

Into the 1950s Italians clustered in neighborhoods north, south, and west of the Loop business district. Significant additional Italian colonies sprang up in the suburbs of Melrose Park, Chicago Heights, Blue Island, and Highwood. Downstate in such places as Spring Valley, Cherry, and Herrin Italian coal miners and former coal miners settled. Though ethnic population statistics are always somewhat suspect, it appears that by the 1920s Italians made up about 5 per cent of Chicago's population. This figure has remained relatively steady throughout the last decades of the century and in the absence of high profile issues, outstanding leaders, and coalition building, there would seem to be no reason to expect political dominance from Italians in Chicago.

Writing about the political interaction of ethnic groups in Chicago before 1936, John Allswang observed of the Italians that they were relative latecomers to the scene – 82 per cent of them arriving here after 1900 – after the rules had been set and the Irish had ensconced themselves in the Police and Fire Departments. Moreover, apparently practicing the sojourner mentality, Italians were slow to apply for citizenship. Even by 1920, only 35 per cent of Italians had obtained citizenship and the right to vote. That is about half the rate of the foreign born Irish, Swedish, German, and Norwegian population.⁵ The lag in female citizenship and voting among Italians was another debilitating factor. Interest in political participation among the immigrants advanced enormously in the 1920s when Prohibition enforcement became a major local issue.

On the national level, Italian Americans generally supported the Republican Party. Whether this was an aversion to Woodrow Wilson's racism and his anti-Italian stance on the Trieste issue in the Versailles Treaty is unclear. Competition with Chicago's Irish who controlled the local Democratic party may also have been a factor in pushing Italians toward the Republican column. Both of the major Italian language newspapers generally supported the Republican Party on the national level.⁶ Moreover, Capone's alliance with Republican Mayor William Hale «Big Bill» Thompson gave Italian voters yet another reason to support the GOP. Italian voters seemed to break ranks in 1928 to support Democrat Al Smith who was the first Catholic major party presidential nominee. Later Franklin Roosevelt brought Italians and most other ethnic groups into his winning Democratic coalition that lasted into the Nixon years, by which time Italian Americans had moved comfortably into the Republican middle class. Since the 1930s, the Democratic Party has been the only game in town in Chicago, successful Italian political operatives from the City tend to be Democrats (except for the West Side Bloc). Suburban politicians tend to be Republican while Downstate Illinois seems to produce Democratic leaders.

Chicago's Italian community also included a small cohort of socialists, loosely affiliated with the American Socialist Party. The latter had some credibility before World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution. Under the leadership of Giuseppe Bertelli and his *La Parola del Popolo* the tiny group supported the labor movement and fought Fascism, with some elements of the group surviving into the 1980s thanks to Egidio Clemente's valiant efforts to keep *La Parola* alive.⁷ There was also a good deal of Anarchist activity in the Spring Valley area.⁸

Despite the fact that Italian Americans have not reached the highest offices in the city and state, some progress was made on the ward level even before 1900. Not much is known about the first Chicago aldermen, Stephen Rovere who served in the City Council from 1885-1897 or Frank Gazzolo (1892-1913).⁹ Schiavo lists Frank Brignadello, Stephen Malato and William Navigator as elected state representatives in the 1890s.¹⁰ Italian immigrant voters seemed to ignore the local recommendations of the two prominent Italian American journalists of the era, Alessandro Mastro-Valerio (*La Tribuna Transatlantica*) and Oscar Durante (*L'Italia*) who were allies of Jane Addams and her circle of reformers in the West Side Italian neighborhood. Instead, Italian voters supported bosses like Irishman Johnny Powers (Gianni de Pow to Italian speakers) in return for minor patronage jobs and municipal services packaged as political favors.¹¹

In his upbeat 1928 analysis of Italian politics in Chicago, Schiavo claimed that the group was «beginning to climb the ladder.» He then proceeded to list a dozen office holders including State Senator James Leonardo, State Representatives Joseph Perina, Charles Cioa, Michael Durso, Aldermen A.J. Prignano and William Pacelli, City Sealer Daniel Serritella, Chief Clerk in the Prosecutor's office, Peter Granata, and Board of Improvements member James Vignola as men with a future. But Schiavo reserved his

highest accolades for former Judge Bernard Barasa, «the leading Italian in politics in Chicago.»¹² Though he ran unsuccessfully in mayoral and county primaries in the early twenties, Barasa never achieved the success that Schiavo had predicted for him. Serritella, on the other hand, became Ward Committeeman and a powerful State Senator from the First District. Granata later became one of the West Side Bloc, nominal Republicans who at strategic times switched their votes to support the Democratic Kelly (later Daley) machine. Both Serritella and Granata ended up with besmirched reputations.¹³

Humbert Nelli describes the rough and tumble struggle of colorful Anthony D'Andrea, president of the (mostly Italian) Hod Carriers' Union and the Unione Siciliane (and also an «unfrosted priest, red light district luminary and convicted counterfeiter») against Johnny Powers in the Near West Side 19th Ward 1921 aldermanic race. Typical of the era, the campaign was marred by political bombings, feuds among Italians who supported rival candidates, kidnappings, and fist fights.¹⁴ Despite his ability and willingness to fight fire with fire, D'Andrea lost to the «Prince of the Boodlers» by 389 votes. In May 1921 D'Andrea was dead, the victim of a shotgun attack. To avoid this kind of embarrassing challenge in the future, the Powers and the Council majority increased the number of wards from 35 to 50 making sure to gerrymander the Italian vote in Ward 19, where it was a majority, into four different wards, where Italians were in the minority.¹⁵ It was only through the efforts of Al Capone later in the decade that Italians were able to capture political power on the Near West Side.¹⁶

In contrast to Schiavo, Nelli's analysis of Italian American political figures in the 1920s portrays the group as pals of Al Capone. Nelli and the Capone biographer contend that by the mid 1920s, Big Al was the most powerful Italian American political figure in the City and people like Serritella, Granata, Pacelli, Prignano, and Roland Libonati (pictured in the Schiavo book) were Capone cronies.¹⁷

Organized crime and elected officials have a natural affinity. Candidates need campaign funds and volunteers while bootleggers, gamblers, and pimps need elected officials to «look the other way» and apply lax enforcement of the laws concerning their illicit commerce. Add to that situation the universal unpopularity in Chicago of the Prohibition law and the fact that some Italian American political figures had grown up with (or were related to) organized crime functionaries, and you get a formula for undermining the credibility of Italian American office seekers. It is a stereotype which has dogged ambitious Italian Americans since that era.

John Kobler presents evidence that Serritella served as Capone's agent in the City Council in the 1920's.¹⁸ Capone and other organized crime leaders helped engineer the mayoral victory of Bill Thompson over incumbent William Dever. From 1923 to 1927 Dever had waged a sincere battle to enforce Prohibition as the law of the land and had been so successful that Capone was forced to move his operations outside the city limits for a time. But Thompson, who described himself as «wet as the Atlantic Ocean,» promised a wide open town with 10,000 new speakeasies. Needless to say, Capone and his rival bootleggers jumped heavily onto Thompson's bandwagon. Capone reportedly used every technique of bribery and terrorism on behalf of Thompson and Kobler credits the gangster with coining the slogan «Vote early and vote often» in this 1927 election.¹⁹ As the anonymous wag put it, «Chicago politics ain't bean bag.» Big Bill's electoral victory created a situation in which Capone claimed to have half the Chicago Police Department on his payroll (\$300,000,000) and to have thousands of Italian immigrant families producing illicit beverages to satisfy millions of thirsty Chicagoans – policy also led to increased competition among the bootleggers which escalated into widespread violence, the most spectacular example of which is the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

Thus, the Italian American electorate and political leadership was schooled in an milieu in which bossism triumphed over Jane Addams' reformism, one in which non-Italian bosses were often the best sources for patronage jobs, and in an atmosphere where most political campaigns were characterized by violence, intimidation and hooliganism. The practical reality of this era is that almost all politicians of whatever ethnicity were corrupt. Italian Americans in the late 1920s did not need Sacco-Vanzetti or Mussolini's American Fascist movement to make them (confused) cynics? Better to focus on honest work and family affairs.

It is with this dubious heritage that Italian Americans moved into the second half of the century. The boys came home from military service, the population moved to the suburbs, and the working class generation was succeeded by a better educated, more middle-class cohort. This generation, or these next two generations after 1950, produced a wide range of office seekers and political pressure groups who used a variety of approaches but somehow never found a degree of success that could satisfy the group's desire for place and respect. They were not alone. The Irish-oriented Democratic Machine leadership had since the early thirties stingily parceled out perks and incentives to the European ethnic groups and in the last part of the century faced additional demands from African Americans and Latinos for their share of the

pie. The success of African Americans in getting elected as Mayor, Cook County Board President and U.S. Senator in the 1980s and 1990s only increased the frustration level of the Euro-ethnics.

The general pattern for Italian American political achievement in the two decades after World War II was for a half dozen Italians to be elected to the Chicago City Council (out of 50) from the wards in which they could find some Italian base. Some of those same districts and the Proviso Township (Melrose Park) and the Chicago Heights areas generally elected a handful of Italian Americans to Springfield. It continued to be an era when candidates, officeholders and patronage workers had to have a «sponsor.» As the writer, Milton Rakove, brilliantly put it «Don't make no waves. Don't back no losers.»²⁰ This could have been the slogan for two generations of savvy machine operatives who knew how to take care of themselves and their relatives. Occasionally Italian American aldermen got caught up in the periodic corruption investigations that are a staple of Chicago politics. All Chicago politics is based on place and influence. The one time that an Italian issue did emerge in the 1960s – when Mayor Richard J. Daley decided to tear down the Italian neighborhood to make way for the University of Illinois at Chicago – the Italian elected officials rolled over and played dead, leaving only a heroic housewife, Florence Scala, to lead a fruitless battle to save the near West Side Italian community.²¹ In fact, when the north side Sicilian neighborhood was programmed for public housing (Cabrini-Green) there was even less resistance.

The most colorful of Chicago Italian politicians, Vito Marzullo became a precinct captain in 1920, was elected state representative in 1940, and became alderman from the near Southwest Side 25th Ward in 1953. Fiercely loyal to the Democratic machine, Marzullo put into practice the maxim that «all politics is local politics.» He was a powerful ally of the first Mayor Daley and in the 1980s was referred to as the dean of city council. Lionized at Harvard University, where he lectured in nonstandard English, Marzullo, perhaps unconsciously, symbolized the limited ambitions of his generation of ethnic politicians.

Frank Chesrow (Cesario) parlayed a college education, training as a pharmacist, a honeymoon trip to the Amazon, and experience in the U.S. occupation forces in Italy into a seat on the Cook County Sanitary District Board and then on the County Board itself where he served as a Commissioner from the 1960s to the 1980s. His brother, a physician also worked for Cook County as director of the Oak Forest Hospital.

Roland Libonati in 1957 became the first Illinois Italian American elected to the U.S. Congress when he was chosen in a mid term election in the 7th District (Central Chicago and the West Side). A veteran member of the West Side Bloc in the Illinois House and Senate, Libonati's Democratic seat was passed on to Frank Annunzio in 1964. And on the state level, Senator Peter Granata continued into the early 1960s to reign as chief of the West Side Bloc.

The two most significant and enduring factors in Italian American political circles in the last half of the century were the Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans and the Justinian Society (Italian American Lawyers).

The JCCIA was founded in 1952 in response to the Republican State Central Committee's removal of Emil Caliendo, a candidate for municipal judge, from their ticket because of recent organized crime activity in the city that had nothing specifically to do with Caliendo. The city-wide fledgling organization was made up of leaders from 50 different Italian American clubs and under the leadership of Joseph Barbera was able to get the Republicans to reinstate Caliendo. Thus began the work of the officially non partisan umbrella organization that became the official voice of the Italian American Community of Chicago. Under the guidance of Anthony Sorrentino, (who served as executive director into the 1980s) and a series of well known community activists who served as presidents, the JCCIA became the arbiter of culture, prestige and honor within the Italian Community as well as the champion of the Italian American reputation against those who would defame it.²²

By the mid-1960s the JCCIA was working closely with newly-elected Congressman Frank Annunzio. The dominant political figure among Chicago Italians from the '60s to the '90s has been Democratic Congressman Frank Annunzio. Annunzio began his career in the mid-1930s as a business arts and history teacher. He later became the legislative and educational director of the Steel Workers Union, and then Director of the Illinois Department of Labor in the administration of Adlai Stevenson. In the later 1950s he played an important part in the Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans' campaign to support the Villa Scalabrini (Italian home for the aged), bringing together the two most dynamic groups in the city. The personal alliance between Annunzio and Fr. Armando Pierini (Director of the Villa) was a powerful and a lasting one. In the 1964 Lyndon Johnson landslide, Annunzio was elected to Congress from the 7th District, succeeding Roland Libonati. In Washington, Annunzio successfully fashioned for himself the role of «leading Italian American Congressman.» He was a major protagonist in getting Columbus Day proclaimed a national holiday. He spearheaded earthquake relief funding for Italy in 1978, and he used his influence to promote the fledgling Washington-based National Italian American Foundation. He was the

champion fund-raiser for Villa Scalabrini and for the Joint Civic Committee, and he was responsible each year for attracting a top political celebrity to be the grand marshal in Chicago's Columbus Day Parade. Annunzio served until 1992 when old age and redistricting hastened his retirement. Perhaps not so coincidentally, Congressman Marty Russo (a younger man with a more «modern» political style) from the South Suburbs was defeated in the primary election by Congressman William Lipinski, a darling of the machine, in a newly-created district that favored the latter. For the first time in thirty years, Illinois Italians were without a Congressman to call their own until Republican Donald Mazullo of Rockford was elected a few years later. Mazullo, however, seems much less interested in pursuing an ethnic agenda than his Italian American predecessors.

Another major organization with significant political influence is the Justinian Society, an active fraternity of Italian American lawyers whose roots go back to the 1920s. Its membership has at times reached as high as 1000 and the leadership of this group has vigilantly monitored judicial appointments on the city, county and state levels for almost a century. Sometimes the Society has been so successful that Italian names seem to be overrepresented in the judiciary. This is a result of several factors. There are thousands of Italian American lawyers in the city, and every lawyer wants to be a judge. Constitutionally, judges in Illinois are elected, but many judicial careers begin with appointment to mid-term vacancies. And lobbying by the Justinian Society and other intermediaries has often produced favorable results. Moreover, the judiciary offers a political career without the necessity of enduring an all-out political campaign and the inevitable Mafia smears and innuendoes that are mounted against any candidate with an Italian name. On the other hand, in recent judicial elections, many experienced, well-respected Italian American judges have been knocked off by unknowns with Irish names. It is clear that when the voting public is confronted with choosing names on a ballot of candidates who are unknown to them, Irish names are more appealing than Italian, Hispanic or Polish names. In fact, judicial candidates have been known to change their names to acceptable Irish ones to get elected. Though none serve at present, several Italian Americans have sat on the State Appellate Court, and only one, Moses Harrison III of Carlinville has ever been elected (and is currently serving) on the Illinois Supreme Court.

The post war era also saw the emergence of a new independent brand of Italian American politician. Closely in touch with his Italian roots Anthony Scariano became one of the most accomplished Italian Americans in the state. Born in 1918, he grew up in the North Side Sicilian neighborhood. His development was influenced by the Chicago Commons Settlement House. In the late 1930s and early 1940s Scariano attended George Washington University. During World War II he was recruited into the OSS, the forerunner of the CIA. His undercover work in Northern Italy and Naples during the war was featured in Stud Terkel's *The Good Wa*²³ After serving in the OSS, Scariano worked his way through Georgetown Law School by serving as a guard at the Capitol Building and later as assistant to Illinois Senator Scott Lucas.

Scariano moved to Park Forest, opened a law practice in Chicago Heights and was elected to the Illinois State House of Representatives as a Democrat in 1956. He distinguished himself in the legislature as a champion of education and of the open meetings act. Scariano was so popular with educators and labor unionists that in the 1964 «Bedsheet Ballot» in which all 236 state representative candidates ran statewide for 177 seats, he ran third. He served in the Illinois House until 1973 when he was appointed to the Illinois Racing Board by maverick Governor Dan Walker. Previously a critic of the board, Scariano is generally credited with reforming the operation which had been plagued by scandals. In 1985 Scariano was appointed to the Illinois Appellate Court and elected in his own right to a ten year term in 1986. After a distinguished career on the bench he retired in December 1996, at the height of his prestige among Italians and non Italians in the state. He speaks perfect Italian and Sicilian and is one of the founding members of SACA (Sicilian American Cultural Association), and was recently installed as its new president. He currently writes a *Fra Noi* column on the origins and meanings of Italian names.

Scariano has often spoken of his frustration with the bossism of Mayor Richard J. Daley and of his embarrassment with the antics of his West Side Bloc legislative colleagues. If there were a figure whose advancement would have uplifted the reputation of Italian American politicians, it was Scariano. But his liberalism and his independence won him more favor with journalists and the progressive elements of the Democratic party than it did with the regular party slatemakers. He was especially shunned by the party regulars for his vote (with the Republicans) for a statewide grand jury to investigate organized crime.²⁴

Coming out of the same geographic area as Scariano, another «modern» political figure of similar campaigning style, but of different politics, was Republican State Senator Aldo DeAngelis. The son of Marchegiani immigrants, DeAngelis was elected to the Illinois Senate in 1978 where his business background, personal skills, and liberal Republicanism (he supported John Kennedy in 1960) made him so popular on both sides of the aisle that he was quickly brought into the leadership circle. Renowned for his

ability to bring state funds to public projects within his district, DeAngelis was honored on the national level with an appointment by President Reagan to the Columbus Quincentenary Committee in the late 1980s. In 1990 he ran for the presidency of the Cook County Board, a post traditionally dominated by Democrats. Despite his pleasing personality and a vigorous campaign, the Senator was defeated. And though he lost by a wide margin, DeAngelis attributed a good part of his deficit to the unacceptability on the county level of his Italian (first and last) ballot name. Changing demographics and a highly spirited campaign by newcomer Debbie DeFrancesco Halvorson defeated DeAngelis in his bid for reelection in 1996. Nevertheless, De Angelis continues to wield power in his new role in Springfield as a legislative lobbyist for some of the largest interest groups in State of Illinois.

In the post war era, only one woman, Theresa Petrone, emerged as an enduring political force. The wife of a county judge from a political family on the near North Side, Ms. Petrone was a long term appointed member and sometime chair of the Illinois State Board of Elections. A quick perusal of state Blue Books²⁵ (biannual directories of elected and appointed officials) revealed that several females from downstate served briefly as State Representatives, sometimes assuming the unexpired term of their deceased spouse. Otherwise, this writer is unaware of female Italian American elected officials with a significant and enduring power base.

It was also, finally, in 1978 that the first Italian American was nominated by a major party for statewide office. A Democrat, Jerry Cosentino had served on the Metropolitan Sanitary District Board before he was slated and elected State Treasurer by a margin of over 150,000 votes. His bid for the patronage rich post of Secretary of State in 1982 against Jim Edgar was a failure,²⁶ but he bounced back and was elected for a second time as Treasurer in 1986. In 1990 Cosentino again garnered the Democratic nomination for Secretary of State, but lost this time to George Ryan.²⁷ Later, charges mainly related to deceptive practices in his private trucking business resulted in a brief prison term for a man who once embodied the highest political ambitions of Italian Americans in Illinois. Observers often refer to the Cosentino experience as the reason party leaders are reluctant to support Italian-named candidates. With Jerry Cosentino, Italian Americans finally got the break for which the ethnic group had been waiting a century but were unable to capitalize on the opportunity.

On a less heady level in state government in the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, the original West Side Bloc was replaced by people who got better press. For instance State Representative Ralph Caparelli is the dean of the State Representatives, currently serving his 28th year in the Illinois House and serving as a political columnist for *Fra Noi*. Also in that group were more Republican suburbanites like Aldo DeAngelis not beholden to the Chicago Democratic machine. Downstaters like Edwardsville Democrat Sam Vadalabene (named Outstanding Legislator of 1969 by the Association of County Superintendents Schools), Rockford Democrat Zeke Giorgi (known as Father of the Illinois Lottery), Carlinville Representative Vince Demuzio (a onetime Democratic hopeful for Secretary of State) and Spring Valley Democrat Richard Mautino (Chair of the Small Business Committee), despite their party affiliation were equally free to practice a degree of independence and help combat the stereotypes.

For a few years in the 1990s sometime State Representative Gary LaPaille chaired the State Democratic Party. Italian American representation in the State Legislature reached its peek in the 1993-94 session when 16 of the 177 members of both houses were Italian – almost 10% representation from 5% of the population! This fact gives credibility to the informed opinion of *Fra Noi* editor Paul Basile who insists that recent Italian American political leaders have been remarkably successful in light of the fact that the ethnic population is relatively small and scattered.²⁸ Moreover, Italians seem to have been able to establish themselves in both parties, insuring access no matter who is in power.

DuPage County, west of Chicago, began booming in the post war era, attracting many former city residents including Italian Americans. Sheriff Richard Doria emerged in the 1970s and by the late 1980s, a Republican Italian, Aldo Botti was elected DuPage County Board President. This broke the mold. DuPage has only a tiny Italian population. The post was an *executive one* and the DuPage arena seems about as distant from the Old Machine as one could get.

This era also saw the appointment of several Italian-named men as assistants to Governor Walker (Victor De Grazia) in the 1970s and Governor Thompson (Henry Anselmo) in the 1980s. Exactly what impact these gentlemen had on policies or patronage affecting the Italian American community is unclear. Also unclear is the impact of current Republican Attorney General Jim Ryan who is Italian on his mother's side. Sadly, Ryan and his family have been overwhelmed by a series of medical problems which he has faced with great courage.

Historically, the number of Italians in the larger electoral units has never been great enough successfully to challenge other more populous ethnic groups. However, in electoral units such as suburbs

like Chicago Heights a base of 10,000 co-ethnics and a little coalition building can bring success, as it did for Mayor Charles Panici. Originally elected in 1975, Panici built up the most powerful Republican organization in the state, and his town was rewarded for that by a visit from President Reagan in 1986. Seven years later, Panici and most of his City Council found themselves in Federal prison convicted of bribery and racketeering.

On the plus side, a survey of the current mayoral scene reveals that some key Italian American mayors are leading their towns in a progressive direction. Anthony Vacco, the Dean of Italian American mayors, is in his 30th year as Mayor of Evergreen Park, a southwest adjacent suburb with a population of 21,000--mostly of Irish and Dutch descent and few Italians. A Republican turned Democrat, Vacco attributes his success to the respect that he shows toward all elements of his community, an attitude that he attributes to his Italian upbringing.²⁹ Ron Serpico, the new Mayor of Melrose Park sees himself as a reformer who also bases his political approach on respect. In 1995 he led an ethnic coalition that swept the long ensconced Italian American incumbents from office. His ambition is to remold the image of Melrose Park by opening up the lines of communications within his community and by actively cooperating with neighboring municipalities.³⁰

Jerry Genova has done such a good job of cleaning up Calumet City and ridding it of its «Sin Strip» that he has become the darling of the local press.³¹ Still a young man, the popular reformer was an unsuccessful candidate for Stated Treasurer in the 1998 Democratic primary. And in Chicago Heights Democratic Mayor Angelo Ciambrone (elected in 1995) strives to re-invigorate the town of 32,000 challenged by past political corruption and neglect. Young Peter Silvestri creatively doubles as President of Elmwood Park and Cook County Commissioner. The suburbs of Burr Ridge and Frankfort also have Italian American mayors.

In 1994 a group of Italian Americans led by Anthony Tortoriello (an executive in the utility industry) formed the Italian American Political Coalition. Although committees with similar names had surfaced in the past (usually during election years), the Italian American community had never had a viable and continuing organization forthrightly devoted to the promotion of Italian American interests in politics. The group aimed to provide a «political voice for the Italian American community» and it emphasized that the Italian vote could be the balance of power in any close election. After considering all the foibles of such a venture such as the diversity of class, politics, and geography *within* the Italian community, the IAPC settled on a formula. They would strive to register every Italian American in the state, to publicize political issues and candidates through statewide mailings and, most importantly, to hold endorsement hearings to choose candidates most in tune with the Italian American agenda. And high on that agenda was the recruitment and support of Italian American candidates for as many offices as possible. The IAPC also appealed to the Italian American public to break their long honored stereotype and contribute money to political causes like IAPC and the campaigns of individual Italian American candidates. In short, the IAPC set up shop to become a credible player in the crowded arena of ethnic/interest group politics in Illinois.

The Devil, however, is in the details. The IAPC's first major test came in the 1996 election when the lion's share of attention was focused on conservative State Senator Al Salvi's underdog bid to become U.S. Senator. Here was the opportunity of a lifetime to shatter the stereotypes, to make the kind of breakthrough for Italians in Illinois that John Kennedy had made for Catholics in 1960. With some notable exceptions, the IAPC was able to mobilize the Italian American community behind Salvi with financial support and endorsement even from some lifelong liberal Democrats. The *Fra Noi* sang Salvi's praises and the IAPC did all the right things. The commitment to Salvi was greater than that given by the Italian American public to any co-national in the history of Illinois. Unfortunately, Salvi was defeated 60%-40%, rejected by the voters because of his conservative stances on abortion, and gun control and his own inept campaign tactics. In picking up the pieces after the wrecked campaign, some observers felt that at least the IAPC had established its procedures that could be plugged in later to support a more viable candidate. Others more darkly suggested that the Salvi fiasco had proven once again how little the support of Italian Americans really matters. In any case, Salvi has managed to get on the Republican state ballot again in 1998, this time as a candidate for State Treasurer and the IAPC under the leadership of its president, Anthony Fornelli (himself an aldermanic candidate a few years ago), has gone about its recruitment and endorsement efforts in the 1998 election without overemphasizing Salvi.

Meanwhile, the IAPC can look to a number of younger Italian political leaders who show some prospect of appealing to a broad enough spectrum of voters to get elected to higher office. Anyone of the following could possibly be the messiah who delivers Illinois Italians «Cuomo-like» from the agony and disrespect of being left out of the game. The aforementioned mayors Genova and Serpico or some of the Italian politicians who have emerged in DuPage county like Aldo Botti or Chief Judge Michael Gallaso might

be the ones. Alderman Charles Bernardini was originally appointed by Mayor Richard M. Daley to represent the upscale Lincoln Park area. Bernardini has an impressive resume as a top-level corporate attorney for Allstate Insurance, former Cook County Commissioner, and director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Italy. After suffering defeat in a 1996 State Senate race, Richard Della Croce (who changed his name back from «Kress») defeated an Irishman on St. Patrick's Day 1998 to become Democratic Township Committeeman in thriving (non-Italian) Orland Park. Angelo «Skip» Saviano went from a position of Supervisor of Leyden Township to Republican State Representative from the Melrose Park area. Mentored by Senator DeAngelis, Saviano is encouraged by the de facto Italian American caucus in the state legislature to preserve Columbus Day as a national holiday.³² Second generation State Representative Frank Mautino from the Spring Valley area has shown considerable interest in education issues. Another young personable leader is Cook County Commissioner Peter Silvestri of Elmwood Park who seems eminently capable of expanding his political base far beyond his West Suburban district. Freshman Democratic State Representative, Mike Giglio, might be the one or ones who create the breakthrough. And Debbie DeFrancesco Halvorson, who toppled DeAngelis in the South Suburbs, might very well be a viable candidate for the state ticket in 2002.³³

After more than a century of venal efforts, false starts, missed opportunities, and small successes Italian American political leaders stand at the brink of an uncertain future. No one knows quite what the meaning and purpose of Italian or any other kind of ethnicity will be in the 21st century. But it is clear that those with higher ambitions need to broaden their base, become inter-ethnic diplomats perhaps to fashion a coalition of elements who share traditional cultural values and common economic interests. The presence of Italian Americans in the councils of both parties is an encouraging sign. The one certainty that reins is that the bad old days of gangster-ridden and machine dominated politics are gone.

Endnotes

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Italian American ethnic politics in New York

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The phenomenon known as «ethnic politics,» while less familiar outside of the United States, is a common staple of American political practice. This custom is associated with ethnic groups, that can be described as groups, that while residing within the nation, are set off from other groups by religion, race, or nationality, or some combination of the same. Current pre-occupation with multi-culturalism is an example of its continuity. To aver that ethnicity continues to remain an important component in American politics is to acknowledge that «ethnic politics» has surfaced repeatedly during electoral campaigns. On a national level in the nineteenth century one can cite the efforts of the Democratic party assiduously cultivating Irish immigrants to support Andrew Jackson's candidacy for president in the 1820s, or the Republican party's attempts to convince German Americans to vote for Abraham Lincoln in 1860. Likewise the twentieth century saw Franklin D. Roosevelt's careful construction of the New Deal coalition that was heavily dependent on attracting ethnic groups such as Jews, Italians, Irish, and African Americans.

However, it is on the local plane, of state, county, town, city and village levels that the influence of ethnic politics is more readily manifest. At these levels ethnic politics finds its strongest expression and leads to the enshrining of certain elective offices to various ethnic groups. Thus, in New York one finds congressional districts that are undisguisedly African American or Puerto Rican, and councilmanic districts that are Asiatic or Orthodox Jewish.

To a considerable degree Italian American political activity revolves around the concept of «ethnic politics», one that has enabled them to emerge as political forces who must be included in the political enterprise. From the beginning, Italian Americans began to gain meaningful inclusion in the political process to the extent that they could demonstrate political power as a result of organizing themselves into voting blocs that could effect political outcomes. Fiorello H. LaGuardia is an early twentieth century example of an Italian American whose political upward mobility rested on a strong Italian American home base. Generoso Pope, because he was the publisher of «Il Progresso Italo Americano», a powerful organ among Italian Americans during the 1930-50 period, notwithstanding his prior pro-Mussolini posture, was courted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was desirous of keeping the Italian American vote in the Democratic party column. By 1950 Italian Americans had come to be so dominant in New York City's political scene, that the three main candidates for mayor were all Italian-born: Vincent Impellitteri, Ferdinand Pecora and Edward Corsi. New York Italian Americans both within and without New York City continue to be active political performers, as witnessed by the contemporary careers of Mario Cuomo, Geraldine Ferraro, Alfonse D'Amato and Rudolph Giuliani.

What do the results of the 1997 elections tell us about the present? Interestingly the results inform us that the majority of nearly 18 million New York State residents are governed in municipalities and counties headed by Italian Americans. They are Mayors Rudolph Giuliani, Anthony M. Masiello and Roy Bernardi, re-elected mayors of New York City, Buffalo, and Syracuse respectively, and Thomas Gulotta and Andrew Spano as County Executives of Nassau and Westchester counties. All of this is topped off by the partial Italian background of George Pataki, current governor New York. This is a truly remarkable development when one considers that Italian Americans were virtually absent from the political scene only a few generations ago. Although Fiorello H. LaGuardia became the first Italian American elected mayor of a large New York city in 1933, it was in the last two generations that Italian Americans were elevated to other important New York executive offices: Ralph Caso elected Nassau County Executive in 1970, Alfonse D'Amato elected United States Senator in 1980, and Mario Cuomo elected governor in 1982.

The occupancy of so many Italian Americans in high political offices is indeed impressive. It is, however, part of a piece, a development that has seen a steady emergence of Americans of Italian heritage in New York State government in recent decades. The presence of Italian Americans in the New York State

Legislature, which includes the New York State Assembly and the New York Senate, offers further convincing evidence of the ethnic groups' political emergence. The best estimates are that in the 1990s Italian Americans represent approximately 16% of the population of New York State. Whereas in 1950 only 23 Italian Americans (6%) were members of the New York State Legislature, by 1974, 40 were Italian Americans (16%). From 1982 on the number of Italian Americans in the New York State Legislature have far exceeded their percentage reaching 34% in 1994.

With respect to political party affiliation, for most of this century most Italian Americans elected to the New York State Legislature were Democrats, a fact that underscored their proletarian orientation as well as their urban concentration. However, commencing with the 1960s a decided movement to the Republican party has taken place. In part attributable to right-wing swing in politics on the part of an increasing number of ethnic groups in recent decades, it is also a concomitant of the movement into suburban areas of New York. It is in the suburbs that the political emergence of Italian Americans is especially evident.

By 1997 the presence of Italian Americans in New York politics has become so palpable that it causes observers to remark about a superfluity of Italian American officeholders. The prodigality of Italian Americans is evident on local levels, particularly the suburban town of Hempstead, the country's largest town, which if it were a city would be comparable to cities like Baltimore. In contemporary Hempstead concern has been registered that with four of the seven town board members of Italian heritage, there are too many, thereby precluding consideration of any other of that nationality for the position at this time. The Italian political profusion is also manifest on a statewide basis. Thus, in the aftermath of the November 1997 election which saw Nassau County Executive Thomas Gulotta win re-election with a huge majority, the «New York Times» speculated that Gulotta's potential elevation to a statewide elective office was jeopardized by an over-abundance of Italian Americans in politics. «Ethnic background poses another barrier for Mr. Gulotta. The presumptive state ticket already has two Italian-Americans, United States Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato and State Attorney General Dennis C. Vacco.» («New York Times» November 30, 1997) Gulotta's case is ironic in that his father overcame ethnic prejudice by becoming the first Italian American to win county-wide office as District Attorney in 1945. «There once was once a time when being Italian meant that you, couldn't be in politics. Now they're saying the same thing to Tom, [Thomas Gulotta] for the different reason that there are too many already in office.» («New York Times», November 30, 1997).

The recent experience of Italian Americans in New York's political arena is extraordinary. Whereas shunned and openly discriminated a couple of generations ago, they are common currency of late. Although of recent evolvment, another development is discernible, namely the emergence of Italian American women to political office. Again a look at the demographic makeup of Italian Americans in the New York State Legislature is helpful. The fact is that Italian American political representation has been male-dominated. Until the present generation not only were virtually all Italian Americans elected to the New York State Assembly and the New York State Senate males, but there was a near absence of Italian American women even as candidates. As of 1994, only six female Italian Americans had been elected to the State Legislature, and of that number five currently hold such offices. While a small number when compared to some other ethnic groups such as Jews and African Americans, it nevertheless may mark the beginning of a trend.

While prognostication is understandably subjective and speculative, the historical record demonstrated that the people of New York State have accepted Americans of Italian descent as political leaders. The growing approbation on the part of the body politic to choose members of the ethnic group for public office stands in sharp contrast with the political realities of a couple of generations ago. Although it would require further study, there is an impression that the New York situation has some relevance for some other states in which Italian Americans make up a substantial part of the population such as New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts. It is of course not known whether this trend will persist for any considerable period. What can be said is that for the present and for the immediate future, Italian names will be familiar currency among New York officeholders and if New York has its usual influence elsewhere, the Italian American political phenomenon may be manifest in other parts of the country as well.



Italian Canadian cultural politics: the contradictions of representation

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From absent to invisible

The status and situation of Italian Canadians could be said to be representative of the general trends of North American cultural politics. The reason I quickly reference my introductory statement to a North American context is that, after 12 years in the U.S., I have seen the pedagogical value of Canadian pluriculturalism be diminished as it is influenced by the more polarized but undeniably impressive American situation. South of the border we find a diversity of movement toward the emphasis of cultural heterogeneity and an increase in the political presence and cultural emergence of ethnically and racially different groups. An overview of this diversified field of interaction makes it increasingly apparent that Italians in the United States have accepted for too long a complacent position away from the troubled front-lines of mainstream/margins struggles. Current attempts at producing an Italian American consciousness and reality withstanding, it may in fact be too late to rescue an Italian American identity that is not plagued by *menefreghismo*.

Italians in Canada, as with the Canadian multicultural landscape in general, have always had at their disposal a more balanced, at least on the surface, approach to the issues that surround questions of language, national background, ethnicity, race and citizenship. And yet, today, Italian Canadians find themselves much closer to the situation of their American cousins, in terms of cultural presence and voice, than to the many other groups that move within Canadian politics. In other words, Italian Canadians are slowly but surely becoming invisible and silent.

As the current president of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers this essay emerges from reflections based on my activities within that association. Fourteen years after Italian Canadian writers met in Rome, Italy, we can list an impressive roster of publications: novels, poetry, non-fiction, scholarly studies and essays. And yet, it appears that we have hardly made progress since the foundation of the Association in Vancouver, in 1986. This apparent inertia is the result of a number of different coinciding factors: changes in aspects of institutionalized multiculturalism, the influence of US ethnic and minority studies, and the commodification of ethnicity and race, to name three.

In the first instance, changes in the designations of multiculturalism, the institutionalization of visible and invisible as categories of ethnicity, have served to the detriment of both. The divisiveness of such designations should be more than apparent, yet we have come to accept them uncritically. Why? Because they play on the very fears that nevertheless keep us tied to the institution of officially sanctioned multiculturalism. These shifts in categories are double edged. On the one hand they offer support to those who view themselves, or are viewed, as minorities; on the other hand they hold out the promise of mainstreaming. What else can «invisible minority» mean but that we who fall under that designation are on our way to officiality, to mainstream? Those who remain in the «visible» grouping are given secondary status until they can whitewash themselves as well. For the time being they too view «invisible minorities» not as minorities at all, but as mainstream.

The reality of it all is that reconstitution of these designations slowly but surely work to disappear ethnicity, difference, and diversity and groups such as the Italian Canadians risk being erased by these

policies. Even, as some would suggest, if we put our hope on the rapidly changing demographics to give us the numbers to sway official policies, in my pessimism I tend to see the hope in demographics as a losing proposition in a losing race with the deception of assimilation. Why the pessimism? Because as we await our turn at the voting booth we have turned our backs to the potentially constructive alliances that could emerge across ethnicities and race to provide us with a demographic presence immediately. While things as they are might more accurately represent the general multicultural horizon, I believe that the current situation instates an artificial disarticulation of alliances and creates in its stead a competitive and potentially confrontational environment. This, in addition to the disappearance of certain cultural groups (a positive outcome in the opinion of those who ridiculously long to be «simply Canadian») and the construction of skin pigmentation as a cultural determinant. Oddly enough, the latter, in manifestations such as «the melanin school» re-establish positivist anthropological categories as acceptable commonplaces on both sides of the political spectrum.

This takes us directly into the second point and the influence of US paradigms on the more complex but less confident Canadian model. Working along the current Canadian lines of visible/invisible has made the dominant US dichotomy of black/white infinitely influential. While the binary US model is necessary to a certain extent given the historical fact of slavery and its extant influence, it must be recognized that it has been instrumental in obliterating a greater diversity. Ethnic studies departments, such as the one at my university, are mostly understood to mean African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American. As the only recognized «ethnicities,» these are the categories that appear on school registration forms, on employment applications, on social security forms. These, and the other ethnic category of White, are an example of the commodification of race and ethnicity at the political level. White as an ethnic category is an absorptive construct that signifies cultural obliteration and has little to do with race or ethnicity. It merely implies an acceptance of assimilation and a willingness to take on the cultural dictates of officialdom.

The general tendencies of my research are in the exploration of what might have precipitated Italian North Americans' non-reaction to being disappeared, in their inaction at the forgetting and undoing of their history. Many have chosen to resolve this by seeking refuge within an odd sort of non-descript nationalism that goes by the name of *italianità*. This term of cultural essentialism is mired in a static mode of cultural alienation and historical illusion. Most Italian Canadian literary anthologies continue to limit themselves to self-representations in terms of this *italianità* filtered through a purely «immigrant» or «ethnographic» key, all written in forms and genres that mirror official or canonical ones, and show little sense of challenging the norms that define the exclusive category of «mainstream.» The effect is a diminishment of what may be truly different in ethnic/minority culture. For this reason purely conventional narrative forms of reminiscence are of little interest to me. Having the courage to delve into the mechanics behind how things have come to be marks the emergence of hybridity, the situation in which, in Marshall McLuhan's terms, «new form is born.» (McLuhan, 63) There are myriad new forms active and possible in hybridity that require different reading strategies, ones that do not easily fall into expected thematics, yet these works receive little if any attention. Mary Melfi and Fulvio Caccia, for example, are among the most important and least analyzed writers we have. The reasons for this may be that hybridity is a discontinuous condition and that, in its disruption of official «rules of recognition,» it defines a moment of uncertainty that is at best uncomfortable for those who relegate minority cultures to a precarious perch between a rock and a hard place. We might, however, also consider that this inattention may simply be related to the fact that thematic criticism of minority cultures is an industry which, as it is sponsored by institutionalized multiculturalism, stands to lose its subsidized existence.

Resisting nationalisms

The warnings and speculations that are offered over and over regarding the disappearance of minority writing, mostly by the adherents to New Criticism, have, oddly enough, been framed in terms of assimilation. It has become a deceptive standard belief that minority writers who move beyond theme-guided poetics that mark their immigrant and/or minority status, are expressing their desire to assimilate. Quite the contrary, the maintainment of both critical attention and creative energies at a level of thematic referents and experience, while appearing to provide a documentation of minority life, become supportive of a divisive and oppressive cultural politics. These trends, supposedly championing minority expression, end up in serving to easily diminish and dismiss important minority and ethnic writing. By simultaneously representing minority culture as a developmental stage, these attitudes ensure its demise by valorizing stagnant and repetitive modes. That this work is also written in forms prescribed by official culture further

diminishes their power in the constant comparison that is drawn between it and canonical standards, standards that emerge out of completely different and incomparable situations, thereby ensuring for the minority products an inferior and secondary status. As such, this game detracts all of minority culture's legitimacy and works to diminish its political, social and cultural influence. The emphasis of a sub-nationalism (*italianità*), beyond the dichotomy of Canadian nationalism, supports the diminishment of Italian Canadian culture through the imposition of nationalist cultural and linguistic guidelines. *Italianità* is a bankrupt proposition because it is from its inception a distinction of categories that denies cross-cultural influence and dialogue and emphasizes standardization and homogeneification. A discontinuous, hybrid, post-emigrant approach is more conscious of its history, less compartmentalized and admittedly multifaceted. Its success rests in the willingness to activate an awareness and faith in one's beginnings that will carry beyond nationalisms toward a comparative diasporic studies.

The achievement of a point at which Italians outside of Italy might begin to assess and engage a comparative discourse, such as I have hinted at above, means coming to terms with one's history. We must face the fact that the terms by which Italians throughout their history in North America have been judged are ones that were established in Italy itself. The racialized history of North/South relations in Italy becomes a useful instrument in the denial of rhetorics of disappearance and further denies the detraction of culture and the absorption initiated by that detraction. Finally, it objects to the steadily advancing and progressive diminishment of cultural diversity that institutional multiculturalism requires. The reasons as to why we must return over and over to our past history are that, first of all, we have as yet to utilize its lessons, and, secondly, because still today we are faced with the terms of its effects.

The nineteenth century attitudes of positivist theorists of «race,» who were busy considering the position of Southern Italy in the context of the Italian nation, helped establish the ground upon which Southern inferiority became an unquestioned scientific «fact.» (Teti, 112) Alfredo Niceforo's emphasis of the anthropological proximity between Italian Northerners and the Germans and the English, in contrast to their distance in a similar manner to Southern Italians, coupled with cultural and social variants, lead to his suggestion for the governance of these two Italies, North and South, through two radically different systems. The proposed establishment of two Italies, the North as a democracy and the South under a dictatorship, to account for two races, two psychologies, two geographies, was all meant to justify divisive and differential treatment of the population and the imposition of the dictates of the component (the North) on the inferior one (the South) (Teti, 79). The reason that I stress these beliefs and quote them as I have in other writings, is that these are the attitudes that followed Italians when the emigrated to the U.S., Canada and most elsewhere. These have been the terms of the internal dynamics of Italian Communities abroad, as well as the terms of others' definition of the Italians upon their encounter. And, though we may notice many Italian names within the rolls of Canadian government at the local, provincial and federal levels, names such as Caccia and Nunziata, we must finally ask what the impact of these names has been within a larger conscious rendering of an Italian cultural political in Canada.

Historically, the tendency for immigrant generations to deny their past has been tied to the marginalizing effect of difference. In general, this means a move toward ethnic and racial, as well as political legitimacy, as defined by «whiteness.» By this equation, «white» has developed as an alternative term for «nationalism.» «Whiteness» is the line of defense and battle cry of those who find no justification for their exclusionary politics but who have cynically detected the unease that most people feel at being categorized outside of the mainstream. Whether it is an attack on the rights of both legal and illegal immigrants in the United States, or placing of the blame for the failure of the Quebecois separatist cause on the backs of immigrants, or the separatist/racist rhetoric of Bossi and his state of Padania, for whom the ideal citizen is «white and catholic,» it would appear that nationalism and whiteness have become undeniable synonymous in political, social, and cultural terms.

As such, in the North American political field, Italians occupy an uneasy but potentially interesting and useful middleground whose effects in undermining «whiteness» could be explosive. Italian Canadians have yet to exploit such a rich position and continue to be caught in the contrasting desires that, on the one hand, lead one at all costs to a conscious disassociation with what official culture deems inferior and, on the other, to an undeniably inherent sense of difference and an attachment to one's culture.

While some may read in these statements a threatening conflation of ethnicity and race, they are not meant to be a dismissal of either one or the other. Rather, it is the acknowledgment that these are plastic categories that flow in and out of each other and that hold different meanings in different places and situations. Race, face and place are tightly bound elements that influence each other to various degrees in time and space. We are the irrevocable products of their interactions and their interpretation. This is part and parcel of a postemigrant condition that values diversity and community-based

individualism, and despises the extreme political and ideological act of disappearance that has been fostered upon us and in which we have become participants.

The last decade or so has seen an increase in the political and cultural consciousness of Italian Canadians. Possibly, this may be a result of a new-found confidence stemming from a recognition of one's own cultural products. Undoubtedly, in the US it is a result of the ground breaking work of other so-called ethnic or minority writers, Black, Chicano, Native American, etc., but in Canada, while Italian Canadians have been at the forefront of this cultural production, they have lagged behind considerably in articulating a corresponding politics. The last few years have seen the publication of a variety of critical works that address issues specific to the Italian experience abroad and generally applicable to being an ethnic minority in Canada: Joseph Pivato's *Echos*, Antonio D'Alfonso *In Italics*, Francesco Loriggio's *Social Pluralism*. Yet, even within all this apparent progress in assessing the positions of expatriate cultures within the Canadian landscape, I do not consider it an exaggeration to state that beyond these few books, the majority of the work of Italian Canadians is rooted in a misguided nostalgia. Not a re-envisioning or re-telling of the immigrant experience as lived mostly by our parents and grandparents, which would indeed be a valuable point of reference if historicized and related to the root causes and effects of emigration. Very little work goes beyond that experience to analyze the conditions in which successive generations have come to exist. For all its importance, the immigrant experience is but one part of the inventory to be compiled by Italians abroad. We must recognize and emphasize the lives of those who came before us, document and preserve their stories, but we must also delve into the realities that created those individuals and the ones that resulted from their experiences which, in turn, have gone to create the basis for our own existence as non-immigrants.

The edges of inhabitation are distinct.
Morning light barely reaches through the curtains.
The wound of description fits every shade of expression.
A hundred, two hundred
a thousand more and more
accompanied by music distant
and faint sainthood makes sense.
A woman catches a rabbit and then lets it free.
A man looks for her along both sides of the path.
Grass grows hip-high and golden.
Stopping to consider the scene he remembers
that it is somewhere else. She is no longer
waving. He no longer sees her.
A glass of water on the night table.
Slippers by the bed side.
A dog in the courtyard.
A man alone and a woman waiting.

We inhabit the foreign, we are the foreign. However, this exciting proposition is undermined by Italian Canadians' move into invisibility («invisible minority»), both as a result of multiculturalist legislation and as a function of a residual mythology of Italian nationalism. The latter seems to gather strength in direct relationship to the strengthening of the former. Oddly enough, the more Italians come to think of themselves as assimilated, the more (Italian) nationalist they become. We paradoxically stand in awe of a supposed Italian culture of origin, a culture that by its own terms defined us as superfluous and foreign. I would suggest that, at this point in history, what requires our attention are the conditions by which the line defining «home» and «abroad» has come to be erased, and the continuing effects of cultural belittlement that cause so many of us to attempt a reintegration into an exclusionary concept and ideology, *italianità*.

Italian unification, the creation of the Nation state and a way through which to achieve an Italian national identity, meant the elimination of those deemed to be «non-Italian.» Emigration was the product of this process. Beyond it, the twenty year reign of Fascism also foregrounded a cultural homogeneity that was instituted under the term *italianità*. How, then, could such an obviously prejudiced and weighty term be taken as a term of identification by Italians abroad? The role of every Italian writer outside of Italy who is ready to acknowledge that our history has yet to be written, and that terms of nationalism such as *italianità* only serve to delay its emergence, is to destroy any notion of Italian culture and history that denies the presence and influence of Italian emigration and its extensive extra-national polis.

Identity politics holds a major position in the Canadian cultural landscape. Writers such as Neil Bissoondath and Nino Ricci have achieved prominent positions within this context. I bring up their names only to emphasize that my denial of Italian nationalism does not correspond to Bissoondath's attack on ethnicity or Ricci's cynical abuse of Italian emigrant history in his recently completed novelistic trilogy. Their critiques remain superficial and self-serving devices that are only meant to raise them as individuals above what they appear to view as the dung-heap of immigrant and ethnic cultures. Critics of ethnicity fail to recognize that ethnic discourse does not seek to occupy a space (either past or present) but represents discourses that cross other discourses, that mediate and are mediated in their position vis-à-vis others. Ethnicity is not merely content but a full-fledged economy in which content is continuous with form, language, modes and systems of production and dissemination (which of course means diaspora and expands the current restricted ground upon which that term is engaged).

Assimilation, invisibility, and the language of disappearance

Since for Italians language has always been a term of culture and social distinction, as the «la questione della lingua» intimates, it is not unusual that this same *questione* would arise to challenge Italians outside of Italy. Language is the skin of culture. Language is the assumed difference. In an extra-national context, language is part of the terminology of ethnicity that often becomes lost or circumvented by more current terms of distinction as dictated by each particular situation that generates them. Canada, with its French and English bilingual policies as the defining paradigms, is a society extremely conscious of the value of language as a political tool.

We know that the Italian linguistic landscape has long been rather diversified and heterogeneous. The value and resilience of the so-called dialects, that crowd within the relatively small geographical space, that in Italy has only recently been challenged by cross-fertilization with standard Italian. In contrast to this, Italians in North America have always referred to their languages (dialects) as Italian. This false self-representation created for many years the impression of a culturally and politically cohesive community bound by a common language and heritage. It came as quite a surprise and disappointment to some when recent Statistics Canada reports showed that Italian had fallen in the national standings of prominence: Chinese has overcome Italian as the second most spoken language in Toronto, and the third in Canada.

Already, a couple of years ago, Antonio D'Alfonso responded to the 1996 *Statistics Canada* report that placed Italian Canadians among the most affluent groups in the population. Quite rightly, in «Stats describe complacency of Canadians born in Italy: Writer says community's culture is poor» (*Tandem*, August 10, 1996, 2-3). D'Alfonso asks pressing and disturbing questions of the community: So, we have money? But what has this done for us? «The fact that Italians have money does not mean that they are any better off than recent immigrants. Quite the contrary, I tend to believe that the new immigrants, in many cases, have acquired through intelligent cooperation, more rights than has the established Italian community. [...] The only lesson I learned from StatsCan is how complacent we Italians in Canada truly are. Let's never forget: The only future our children will know is what Italian Canadians leave behind in books, music and art. And that comes from education and schooling and serious community and cultural life.» (D'Alfonso, 1996, 2)

What is at the bottom of this lack of commitment to community among Italian Canadians? I believe that the answer must in some way be sought out through Italians' relationship with language. The new set of statistics that describe Canada's linguistic competition provoked yet another response, this time by *Eyetalian* editor John Montesano. Given space in the «Opinion» page of «The Toronto Sun», the newspaper that first published the statistics regarding the decline of Italian as a language in Canada, Montesano attempts to give a background to this development in a piece entitled «Dialects explain drop in spoken Italian.» Montesano tells «Sun» readers that the reason Italian has dropped in the standings is due to the fact that today more people speak their dialect rather than Italian. This would be a fine opinion to state in support of the trend, since it shows that linguistic diversity is alive and well, if only it were true. Montesano informs his readers that an anti-dialect prejudice existed and persists, yet fails to mention that the Italian linguistic landscape has never been homogeneous in the way that he presents it. He states that it was up to «the post-World War II group [of emigrants] that was entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the language in this new country,» and tells us that he «attended Italian language courses for years in grade school.» Tullio De Mauro and others have consistently shown that Italian as a lived language failed to filter through to upward of 75% of the Italian population until well into the 1970s. So, how can we expect «post-World War II» immigrants to have «maintained» a language that for all effects

and purposes was foreign to them. What matter that Ontario offered course in Italian for its grade school students if, as Montesano himself seems to report, it was nothing more than another foreign language; and not one as useful as English or French in the new country.

To give the predominance of dialects as a reason for the decline of Italian is to misrepresent Italian immigrants historically and culturally. Italian immigrants to Canada had their dialects as primary languages. Their levels of formal education and their regional ties back home dictated the access they were given to legitimate representation within Italian communities abroad. This is indicative of a cultural conditioning that has relegated dialects to a minor position. To speak dialect outside of one's own group has come to signify a lack of education and a lower intellectual standard. That many immigrants should declare themselves as Italian speakers in census studies merely reflects pressures to assimilate into an Italian national image as much as their need to feel a part of a larger community. Ironically, these very same trends were ones that in fact denied a sense of community in material terms, a community from which might emerge a viable political element.

In the end, Montesano's analysis of the situation, while apparently valorizing the inherent linguistic diversity of the Italian Canadian community, ends up by missing the opportunity to comment on the «questione della lingua» as it continues to be problematic for Italians outside of Italy. His argument offers a series of excuses for Italians' lack of political and cultural congruity, rather than risk a wider ranging critique. His editorial manifests a common trait among Italian Canadians, in particular those who hold at their disposal means of communication and media, which is either the lack of a critical imagination or will and a rather paternalistic attitude in the protection of a perceived readership.

I would like at this point to close with a passage from James Baldwin that I have quoted elsewhere: «To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger.» (23) For us Italian Canadians, and I would extend this to Italian Americans, however we may be defined from outside or within, ethnic and/or minority, visible and invisible cultural activists, Baldwin's statement cuts to the bone of the issue. We must challenge the norms that define both the danger of interaction and the foreign as dangerous. If we take on this challenge, our commitment will reach its full effect and provide a workable and viable alternative to official nationalist myths such as *italianità* and undo the parallel structures of prescriptive multiculturalism, both of which work toward assimilation, disappearance and the silencing of alternative political and cultural voices.

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Sommario

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Gli autori che qui presentiamo si interrogano sul ruolo svolto dalla componente etnica nel determinare l'identità e le scelte politiche degli immigrati e dei loro discendenti nell'America del Nord e in Brasile.

Il ruolo giocato nella formazione dell'identità etnica italoamericana durante gli anni della Seconda guerra mondiale attraverso le celebrazioni del Columbus è esaminato nel saggio di Mormino e Pozzetta in cui Cristoforo Colombo viene visto come il primo italiano che sfuggì alla reazionaria classe dominante italiana aprendo la strada agli altri italiani che si rifugiarono in America alla ricerca di libertà e democrazia. Gli antifascisti italiani in America, riallacciandosi alla tradizione democratica per combattere il fascismo, mostrano così che gli italoamericani sono parte integrante, addirittura costituente, del paese di Jefferson e di Lincoln.

Le difficoltà dell'antifascismo italiano in Brasile sono esaminate in una prospettiva comparata da Bertonha che sottolinea il ruolo giocato nella diffusione di sentimenti filofascisti tra la collettività italiana, sia dalle simpatie riscosse dal regime nel paese, specie durante gli anni trenta, sia dall'abilità del corpo diplomatico sia, infine, dal clima politico repressivo dominante in Brasile dopo il 1935. L'autore sottolinea poi quanto tali difficoltà fossero anche legate alle divisioni interne allo schieramento avverso a Mussolini.

Candeloro esamina il difficile percorso dei leader politici italoamericani in Illinois, con particolare attenzione a Chicago a partire dai primi insediamenti nello stato, passando attraverso gli anni bui del proibizionismo per giungere fino ai giorni nostri. Il futuro incerto del ruolo che l'identità etnica potrà esercitare potrà essere determinato, secondo l'autore, dalla nascita di diplomatici interetnici che siano in grado di unire valori culturali tradizionali a interessi economici super partes; in questo senso la presenza di italoamericani in entrambi i partiti viene letto come segno incoraggiante.

LaGumina analizza il ruolo storico giocato dalla politica etnica a livello locale, esaminando il caso di New York. Mostra come gli italoamericani siano riusciti ad inserirsi nel processo politico americano man mano che dimostravano di sapersi organizzare come blocco elettorale. Dai risultati elettorali del 1997 si ha che la maggioranza dei diciotto milioni di residenti dello stato di New York sono governati da italoamericani, anche se nello stato i residenti di origine italiana sono il sedici per cento. Nelle maggiori città dello stato, New York, Buffalo e Syracuse i sindaci sono di origine italiana: Rudolph Giuliani, Anthony Masiello e Roy Bernardi. Nel caso di New York gli italoamericani sono stati quindi pienamente accettati come leader politici.

Verdicchio analizza gli italo-canadesi e le politiche culturali nei confronti dell'etnicità in un'ottica letteraria. Nel suo saggio denuncia che i canadesi di origine italiana, più di altri gruppi etnici, si stanno adeguando al modello americano allontanandosi dal trend del pluriculturalismo canadese da cui consegue una sempre maggior invisibilità. L'autore si interroga sul ruolo esercitato dai dialetti regionali nell'abbandono della lingua italiana e si chiede quanto ciò abbia influito sulla mancanza di dedizione degli italo-canadesi nei confronti della loro comunità.

Abstract

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The authors presented here have researched and investigated the role of the ethnic aspect in determining the identity and political choices of immigrants and their descendants in North America and Brazil.

The essay by Mormino and Pozzetta examines the formation of Italian-American ethnic identity during the period of the Second World War through the celebration of Columbus Day. Here, Christopher Columbus is seen as the first Italian to escape the reactionary Italian ruling class thus opening the way for other Italians who sought refuge in America in search of liberty and democracy. Italian anti-fascists in America, in turning to the democratic tradition in order to combat fascism, proved that Italian-Americans were an integrated and, in fact, essential part of the country of Jefferson and Lincoln.

The difficulties of Italian anti-fascism in Brazil are examined in a comparative essay by Bertonha which underlines the role played in the dissemination of fascist sentiment among the Italian community by the support the regime enjoined in the country, in particular during the thirties, by the ability of Italian diplomats and by the dominant repressive politics which dominated post 1935 Brazil. The author also points out to the divisions among the antifascists as responsible of the mentioned difficulties.

Candeloro examines the difficult progress of Italian-American political leaders in Illinois, giving particular attention to Chicago, beginning with the first settlements in the state, moving through the dark years of prohibition to the present. The uncertain future of the role exercised by ethnic identity can be determined, according to the author, with the birth of inter-ethnic diplomats, capable of uniting traditional cultural values with economic interests, *super partes*. In this sense, the presence of Italian-Americans in both parties is seen as an encouraging sign.

LaGumina analyzes the historical role played by ethnic politics on the local level, using the example of New York. He shows how Italian-Americans gradually managed to enter the American political process as they began to realize how to organize themselves as an electoral block. The electoral results of 1997 show that the majority of the 18 million residents of New York state are governed by Italian-Americans, even though residents of Italian origin make up only sixteen percent of the state. In the larger cities in the state, i.e. New York, Buffalo and Syracuse, the mayors are of Italian origin: Rudolph Giuliani, Anthony Masiello and Roy Bernardi. In the case of New York, Italian-Americans have been fully accepted as political leaders.

Verdicchio analyzes Italian-Canadians and cultural politics in dealing with ethnicity from a literary viewpoint. In his essay, he states that Canadians of Italian origin, more than any other ethnic group, are following the American model, moving away from the trend of Canadian multi-culturalism which had resulted in greater invisibility. The author investigates the role exercised by regional dialects in abandoning the Italian language and considers how much this has influenced the Italian-Canadians' lack of loyalty toward their community.

Résumé

Les auteurs que nous présentons ici s'interrogent sur le rôle joué par la composante ethnique dans la détermination de l'identité et des choix politiques des immigrés et de leurs descendants en Amérique du Nord et au Brésil.

Le rôle joué dans la formation de l'identité ethnique italo-américaine, pendant les années de la Deuxième guerre mondiale, par les célébrations du Columbus est examiné dans l'essai de Mormino et Pozzetta, où Christophe Colomb est vu comme le premier Italien qui échappa à la classe dominante réactionnaire italienne, ouvrant le chemin aux autres Italiens qui se réfugièrent en Amérique à la recherche de liberté et de démocratie. Les antifascistes italiens en Amérique, se rattachant à la tradition démocratique pour combattre le fascisme, montrent ainsi que les Italo-américains font partie intégrante, et même constituante, du pays de Jefferson et de Lincoln.

Les difficultés de l'antifascisme italien au Brésil sont examinées selon une perspective comparée par Bertonha, qui souligne le rôle joué dans la diffusion de sentiments philofascistes au sein de la collectivité italienne tant par les sympathies dont a joui le régime dans le pays spécialement au cours des années trente, que par l'habileté du corps diplomatique, et enfin par le climat politique répressif régnant au Brésil après 1935. L'auteur souligne ensuite le fait que ces difficultés étaient également liées aux divisions à l'intérieur de la coalition contraire à Mussolini.

Candeloro examine le parcours difficile des leaders politiques italo-américains dans l'Illinois, en se référant particulièrement à Chicago, à partir des premiers établissements dans cet État, en passant par les années sombres du prohibitionnisme pour arriver à nos jours. Le futur incertain du rôle que l'identité ethnique pourra exercer sera probablement déterminé, selon l'auteur, par la naissance de diplomates interethniques qui seront capables de joindre des valeurs culturelles traditionnelles à des intérêts économiques *super partes*; dans ce sens, la présence d'Italo-américains dans chacun des deux partis est vue comme un signe encourageant.

LaGumina analyse le rôle historique joué par la politique ethnique au niveau local, examinant le cas de New York. Il montre comment les Italo-américains ont réussi à s'insérer dans le processus politique américain à mesure qu'ils faisaient la démonstration qu'ils savaient s'organiser comme bloc électoral. Par la suite des résultats électoraux de 1997, la majorité des dix-huit millions de résidents de l'État de New York sont gouvernés par des Italo-américains, même si dans l'État les résidents d'origine italienne ne représentent que seize pour cent. Dans les villes principales de l'État, New York, Buffalo et Syracuse les maires sont d'origine italienne: Rudolph Giuliani, Anthony Masiello et Roy Bernardi. Par conséquent dans le cas de New York, les Italo-américains ont été pleinement acceptés comme leaders politiques.

Verdicchio analyse dans une optique littéraire les Italo-canadiens et les politiques culturelles par rapport à l'ethnicité. Dans son essai, il dénonce le fait que les Canadiens d'origine italienne, plus que d'autres groupes ethniques, s'adaptent au modèle américain en s'éloignant du trend du pluriculturalisme canadien, ce qui leur confère une invisibilité de plus en plus grande. L'auteur s'interroge sur le rôle exercé par les dialectes régionaux dans l'abandon de la langue italienne et se demande dans quelle mesure cela a influé sur le manque de dévouement des Italo-canadiens à l'égard de leur communauté.

Resumo

Os autores que aqui apresentamos interrogam-se sobre o papel representado pela componente étnica no determinar a identidade e a escolha política dos imigrados e dos seus descendentes na America do Norte e no Brasil.

O papel desempenhado na formação étnica italoamericana durante os anos da segunda guerra mundial através das celebrações do Columbus é examinado no ensaio de Mormino e Pozzetta no qual Cristoforo Colombo é visto como o primeiro italiano que escapou da reacionaria classe dominante italiana abrindo a estrada aos outros italianos que se refugiaram na América à procura de liberdade e democracia. Os antifascistas italianos na América, reatando-se à tradição democrática para combater o fascismo, mostram assim que os italoamericanos são parte integrante e, até mesmo, constituinte do país de Jefferson e de Lincoln.

As dificuldades do anti-fascismo italiano no Brasil são examinadas numa perspectiva comparada por Bertonha que sublinha o papel desempenhado – na difusão de sentimentos filo-fascistas dentro da colônia italiana – quer pelas simpatias despertadas pelo regime no país, principalmente na década de 30, quer pela habilidade dos diplomatas, quer, enfim, pelo clima político repressivo que dominava no Brasil depois de 1935. O autor evidencia, além disso, o quanto essas dificuldades fossem também associadas às divisões existentes na frente que combatia Mussolini.

Candeloro examina o difícil percurso dos líderes políticos italoamericanos em Illinois, dando particular atenção a Chicago a partir dos primeiros assentamentos no estado, passando através dos anos escuros do proibicionismo para chegar até nossos dias. O futuro incerto do papel que a identidade étnica poderá exercitar talvez será determinado, segundo o autor, pelo nascimento de diplomatas inter-étnicos que sejam capazes de unir valores culturais tradicionais a interesses económicos super partes; neste sentido a presença de italoamericanos em ambos os partidos é lido como sinal encorajador.

La Gumina analisa o papel histórico desempenhado pela política étnica em nível local examinando o caso de New York. Mostra como os italoamericanos conseguiram inserir-se no processo político americano à medida que demonstravam saber organizar-se como bloco eleitoral. Dos resultados eleitorais de 1997 vê-se que a maioria dos dezoito milhões de residentes no estado de New York são governados por italoamericanos, mesmo se no estado os residentes de origem italiana representa dezesseis por cento. Nas maiores cidades do estado, New York, Buffalo e Syracuse, os prefeitos são de origem italiana: Rudolph Giuliani, Anthony Masiello e Roy Bernardi. No caso de New York os italoamericanos foram portanto completamente aceites como líderes políticos.

Verdicchio analisa os italo-canadenses e as políticas culturais em relação à etnicidade numa ótica literária. No seu ensaio denuncia que os canadenses de origem italiana, mais do que os outros grupos étnicos, estão se adequando ao modelo americano afastando-se do estímulo do pluriculturalismo canadense e disso resulta uma sempre maior invisibilidade. O autor interroga-se sobre o papel exercido

pelos dialetos regionais no abandono do idioma italiano a pergunta-se quanto isto tenha influido na falta de dedicaco dos italoamericanos em relao a sua comunidade.

Extracto

Los autores examinados en este resumen se interrogan sobre el papel desarrollado por la origen  tnica en la determinaci3n de la identidad y de las opciones pol ticas de los inmigrados italianos y de sus descendientes en Norte Am rica y Brasil.

El ensaye de Mormino y Pozzetta analiza las celebraciones del *Columbus Day* durante los a os de la segunda guerra mundial, relativamente a su papel en la formaci3n de la identidad  tnica italoamericana: Crist3bal Col3n est  percibido como el primero italiano que consegu  escaparse a la retr3grada clase dirigente de su pa s, abriendo el paso a todos los compatriotas que en seguida se refugiaron en Am rica en busca de libertad y democracia. Los antifascistas italianos en Am rica se volvieron a la tradici3n democr tica para luchar contra el fascismo, demostrando as  como los italoamericanos sean parte integrante – y m s bien, constitutiva – del pa s de Jefferson y Lincoln.

Las dificultades del antifascismo italiano en Brasil son examinadas en perspectiva comparada por Bertonha, que evidencia como las simpat as despertadas en el pa s por el r gimen fascista, en particular durante los a os treinta del siglo, conjugadas al empe o de los diplomaticos y al clima pol tico represivo dominante en Brasil despues de 1935, contribuyeron a la difusi3n del sentido filofascista en la comunidad italiana. El auctor se ala daem s como las dificultades fueran tambien originadas por las divergencias rec procas de los adversarios politicos de Mussolini.

Candeloro examina el dif cil *iter* recorrido por los l deres pol ticos italoamericanos en Illinois, y en particular en Chicago, desde la primera instalacion de los inmigrantes en el estado, durante los a os oscuros del prohibicionismo, hacia hoy. El todav a incierto futuro del papel que la identidad  tnica puede desarrollar, podr  ser determinado – seg n el autor – cuando se ser  formada una nueva categor a de diplom ticos inter tnicos, que sepan juntar valores culturales tradicionales y intereses econ3micos *super partes*; en este sentido, la presencia de italoamericanos en los dos partidos es tenida por un se al estimulante.

LaGumina analiza el papel hist3rico de la pol tica  tnica a nivel local, examinando el caso de Nueva York. El autor muestra como los italoamericanos conseguieron su integraci3n al proceso pol tico americano, a medida que demostraban su capacidad de organizaci3n como alianza electoral. De los exitos electorales de 1997, resulta que la mayoria de los dieciocho millones de residentes en el estado de Nueva York es gobernada hoy da italoamericanos, aunque si el n mero de residentes en el mismo estado monta en total al dieciseis por cien. En las ciudades mayores del estado, Nueva York, Buffalo y Syracuse, los alcaldes son de origen italiana: Rudolph Giuliani, Anthony Masiello y Roy Bernardi. As , en el caso de Nueva York, los italoamericanos han sido enteramente aceptados como l deres pol ticos.

Verdicchio analiza en 3ptica literaria los italo-canadienses y las pol ticas culturales relativas al factor  tnico. En su ensaye, el autor denuncia la adecuaci3n de los canadienses de origen italiana – m s que de los otros grupos  tnicos – al modelo americano, y su alejamiento dal pluralismo cultural caracter stico de Canad ; de conformidad a este fen3meno, sigue una siempre mayor invisibilidad de la comunidad italiana. El autor se interroga relativamente al papel de los dialectos regionales, con referencia al abandono de la lengua italiana, preguntandose cuanto este pueda haber influido sobre la falta de dedici3n de los italo-canadienses a su comunidad.



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Intervista

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Interview with Joseph Scelsa, Director of the John Calandra Italian American Institute, New York

Maddalena Tirabassi

«When Italy gets respect, we get respect as Italian Americans».

Italy is undergoing a dramatic change in its international collocation due to the entry into the single currency of the European Union, a change which is going to affect its image and will probably have repercussions on the people of Italian origin in the world. In the meantime Italian political leaders seems to have discovered the long neglected Italian diaspora: the Italian Parliament is discussing the Law giving the vote to Italians abroad, Rai International is dedicating its programs to the Italians communities; and within a few months there will be the III Conferenza dell'emigrazione, ten years after the last, just to mention few initiatives. Italian Americans seem to have perceived the undergoing process of this changing of image and they seem willing to take part in it, as it has happened in the past. They seem ready to enter a new age in their relationship with their country of origin. The means are not yet clear, the questions are many, but the interest, this time on both side of the Atlantic and the new facilities in communication may lay the ground for cooperation between Italy and the «big» little italies (to quote Italian Sottosegretario di Stato agli Affari Esteri, Piero Fassino) in America.

Professor Scelsa, let me start with two documents that testify the attention of the Italian community in the US to Italian status; these documents support the inclusion of Italy in the Security Council of the United Nations, the first signed by the president of the National Italian American Coordinating Association, Martin G. Picillo, the second the text of a petition addressed to President William Clinton:

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September, 1997

Dear Italian American Leader,

the last time America's Italian American leadership coalesced into an «Italy Lobby» was following World War II. Thanks largely to organized Italian American inspired and expressed concerned, the framework for United States aid toward Italy's recovered and renewed role in the community of nations was constructed. The fruits of that effort readily became evident then and are clerally obvious today.

Today, of course, Italy is a nation transformed, a nation of global dimensions due to the fact that it is the world's fifth largest economy – having already surpassed Great Britain and now vying France for number four – as well as a vital contributor to the international geopolitical process. In the words of President Clinton, «Italy has been and continues to be one of our closest allies and strategic partners in the world community».

Why, then, this letter to 3,500-odd Italian American organizations nationwide? Because a new «Italy Lobby» is needed, one, not unlike that of a half century ago, concerned with the basics of democratic traditions in a post Cold War world. All Italian American organizations are vital to this new lobby's success. read the attached notice and please help.

Sincerely yours

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Martin G. Picillo  
Petition to President William J. Clinton

We petition you, Mr. President, to instruct our State Department to cease its urging of permanent seats on the United States Nations Security Council for Germany and Japan to the exclusion of Italy. This is a slap in the face to a nation which, in your words, «Italy has been and continues to be one of our closest allies and strategic partners in the world community».

So, please do what is right, Mr President. Do not allow the Stete Department to reduce Italy to second rate status on the world stage.

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At the beginning of December the petition had been signed up by 50,000 persons, it would seem that Italian Americans are again active in the U.S policy toward Italy Professor Scelsa, in inviting to sign up for the petition, you wrote «When Italy gets respect, we get respect as Italian Americans», Do you think that is the key to all this?

Absolutely. The United States of America is not a homogenous society. It is made up of many ethnic and racial groups. Each one vies for respect and prominence, therefore it is essential that Americans of Italian descent support their ancestral home land in order for them to receive the recognition they are due as a group in the USA.

Until now it seems that the main target of the Italian American community has been around issues such as quotas or antidifamation. This petition goes beyond these, to touch US foreign policy toward Italy. Do you see this petition as a solitary episode or as the starting point of an Italian American lobby?

This is not a starting point for an Italian American lobby. The Italian Americans have always lobbied for its need, however as a community they tend to be reactive rather than proactive when it comes to issues of ethnicity and national origin. Although this is changing as evidence by the success of the National Italian American Foundation in Washington, D.C., it has been a slow process which will evolve as we move through the next century. Americans of Italian descent due to their strong families and religious values are blessed with a positive self image. It is only when that image is blatantly attacked and they can see a direct connection between the incident and its effect that they speak out.

What do you think the target of an Italian lobby could be? Do you think Italian Americans may mobilize on issues related to Italy which do not have direct links tot he Italian American community? To put it more clearly, do you think they stand with Italy due to their roots or because they are concerned with the impact its renewed prestige may have on them as US citizen of Italian descent?

The question that you ask «What do you think the target of an Italian lobby could be»? Needs to be bifurcated, since it implies that an Italian lobby and that Italian American lobby are interchangeable, they are not! Italian Americans that is Americans will only lobby for Italian causes when it is in their personal best interest. What is unique about the 50,000 petitions to President Clinton is that most signers are US citizens of 2nd, 3,d and 4th generation and they see Italy s respect in America as being important to the esteem that Americans hold them in personally.

Do you think that Italian entry into the European Union's single currency will affect Italian Americans?

Again the answer is «yes». Although it will not be seen by many as having a direct connection. Italy's ability to gain entry in the European Union will have and does have a significant impact on Americans of Italian descent. Italy's ability to adjust herself to the demands of the member nations and to maintain the strong guidelines and control necessary cannot be underestimated. The «New York Times» will have to rewrite its editorials, which claimed that they were only temporary measures which Italy would forget once they were made members of the EU.

Do you think that we are going to face a revival of Italy in America as that of the eighties, when Italian design and fashion industries, new cuisine etc. changed the image of Italy in the United States? Or, given the deeper change of Italy status among Western nations, will it be something which will affect more also the power relationship of Italian ethnic in the U.S?

I believe the latter is true. The power relation of Italian ethnic in the USA today is much more significant a change than that of the eighties. It is important that Americans of Italian descent (2nd, 3rd and 4th generations) capitalize on their heritage by association not only culturally but economically. They must be as aware and involved as other Americans, with the new place Italy has in the world's economy today.

What role can Italian Americans play either toward US international policy or domestic policy?

Americans of Italian descent can play a role both in Italian and domestic policy if the leadership chooses issues which cut across party ideologies and get to the essence of the Italian psychic in Americans of Italian descent.

Talking about domestic policy, can we still speak of an ethnic community vote or role in the election of Italian Americans in Senate, Congress or at a local level? For instance did Giuliani get votes from Italian American democrats?

Again, it is possible for a politician to gain the support of Americans of Italian descent. I choose not to use the word «ethnic» since it is often used to describe 1st and 2nd generation. The key here however is the ability of the politician to identify basic issues and concerns in this community, for example; Italian Americans are overwhelming in favor of strict laws in relation to violent crimes and the concept of equality for all under the law. They also do not see the need or the benefits of affirmative action programs.

How would you evaluate the knowledge about Italy among Italian Americans?

Poor, unfortunately for Americans of Italian descent knowledge and culture is transmitted through language and since World War II they have lost the Italian language. We must now concentrate our assault on the knowledge of Italy using the language of the USA, the international language, English.

The Italian law on the vote for Italians abroad seems close to be approved by Italian Government. It has been estimated that 3,500,00 Italian living abroad (with over 350,000 in North America) will vote. what kind of interest has it aroused among Italian Americans? How will the vote Law affect the community? Do you think there will be a split among Italian Americans?

This is a very unique situation one which had it been initiated at the turn of this century would have had untold influence on the development of Italy and the USA. However it is still likely to have influence although I fear that it might not create what was hoped for. Since the most influential «diaspora» are 3rd

and 4th generations and it would be unlikely that they would be able to participate (vote). There could also be a conflict between them and the newly enfranchised 1st and 2nd generation.

The Calandra Center of which you are Director has done a lot to promote Italian Americans, would you tell us its main achievements?

I have been Executive Director of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute since 1995. Prior to which I was Director since 1984. Its major achievement however in my mind has been providing a voice for the Italian Americans in the American Higher Education Industry otherwise known as Academia.

Can you tell us something about the Calandra programs for the future?

In our effort to document the experience of the Italian Heritage in America the Calandra Institute has embarked on formidable program. There will be an exhibition «The Italians of New York: Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement». This exhibition which will be housed at the oldest museum in the City of New York, The New York Historical Society, will not only mark the first time that a major cultural institution in the USA has agreed to sponsor an exhibition on Italian Americans, but also will test the community's response as to their interest and there by the feasibility in supporting a museum exclusively devoted to the Italian American experience in New York City.

June, 1998



Rassegna



Convegni

Segnalazioni

Il 20 marzo 1998 si è tenuto a San Marino il Convegno «L'emigrazione nella storia sammarinese tra Ottocento e Novecento» presso l'Antico Monastero di Santa Chiara, sede del Museo dell'emigrante (<http://www.omniway.sm/emigration>).

Una mostra sugli italiani durante la Seconda guerra mondiale «Una storia segreta» è stata presentata a Los Angeles lo scorso maggio presso l'Istituto italiano di cultura (<http://www.io.com/~segreta>).

Il VI Convegno Internazionale dell'Associazione Lucchesi nel Mondo, nel XXX anniversario della sua fondazione, avrà luogo a Lucca (Villa Bottini) dal 10 all'11 settembre 1998.

A Cuneo dall'8 al 10 ottobre, si terrà il convegno: «La montagna mediterranea: una fabbrica d'uomini? Mobilità e migrazioni nell'arco alpino e nell'area del Mediterraneo in una prospettiva comparata (ss. XV-XX)», organizzatori Dionigi Albera e Paola Corti.

Nell'ambito della ricerca su «Migrations frontalières dans le Sud-Est de la France» viene annunciato un incontro sul tema «Mémoire et identité de la frontière: étude des migrations de proximité entre les provinces ligures et les Alpes-Maritimes» per il 22-23 ottobre presso l'Università di Nizza.

Dall'8 al 10 ottobre 1998 si terrà a Cuneo il Convegno «La montagna mediterranea: una fabbrica d'uomini? Mobilità e migrazioni nell'arco alpino e nelle montagne del Mediterraneo in una prospettiva comparata 8sec. XVII-XX)».

Nell'ottobre del 1999 verrà inaugurata a New York la mostra «The Italians of New York: Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement». Si terrà presso il più antico museo della città, The New York Historical Society, 170 Central Park West, New York, N.y. 10024). Curata da Philip Cannistraro e Jack Rutland la mostra comprende nel comitato organizzativo alcuni tra i maggiori studiosi del campo: Donna R. Gabaccia, Richard Juliani, Jerome Krase, Gary R. Mormino, Joseph Scelsa e Rudolph Vecoli. Fotografie, lettere, oggettistica, documenti, lavori d'ago, pittura, scultura illustreranno le lotte e i traguardi raggiunti dagli italiani a New York a partire da Giovanni da Verrazzano per giungere a Giorgio Armani.

L'Annual Meeting dell'Association of European Migration Institutions (AEMI) si terrà a Dudelange, Luxembourg, dal 24 al 26 settembre 1998 (inf. tel. 516985, fax: 516985-5).



Rassegna



Cinema

The Second Civil War (Usa, 1997)

Regia: Joe Dante; Soggetto e sceneggiatura: Martin Burke; Fotografia: Mac Ahlberg; Scenografia: Joe Luck; Costumi: Dan Moore; Musica: Hummie Man; Montaggio: Marshall Harvey; Prodotto da: HBO TV. Durata: 100', Distribuzione cinematografica: MIKADO.

Personaggi e interpreti: Governatore Farley: Beau Bridges, Helena Newman: Joanna Cassidy, Jack Buchan: James Coburn, Jimmy Cannon: Kevin Dunn, Il Presidente: Phil Hartman, Mel Burgess: Dan Hedaya, Jim Kalla: James Earl Jones, Vinnie Franco: Denis Leary, Chirstine Fernandez: Elizabeth Pena, Alan Manieski: Ron Perlman

Stati Uniti, nel prossimo futuro. Gli immigrati legali e illegali hanno raggiunto il miliardo di unità. In California i messicani sono in maggioranza e detengono il potere, così come i cinesi in Rhode Island. Un'organizzazione umanitaria porta negli Stati Uniti qualche decina di bambini profughi della guerra nucleare che si è scatenata tra India e Pakistan, ma il governatore dell'Idaho, dove i profughi sono diretti, li respinge: lo stato non accetterà più stranieri. L'ultimatum della Casa Bianca che impone al governatore Farley di riaprire le frontiere, porterà alla «balcanizzazione» degli Stati Uniti, ad un conflitto interetnico di tutti contro tutti, ed alla Seconda Guerra Civile. Tutti gli avvenimenti vengono visti nella prospettiva della rete tv News Net, esplicita parodia della Cnn, i cui giornalisti, disposti a tutto in nome dell'audience, cavalcano la tigre della crisi.

Il film di Joe Dante punta sul grottesco ed è molto poco «politically correct». Tutta la vita pubblica è dominata dal cinismo, senza eccezioni buoniste. Cinici sono i rappresentanti dei diversi gruppi etnici, egoisti e intolleranti, che cercano di rosicchiare quanto più potere possibile vendendo il loro peso elettorale al migliore offerente. La carità pelosa dell'attivista dell'organizzazione umanitaria nasconde un cinico integralismo. Alla Casa Bianca siede un Presidente fantoccio, che confonde i due Roosevelt, crede a sproposito di citare Eisenhower, è dominato dai sondaggi di opinione e da cinici curatori di immagine. Cinico è il direttore del telegiornale della NN, la cui ricerca del sensazionalismo ad ogni costo accelera la corsa verso la tragedia. Il suo motto? Dare sempre al pubblico le tre T: tits, tots, and tears...

Su tutto il villaggio globale impera il potere del prime time, dello share e degli sponsor. Le scene degli attentati e delle uccisioni passano in televisione intervallate da spot di detersivi e gelati. Il Presidente è costretto a intimare un ultimatum di 67 ore e mezza, anziché di 72, perché il suo annuncio non coincida con una seguitissima soap-opera.

Il personaggio più divertente è quello del governatore. Superpatriottico, eletto con lo slogan «America how it should be» da un elettorato cui promette di cacciare gli immigrati e sostenuto da milizie ultra-reazionarie, intrattiene una relazione amorosa con una giornalista ispanica da cui aspetta un bambino. E non vede l'ora di rivelarlo al mondo... Gustoso accenno questo all'irruzione dell'interesse privato (affettivo) nella sfera pubblica.

Altri temi chiave del film sono l'inefficienza e la stupidità della classe politica (la guerra scoppia perché l'annuncio del governatore della propria «successione» viene scambiato per l'annuncio della «secessione») e la constatazione di come eventi anche banali possano portare, a causa della mancanza di comunicazione (in un mondo dominato dai media!) ad esiti terribili ed incontrollabili.

Il film colpisce nel segno. Se il paragone con un capolavoro del sarcasmo e dell'ironia fantapolitica come «Il Dottor Stranamore» può sembrare blasfemo, la sceneggiatura di Martin Burke è però veramente vulcanica e Beau Bridges nella parte del governatore Farley e James Coburn in quella del consigliere presidenziale sono bravissimi. «La Seconda Guerra Civile Americana» è stato prodotto per la televisione dalla rete via cavo HBO. In Italia, dopo la presentazione alla Mostra di Venezia la Mikado ha deciso di distribuirlo nelle sale.

Simone Cinotto

Fratelli (*The Funeral*, USA, 1996)

regia: Abel Ferrara

Con Christopher Walken, Chris Penn, Annabella Sciorra, Isabella Rosselini, Benicio Del Toro, Vincent Gallo.

Cogliamo l'occasione della sua uscita in home video per parlare dell'ultimo film di Abel Ferrara, premiato con la Coppa Volpi a Chris Penn al Festival di Venezia dell'anno scorso. Segnaliamo innanzitutto che l'autore di *King of New York* continua a prediligere atmosfere nere, nerissime, anche per chi si muove nei confini del gangster film.

Francis Ford Coppola ha parzialmente romanticizzato la famiglia mafiosa: la famiglia Corleone proveniva da un passato siciliano idilliaco di comunità e tendeva, negli intenti del Padrino, verso l'assimilazione, come corporation, nella società americana. In *Fratelli* l'ambiente criminale è mostrato in tutto il suo squallore. La famiglia Tempio ha un passato, un presente e un futuro di morte. Il titolo originale rende certamente meglio l'atmosfera del film: la presenza della morte, quasi se ne potesse sentire l'odore, aleggia su tutta la messa in scena di Ferrara.

New York, anni Trenta: *The Funeral* si apre con Humprey Bogart, in bianco e nero, che chiede: «Perché vuoi la tua polizza sulla vita? Ti aspetti di morire?». Johnny, il più giovane dei fratelli Tempio, sta vedendo al cinema *La foresta pietrificata*; poco dopo sarà ucciso. Tutto ambientato in una notte, il film intermezza la veglia funebre e la spietata caccia che il fratello maggiore Ray dà all'assassino del fratello, con lunghi flashback. In uno di questi Ray bambino viene iniziato all'omicidio dal padre, a testimonianza della violenza atavica, inestirpabile che ha sempre fatto parte della sua vita.

Il personaggio interpretato da Christopher Walken non è meno sadico dei gangster suoi predecessori, da *Little Caesar* e *Scarface* in avanti, nonostante la propensione all'introspezione e la sua fede cattolica. I tentativi che Ray fa di contrabbandare la sua vendetta per giustizia divina, il suo cercare un senso celeste al suo potere tutto terreno non sono che una parodia del cristianesimo. «Va bene, vorrà dire che brucerò all'inferno!»: questo personaggio che consuma la propria vita nella violenza e nel senso di colpa ricorda da vicino il Jake La Motta di *Raging Bull*. L'insistenza sui temi di dannazione e salvezza oltre che sull'iconografia del cristianesimo, che è un po' il marchio di fabbrica dell'accoppiata Abel Ferrara-Nicholas St. John (vedi i precedenti *Bad Lieutenant* e *The Addiction*), non è il solo debito che i due pagano verso l'opera di Martin Scorsese.

Fuori dai canoni del genere è invece il personaggio di Johnny Tempio, ribelle alla pax mafiosa imposta dai fratelli, anticonformista, cinefilo e soprattutto comunista. Lo vediamo partecipare a comizi con tanto di striscione «Communism is 20th Century Americanism» e difendere armi in pugno il sindacato. Anche gli Italoamericani hanno una coscienza politica?!? «Non l'ho ammazzato io quel fanatico, anarchico!» urla Gaspare Spoglia a Ray. «No, no, mio fratello era comunista, non anarchico», risponde Ray. A mia memoria si tratta della prima volta che un artista italoamericano ricorda in suo film quel passato di lotte sociali e militanza politica che gli stessi Italoamericani hanno spesso preferito dimenticare come ha fatto recentemente notare Rudolph J. Vecoli, in un saggio comparso su *Acoma*, «Emigranti italiani e movimenti operai negli Stati Uniti: una riflessione personale su etnicità e classe sociale» (5, 1995, p. 19-20).

Tra le consuete coordinate di rosari, candele votive, santini e tavole imbandite irrompono altre novità dirompenti l'immagine della famiglia italoamericana cinematografica. Innanzitutto la malattia mentale. Chez è uno psicopatico incapace di trovare pace, nonostante l'aiuto della moglie. Ferrara suggerisce che la sua malattia deriva dall'ambiente in cui è cresciuto, dai modelli culturali a cui è stato sottoposto, mettendo così in relazione la sua paranoia alla condizione di figlio di immigrati. Sarà proprio la follia autodistruttiva di Chez (Chris Penn, in un ruolo simile a quello di «America oggi» di Altman) a sancire la fine dei Tempio.

Mamma Corleone accettava tacitamente la doppia morale delle due sfere, «affari» e famiglia, e ricopriva un ruolo di prestigio come custode dell'armonia familiare. Non così le donne di *Fratelli*. Sono loro le prime vittime consapevoli della maledizione che incombe sulla famiglia. Con le armi della pazienza, della ragione e della religione, seppur esauste per l'ambiente arcaico e oppressivo in cui sono costrette a vivere, cercano di salvare i loro uomini e se stesse. Ma il male, nel film di Ferrara e St. John, è destinato a trionfare, forse per vendetta divina.

In definitiva, *Fratelli* non solo si distingue dagli altri film di mafia e dagli altri ritratti degli italoamericani, ma è probabilmente, pur con alcuni limiti, l'opera più complessa e compiuta del regista del Bronx, anche grazie ad un cast veramente di prim'ordine.

Simone Cinotto



Rassegna



Libri

Richard N. Juliani

Building Little Italy: Philadelphia's Italians Before Mass Migration

University Park (Pa.), Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998, pp. xxiii, 398, dollari 50.00 (cloth) 19.95 (paperback).

Lo studio della presenza italiana negli Stati Uniti prima dell'emigrazione di massa degli ultimi decenni dell'Ottocento è rimasto prevalentemente confinato a opere datate e di impostazione sostanzialmente agiografica come le ben note ricerche di Howard R. Marraro e Giovanni Schiavo. Il revival etnico della fine degli anni Sessanta, sviluppatosi principalmente nell'ambito della storia sociale, ha infatti finito per trascurare la fase della formazione dei primi insediamenti italiani negli Stati Uniti in ragione soprattutto dell'inconsistenza numerica dei membri di queste comunità fino agli anni ottanta del secolo scorso.

Il volume di Juliani costituisce un significativo e originale contributo in controtendenza. Da un lato, attingendo a una straordinaria gamma di fonti primarie analizzate con esemplare rigore interpretativo, Juliani presenta un dettagliato quadro delle dinamiche della formazione e del primo consolidamento della comunità italiana di Filadelfia nel periodo compreso tra la vigilia dell'indipendenza americana e gli anni Settanta dell'Ottocento, con particolare attenzione per gli aspetti socio-economici e demografici. Dall'altro, pur riconoscendo che solo un esiguo numero di italiani giunse a Filadelfia prima del termine ad quem della sua ricerca, Juliani dimostra in modo incontrovertibile l'esistenza di una comunità italiana a Filadelfia già prima del manifestarsi dell'immigrazione di massa negli ultimi due decenni dell'Ottocento. Negli anni Settanta, infatti, oltre a presentare una marcata concentrazione residenziale nel distretto di South Philadelphia, la presenza italiana in città aveva già evidenziato una stratificazione sociale e l'affermazione di una leadership di commercianti, uomini d'affari e imprenditori, che operavano anche da primi intermediari etnici tra la colonia italiana e la società statunitense. Inoltre, l'instaurazione di istituzioni comunitarie precedette la grande immigrazione di fine secolo. La nascita della prima parrocchia per i cattolici di origine italiana, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, risale infatti al 1852 e la costituzione della prima organizzazione italo-americana di mutuo soccorso, la Società Italiana di Unione e Fratellanza, ebbe luogo nel 1867.

Juliani sostiene anche che queste istituzioni avrebbero rappresentato il fondamento a partire dal quale si sarebbe ulteriormente sviluppata la comunità con l'apporto della grande immigrazione. Tale tesi appare, però, poco condivisibile alla luce dei cambiamenti provocati dal mutamento della provenienza geografica negli immigrati italiani in coincidenza con la loro crescita numerica alla fine del secolo.

Una delle principali discontinuità risulta costituita dalla stessa identità etnica degli immigrati. Secondo Juliani – che cita in proposito le parole di uno dei principali esponenti della comunità..., il toscano Lorenzo Nardi, («siete italiani, e non napoletani, genovesi, né toscani») – la scomparsa di un senso campanilistico di appartenenza sarebbe già stata in atto alla fine dell'Ottocento (p. 286). Tale considerazione, valida per i primi immigrati originari dell'Italia centro-settentrionale, sembra tuttavia difficilmente applicabile al caso dei meridionali che giunsero in massa a Filadelfia negli anni Ottanta e Novanta. Per esempio, a differenza della Società Italiana di Unione e Fratellanza – fondata in prevalenza da liguri – alla quale poteva aderire qualunque italiano a prescindere dal luogo di nascita, la maggior parte delle associazioni di mutuo soccorso costituite da immigrati meridionali ebbero una connotazione localistica e mantennero fino agli anni Trenta delle norme statutarie che consentivano l'iscrizione soltanto agli individui nati in una particolare regione, provincia o paese. Ancora nel 1927, quando l'abruzzese Eugene Alessandrini si candidò alla Court of Common Pleas, una di queste associazioni l'Unione Abruzzese – diramò un appello per l'elezione non del primo giudice di origine italiana della città, bensì del

suo primo giudice di origine abruzzese. D'altro canto, il ligure Antonio Isolero si distinse per il tentativo di escludere gli immigrati meridionali da St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, di cui fu parroco dal 1870 al 1926.

A parte questi rilievi, il volume di Juliani rappresenta l'unica indagine autorevole sull'origine di una comunità italiana negli Stati Uniti. Come tale, la sua importanza trascende la mera dimensione di un case study di storia locale per configurarsi come modello metodologico dal quale chi intraprenderà in futuro ricerche analoghe sul periodo di formazione delle comunità italiane in altre città potrà difficilmente prescindere.

Stefano Luconi

Maria do Rosário Rolfsen Salles
Médicos Italianos em São Paulo (1890-1930)
São Paulo, IDESP/Sumaré, 1997, pp. 182.

L'Instituto de Estudos Econômicos, Sociais e Políticos de São Paulo (IDESP) svolge, da alcuni anni, un bellissimo lavoro volto al recupero del contributo delle diverse etnie allo sviluppo e alla vita sociale e politica dello stato di San Paolo dal secolo XIX in poi; sono già apparsi, tra gli altri, libri su arabi, armeni, giapponesi e spagnoli ed ebrei.

Il libro di Maria do Rosario Salles è il primo dedicato all'immigrazione italiana, ma l'IDESP mantiene il suo scopo di diffondere, innanzitutto, i lavori che studiano le etnie meno conosciute o illustrano aspetti trascurati della vita e del quotidiano di quelle già ampiamente studiate. Questo è, sicuramente, il caso degli studi sugli italiani nello stato di San Paolo, che hanno ricevuto l'attenzione di numerosi studiosi negli ultimi decenni, fornendo una quantità non disprezzabile di libri e saggi al riguardo. Un fatto, in realtà, naturale quando si ricorda che gli italiani e figli di italiani erano parte sostanziale della popolazione dello stato prima della Seconda guerra mondiale e che, ancora oggi, almeno sei o sette milioni di *paulistas* sono di origine italiana.

Nonostante la gran varietà di studi, però, si riscontra la carenza di informazioni su alcuni aspetti dell'integrazione degli italiani nello stato. Infatti, la storiografia brasiliana ha già accumulato una gran quantità di dati sui contadini che sono arrivati nel Brasile per lavorare nelle *fazendas* di San Paolo e sugli italiani che le hanno lasciate per formare la prima generazione della classe operaia paulista, lavori che costituiscono un ottimo punto di partenza per ulteriori ricerche. Ma non si può dire lo stesso quando si pensa alla ricca borghesia industriale italiana – che ha avuto un ruolo fondamentale nel processo di industrializzazione brasiliana nei primi tre decenni di questo secolo – e alla piccola borghesia costituita da commercianti, avvocati, macellai, e così via, la cui entità, disprezzabile all'inizio del secolo, si sviluppò successivamente. Non sappiamo, infatti, come molti contadini e operai siano riusciti a «fare l'America» in Brasile quando le terribili condizioni di vita nelle *fazendas* e nelle fabbriche non fornivano mezzi sufficienti neanche per una vita povera e senza lo spettro della fame. La parola «lavoro» e le condizioni speciali dell'economia paulista in quel momento (industrializzazione e forte crescita delle città e creazione di un mercato di lavoro urbano più sviluppato) devono indicare alcune risposte, ma il problema meriterebbe, senza dubbio, l'interesse di alcuni studiosi.

Il libro di Maria do Rosario Salles ci aiuta a capire meglio quello che è accaduto nel mercato del lavoro paulista di quegli anni, anche se prende in esame un gruppo molto particolare: le persone che in Italia appartenevano già alla classe media, in particolare, i circa 250 medici italiani arrivati in Brasile per lavorare nel nascente sistema sanitario, in particolare nello stato di San Paolo. È interessante perché studia un gruppo di professionisti molto diversi della maggioranza degli immigranti italiani che scelsero San Paolo. Lavorando in questa linea, l'autrice compie un'esauritiva ricostruzione delle vite e delle carriere di questi medici nel contesto di un Brasile rurale che diventava urbano con gravi problemi sanitari e che forniva un ampio mercato di lavoro per i medici italiani.

Maria do Rosario Salles ci aiuta a capire, inoltre, il ruolo di questi medici (e della classe media italiana di San Paolo in generale) nello sviluppo di un'identità italiana (e non regionale) a San Paolo in questo secolo e i loro rapporti con il nazionalismo e il fascismo italiani, in un approccio che ci apre una finestra per un altro campo non molto conosciuto degli italiani di San Paolo, quello politico. Anche se il libro di Maria do Rosario Salles non offre le risposte alle domande prima postulate, giacché è un tipico studio di caso, con fonti e bibliografia molto limitati, rappresenta, però, un contributo interessante e che merita essere seguito da altri studiosi che si dedicano alla ricostruzione della «Piccola Italia» che è stata, un giorno, San Paolo.

João Fábio Bertonha

María Cristina Cacopardo e José Luis Moreno

La familia italiana y meridional en la emigración a la Argentina

Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli 1994, pp. 179, lire 24.000.

María Bjerg Y Hernán Otero (compiladores)

Inmigración y redes sociales en la Argentina moderna

CEMLA-IEHA, Tandil 1995, pp. 241.

I due volumi, pur essendo il frutto di diversi processi di elaborazione, hanno in comune l'attenzione dedicata alle reti sociali e familiari nell'ambito dello studio storico dei movimenti migratori internazionali verso l'Argentina. Il libro di Cacopardo e Moreno raccoglie alcuni dei risultati di un progetto di ricerca sull'emigrazione dall'Italia meridionale verso l'Argentina, durante l'ampio arco temporale compreso tra l'unificazione politica dell'Italia e il primo decennio del regime fascista. Si tratta di quattro saggi, corrispondenti ad altrettanti capitoli, che si sviluppano attorno a due questioni centrali: il ruolo della famiglia nel movimento di emigrazione dall'Italia e il ruolo degli immigrati italiani nella costruzione della famiglia argentina.

L'attenzione è rivolta in modo particolare all'emigrazione meridionale; il metodo della ricostruzione delle strutture familiari e delle eventuali catene migratorie ha reso necessario circoscrivere l'analisi a specifiche realtà locali. Ciò ha permesso uno studio approfondito dei registri e degli schedari degli emigranti in due comuni campani (San Gregorio Magno, in provincia di Salerno, e San Gregorio Matese, provincia di Caserta) e di un comune pugliese (Molfetta, in provincia di Bari). La scelta degli Autori di lavorare su entrambi i versanti del movimento migratorio, e di integrarli in un unico processo storico, conferisce particolare interesse a questo volume. L'analisi di un campione relativamente ristretto contribuisce ad accorciare, per così dire, la distanza – non solo geografica – tra i due estremi di un movimento migratorio che, nato in un contesto rurale, ha il suo compimento in una società dalle marcate caratteristiche urbane.

Il libro prende l'avvio da un esame – esemplare sotto il profilo analitico e metodologico – della struttura della famiglia italiana in Argentina, fondato sullo studio della documentazione originale del secondo censimento della Repubblica (10 maggio 1895), relativamente al *partido* di Luján e al quartiere della Boca a Buenos Aires (cap. 1: María Cristina Cacopardo, José Luis Moreno, *La familia italiana en la Argentina de fines del siglo XIX*, pp. 17-72). Lo stesso tema viene poi affrontato nell'ambito degli emigranti al momento della partenza (cap. 2: María Cristina Cacopardo, *Emigrantes hacia la Argentina desde una pequeña comuna meridional italiana*, pp. 73-98, e Cap. 4: José Luis Moreno, *La emigración de San Gregorio Matese a la Argentina: pasaje de ida sin retorno*, pp. 145-68). Viene inoltre considerato, per il caso di Molfetta, l'impatto delle rimesse degli emigranti sulle relazioni e sulle dinamiche familiari (cap. 3: José Luis Moreno, *Las mujeres van al banco: remesas y familias de los migrantes meridionales en la Argentina antes de la crisis de 1929-30. El caso de Molfetta*, pp. 99-144).

La famiglia nucleare, parzialmente disaggregata al momento dell'emigrazione, riaggregata o riprodotta nell'ambiente di immigrazione, è dunque il tema centrale dei quattro studi che compongono il volume. È nell'ambito della famiglia emigrante e immigrata che vengono via via poste in rilievo le relazioni di genere, le consuetudini matrimoniali, le strategie migratorie, la gestione integrata dei risparmi e quel tessuto di relazioni locali e di parentela che talvolta si delinea come una vera e propria catena migratoria (cfr. capp. 2 e 3).

Mentre il libro di Cacopardo e Moreno sottolinea il ruolo della famiglia nucleare, sia nel processo decisionale, sia durante il successivo inserimento nella società argentina, il volume curato da Bjerg e Otero estende il campo di analisi alle reti sociali, anch'esse utilizzate come strumento di interpretazione del processo migratorio nella sua interezza (dalla decisione di partire all'integrazione e azione nella società di destinazione), relativamente, anche in questo caso, all'esperienza argentina.

Il volume raccoglie le relazioni che sono state presentate alla tavola rotonda su *Redes sociales y migraciones*, che si è svolta nell'agosto del 1994 a Tandil (Buenos Aires), su iniziativa del *Programa de Población* e della *Sociedad del Instituto de Estudios Históricos-Sociales de la Universidad Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires*.

A differenza di altre opere del genere, questa collettanea mantiene viva la tensione del dibattito, sia per i riferimenti alla discussione generale contenuta nella maggior parte dei singoli contributi, sia, soprattutto, per la presenza dei due saggi introduttivi di Ramella e Míguez e del saggio che potremmo definire conclusivo di Moutoukias (Franco Ramella, *Por un uso fuerte del concepto de red en los estudios*

migratorios, pp. 9-22; Eduardo Míguez, *Microhistoria, redes sociales e historia de las migraciones: ideas sugestivas y fuentes parcas*, pp. 23-34; Zacarías Moutoukias, *Narración y análisis en la observación de vínculos y dinámicas sociales: el concepto de red personal en la historia social y económica*, pp. 221-41).

I tre saggi contestualizzano nel dibattito storiografico le singole ricerche presentate durante la tavola rotonda, proponendo implicitamente diversi percorsi di lettura, che percorrono trasversalmente gli studi di caso e le riflessioni sui metodi e le fonti. Il volume è infatti suddiviso in tre parti: l'Introduzione (costituita dai saggi citati di Ramella e di Míguez); un insieme di otto studi di caso, sotto il titolo *Redes sociales e integración de inmigrantes* e, infine, quattro saggi, raccolti nella terza parte, su *Fuentes, métodos y problemas*.

Come spiega Eduardo Míguez, tutti gli articoli raccolti nel volume, «Eredi degli studi sulle catene migratorie, e anche di alcune fonti specifiche, ... cercano di ricostruire la trama di relazioni sociali sulla base delle similitudini di origine regionale, o microregionale, o di relazioni parentali» (p. 29). Il terreno della microstoria consente di dare un nuovo e inusuale rilievo a flussi migratori che, per la loro relativa esiguità, sono normalmente considerati marginali nella produzione storiografica. È il caso dei bei saggi di María Bjerg sull'immigrazione danese (María Bjerg, *Sabiendo el camino o nevagando en las dudas. Las redes sociales y las relaciones impersonales en la inmigración danesa a la Argentina, 1848-1930*, pp. 107-132) e di Hernán Otero, sui francesi a Tandil (Hernán Otero, *Redes sociales primarias, movilidad espacial e inserción social de los inmigrantes en Argentina. Los franceses de Tandil, 1850-1914*, pp. 81-106).

Altri contributi, così come accade nel libro di Cacopardo e Moreno, pongono in luce le peculiarità microregionali e le diversificazioni esistenti nei grandi movimenti nazionali dell'immigrazione di massa. Sono analizzati i casi italiano e spagnolo, con i lavori di Didier Norberto Marquegui, *Migración en cadena, redes sociales y movilidad. Reflexiones a partir de los casos de los Sorianos y Albaneses de Luján, 1889-1920* (pp. 35-60), di Claudia Etcharri, *Redes y movilidad social: éxito o fracaso? El caso de los ripeses e de los ginestrales en Rosario (1945-1955)*, pp. 61-66, e di Marcelino Iriani, *Los vascos y las cadenas migratorias. Los protocolos notariales como fuentes para su estudio* (pp. 169-190).

Nel caso dell'immigrazione spagnola, l'intreccio tra la leadership «etnica» e l'azione politica locale è suggerito nel saggio di Da Orden (María Da Orden, *Liderazgo étnico, relaciones personales y participación política: los españoles de Mar del Plata, 1883-1930*, pp. 133-167), che ribadisce, come studi di altri Autori sullo stesso tema, la determinante partecipazione politica informale dei non naturalizzati, anche grazie all'azione mediatrice dei leader «etnici» locali.

Frid de Silberstein e Ceva (Carina Frid de Silberstein, *De la red al mercado: procesos de especialización profesional de tres estudios de caso. Rosario, 1890-1930*, pp. 67-80; Mariela Ceva, *Las imágenes de las redes sociales de los inmigrantes desde los archivos de fábrica. Una comparación de dos casos: Flandria e Alpargatas*, pp. 203-20) studiano invece il ruolo delle reti sociali nell'ambito della produzione e del mercato della manodopera. De Silberstein pone in rilievo il peso, a Rosario, della famiglia e delle piccole concentrazioni microregionali nelle attività produttive di piccola scala; la specializzazione professionale incrociata con l'appartenenza a reti sociali di origine regionale assicura, in alcune situazioni, il controllo dell'inserimento nel mercato. Ceva, mediante l'analisi delle schede personali degli operai conservate negli archivi di due importanti fabbriche di Buenos Aires, ricostruisce, per il decennio del Trenta, le reti di raccomandazione sviluppatasi al momento dell'assunzione, sottolineando la diversa importanza delle reti familiari e delle reti etniche e di quartiere, e suggerendo nuove e importanti prospettive di ricerca. Bernasconi, infine (Alicia Bernasconi, *Aproximación al estudio de las redes migratorias a través de las listas de desembarco. Posibilidades y problemas*, pp. 191-202), propone una utile analisi della genesi delle liste di imbarco e una riflessione sulle opportunità che esse offrono per lo studio delle reti migratorie. Il saggio di Bernasconi pone l'accento, al pari di altri Autori nel corso dei loro contributi, sul problema delle fonti, in un dialogo ideale con i saggi metodologici, già citati, di Ramella, Míguez e Moutoukias.

Al di là degli specifici campi di analisi, i due volumi, dei quali sarebbe utile una traduzione in italiano, riescono a porre efficacemente in luce alcuni nodi metodologici, che non concernono soltanto le singole ricerche, ma che implicano una discussione più ampia sui futuri orientamenti dello studio della grande migrazione, a partire dal periodo fecondo della storiografia argentina rappresentato da questi anni Novanta.

Chiara Vangelista

Gabriella De Ferrari

Gringa Latina. A Woman of Two Worlds

Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston-New York 1995, pp. 176.

Nata in Perù da genitori italiani, Gabriella De Ferrari è una scrittrice di lingua inglese, che vive e lavora negli Stati Uniti, dove si è diplomata alla Harvard University. Collaboratrice di varie riviste, è autrice, tra l'altro, del romanzo *A Cloud on Sand* e di queste memorie autobiografiche.

Il titolo del libro anticipa efficacemente il filo conduttore di questa autobiografia, che vuole ricostruire le radici di una identità di emigrante (il termine, però, non viene mai usato nel testo). Vissuta sino ai quinci anni in Perù, dove era definita *gringa*, perché figlia di italiani, quando si stabilisce negli Stati Uniti – dopo aver frequentato le scuole superiori in Inghilterra scopre con sorpresa di essere considerata nel nuovo paese di adozione una peruviana, o una *latina*.

La morte dei genitori in Perù e la decisione di prendere la cittadinanza americana inducono l'autrice a una riflessione sulla propria appartenenza etnico-culturale. I ricordi si concentrano soprattutto sul periodo peruviano, attraverso la presentazione di persone e di luoghi che hanno accompagnato l'autrice nella sua fanciullezza e adolescenza: la vicina di casa, le domestiche, il cibo, le compagne di scuola, i genitori, la città natale, la casa, la casa delle vacanze, il deserto, il primo viaggio in Italia e così via.

Il lavoro letterario si trasforma così in una testimonianza delle esperienze e delle relazioni di una famiglia della borghesia italo-peruviana, sullo sfondo di un paese non ancora segnato dal terrorismo e dal traffico della droga.

L'autrice si presenta, sin dal titolo, come il prodotto non conflittuale delle tre culture – italiana, peruviana e statunitense – delle quali fa parte, per origini o per relazioni affettive. L'ultimo capitolo, *A gringa latina cooking sampler*, nel quale vengono spiegate e trascritte alcune delle ricette di cucina della madre, è una efficace sintesi del libro, e ne è anche la chiave di lettura: accanto al *locro* e alla *papa a la huancaína*, ricette della cucina peruviana, c'è la salsa verde, la torta pasqualina, la cima ripiena, il latte fritto (i genitori di Gabriella De Ferrari erano liguri), l'*osso bucco* (sic), con le trasformazioni rese necessarie dalla mancanza degli ingredienti originali (il risotto allo zafferano diventa, per esempio, risotto al coriandolo) e le ulteriori elaborazioni suggerite dai prodotti locali.

Un piccolo bagaglio culturale e affettivo da trasmettere ai figli nati negli Stati Uniti, affinché non dimentichino le loro origini e la storia familiare.

Chiara Vangelista

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<http://www.adnkronos.com/news/prod/itaest/index.htm>

Italian Activities in the US
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