

## **Building Italian-ness through the Logic of the 'Other in Us' and the 'Self in the Other': An Anti-nationalist Approach to the Italian Debate on a New Citizenship Law**

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*Abstract: This paper considers the current debate on a new citizenship law in Italy from the standpoint of a 'brown' Italian citizen, as the author defines himself. From this particular standpoint, the recent bills aimed at changing the law on citizenship and the debate in the Chamber of Deputies on 22 December 2009 will be analysed. In maintaining that reform of the citizenship law should be carried out hand in hand with a critical deconstruction of the idea of Nation, this article calls for a switch of perspective in the public discourse's construction of migrants and integration: from the paradigm of acceptance/rejection of the Other to the paradigm of the 'Other in Us' and the 'Self in the Other'. This alternative perspective enables a blurring of the divide between the Self and the Other and thus allows the re-constructing of the 'public face' of the Nation in an anti-nationalist way. The final section of the article is directly engaged with this aim.*

Keywords: Italian-ness, Unconscious Racism, Second Generation, Nation, Colonialism

A large number of proposals have been made for change in the way in which access to citizenship is regulated (see Marchetti, this issue, for a full analysis). This article will consider the bipartisan Sarubbi-Granata proposal, and the Bertolini bill supported by the centre-right Northern League (Lega Nord, LN) and the People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL). In the following sections I will highlight points of difference and similarity between these two bills. It will be argued that the points they share are more significant than the ones they do not because these are directly related to the ways politicians see Italian-ness. The issue of defining Italian-ness concerns the whole of civil society and occurs every time the presence of migrants within the national territory is discussed in terms of 'acceptance' or 'rejection'. Every time the migrant is viewed as the Other, no matter if in a positive/accepting or negative/rejecting light, Italian-ness is defined by creating distance with such an Other. I thus aim to show that, even when the integration of migrants is demanded or takes

place, this strengthens the definition of Italian-ness in opposition to the Other. This is how what I term the 'paradigm of acceptance/rejection of the Other' works. Rete G2 ('Second-generation Network'), an association of the sons and daughters of immigrants that has recently raised the question of a new citizenship law in Italian public debate, also reifies such a paradigm when it demands that the sons and daughters of immigrants be accepted as Italian citizens. I will make this point clear by looking at Rete G2's claims and at the way in which some opposition parliamentarians made their points during the debate in the Chamber of Deputies on 22 December 2009. In opposing the decisions of the majority coalition, and in casting the sons and daughters of immigrants as victims of unjust legislation, these politicians have excluded the possibility of rethinking the idea of Italian-ness in their bills.

This article is an attempt to address this last point. It calls for dissolution of the concept of the Other conceived as a fixed identity, through embracing the perspective of the 'Other in Us' and the 'Self in the Other'. It is a perspective that seeks to highlight all the elements of interconnectedness between the alleged categories of *us* and *them* that are historically rooted and socially evident but not officially recognised. This is so because – to draw on the insights of Foucault (1997) and Said (1978) – the nations of European modernity have been invented through a dual mechanism: the *reductio ad unum* of internal differences so as to proclaim an 'us', and the definition of this us in *opposition to a 'them'*, which became known through colonial occupation. The idea of nationality that underpins current discourses on the integration of migrants is rooted in this 'colonial fracture'. The fact that this point is seldom addressed in public discourse, and is totally absent when defining national belonging, affects the way in which migrants are seen by the host society: in this absence, I will argue, they are seen either as enemies or victims, criminals or humble workers, never as people with the same desires, dreams and aspirations as the locals. With few exceptions, this limit in seeing 'them' as 'us' when talking about immigration is shared both by progressive and conservative parties as well as by the thinking of local people – because this is the point at which the official way of imagining the Nation meets the popular one. Building on the work of Etienne Balibar (2002, 2004) and his definition of racism as an "internal supplement of nationalism" (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1996: 61), I would define this intersection between institutional and popular racism as 'unconscious racism' to make clear that it precedes the people who articulate it in that it has to do with the legacy of the invention of the Nation as such. In arguing that this unconscious racism is colonially determined, this article offers a means of taking advantage of the citizenship debate in Italy to propose a strategy which could be applied in all the former colonial powers of Europe with the aim of de-colonising the

imagined nation, or rather, decolonising the colonialistic way of viewing migrants.

I advance this perspective as an anthropologist and Italian citizen, whose father was an immigrant. I will contextualise my approach by reflecting on a personal experience in which these two elements, my anthropological background and my being a *brown Italian*, are intertwined. This provides an ethnographic example of how unconscious racism manifests itself and how intimately difficult it is for the 'Other within the Nation' to deal with it. Rete G2 has the merit of addressing this point in the public debate by providing a platform for the children of immigrants to express their disquiet at feeling Italian but not being socially accepted as such. However, their way of politically articulating their personal experiences, to paraphrase the famous feminist slogan, flirts with their self-appointed role of victims. It is partly thanks to this approach that opposition politicians are able to depict them as victims without providing a different conception of Italian-ness. The personal introduction which follows, in contrast, is intended to highlight the link between my 'political personal' approach and the need for a new articulation of Italian-ness. It also introduces the European dimension of my proposal which I will revisit in the final section.

### **Faint Smile, Severe Look**

A few years ago, I was shopping for some breakfast in a large supermarket near my apartment in the centre of Rome before starting my day working on my degree dissertation. I was standing at a counter when suddenly a man's voice nearby attracted my attention: "Can you show me what you put in your pocket?" I turned to where the voice was coming from and realised it was referring to me: there was a man looking at me paternally, with a faint smile but with a severe look. I recognised him as the manager of the supermarket. After a moment of surprise, which probably coincided with my recognition of his face, I cried out: "That's absurd!" and as I pulled out what I had put in my pocket, I added: "My scarf!" The manager, without changing facial expression a great deal, said: "I do apologise" and after having briefly hesitated, waiting for my reply, which did not come, disappeared.

It was during the same period that I came across Althusser's (1977) theory of interpellation which provided a useful lens for interpreting that experience. It was a period of intense stress, which was partly caused by the awareness of having reached a crucial moment in my personal development.<sup>1</sup> Before that morning I knew that the unsolved contradictions of my teens could not be put aside any longer. This became clear by reflecting on how, during my ethnographic experience among the immigrant residents of an occupied building in Rome's Via Giolitti (near

Termini Station), I tended to oppose what I felt was an 'immediate understanding' with an Eritrean man (who subsequently became a close friend), expressed through the language of hip hop, to my interactions with my Roman girlfriend (who soon afterwards became my ex-girlfriend). The opposition I felt was based on her being *different* from us, on her being 'white' in contrast to our being, respectively, 'black' (him) and 'brown' (me) - but in any case linked to the way the white majority of Italian society looks at us, that is to say: as the Other.<sup>2</sup> I was convinced that to really understand why I started to call my Eritrean friend "brother", as he already called me, and as I had never done with anyone before, it was necessary to look back at the way I had built my personality and my body in the late 1990s as a brown Italian: as the son of a Panamanian father and an Italian mother, growing up in a little village where my sisters, my brother and I were among the very few 'coloured' people at that time.

Before the supermarket manager mistook me for a shoplifter, I already knew, through listening to and practicing rap music in my adolescence, that I had identified with the rebellious African-American music in order to express my anger at the racism I experienced, especially at school and when I was called a "nigger" by opposing fans during the official basketball games I played in for my town team. But after that morning, prompted by Althusser's theory of interpellation, I began asking myself whether I had not accepted the manager's representation of me by turning toward him and answering. By taking out the scarf from my pocket, that is, by offering proof that I was not guilty, hadn't I consented to him seeing me as a possible thief? Hadn't I implicitly legitimised the racism in his eye, although I wanted to reject it? Hadn't I, adopting Althusser's example of police-man interpellation, submitted to the Law, instead of resisting it?

I began thus to see the limits of my thinking of myself as a rebel. The process of deconstruction of myself which I was involved in made me think that Stuart Hall's concept of "new ethnicities" (Hall, 1988), originally coined to understand the process of identity-making in the British black youth Diaspora, fitted me, explaining quite well what happened to me during my adolescence. But through Althusser's theory of interpellation I realised how true it was that my body had been disciplined by the ideological apparatuses of the state without my being aware of it. I was ready to embrace fully the implicit suggestion a friend of mine made when he heard about the encounter: "It was as if you and he were involved in a game where whoever has more prejudices against the other wins". That is to say: why should I have thought that he mistook me for a petty-thief just because of my appearance of Otherness? How much was my way of seeing him influenced by my own feeling that the middle-class people living in my neighbourhood thought of me as an intruder, as someone who should not live in the same neighbourhood? How much was this feeling justified and how much, instead, did it show my unjustified lack of trust in, and

negative consideration of, them? Had I turned into a racist from having been myself a victim of racism?

To put it in the words of the Italian ethnologist Ernesto De Martino, I had experienced what he called the “end of the world”, by which he meant the crisis of the cultural explanations his research subjects had built for themselves (De Martino, 2002). By reflecting on this now I realise how helpful it can be to pursue an “ethno-self analysis” (Augé, 1995) in order to detach the insidious and unconscious level on which racism works. However, at that time, just as in De Martino’s anthropology of the “magical world”, where the crisis is followed by the need for a solution able to reconfirm the validity of the previous explanations, I myself was looking for a way out of the crisis (De Martino, 2003; Berrocal, 2009). I thus came across Judith Butler’s (2005) essay which gave me a new meaning for the act of turning. In her critique of Althusser, the act of turning is seen not as a proper act of submission to the Law but rather as a way to redefine the terms of the relationship between the subject and the Law itself. Butler makes her point by advancing Mladen Dolar’s argument that Althusser’s theory does not sufficiently take into account the ‘residual’ between the Symbolical and the Psychical. Dolar points out that the individual is not ‘already the subject’, as it is for Althusser, but rather what can undermine the subject’s completeness during the subjectivity process. If the interpellation tries somehow to remedy this failure and if the residual lies at the heart of the subjectivity process – which is the dimension not sufficiently investigated by Althusser according both to Dolar and Butler – Butler infers that what most characterises the act of turning for the subject is a search for something – an ‘existence’ – to be defined – which originates from the anti-dialectical dominion (the residual) but which is not destined to remain there (in the Psychical): it can see a collective expression one day (in the Symbolical).

What was I looking for while turning toward the shop manager? A further personal experience helps to provide an answer. When the *banlieues* riots erupted in November 2005 in France I felt a sense of anger, partly because of the way the media represented the *black-blanc-beur* involved in the riots, but more because of hearing and reading the way Italian leftist intellectuals and opinion-makers did so.<sup>3</sup> The rioters were repeatedly depicted as *desperate*, their acts of setting fire to cars and schools in their own territory as proof of their *nihilism*. The hip hop model which these young rioters consumed was viewed as the source of their nihilistic desperation – as was exemplified by the tone of an article which appeared in the *New York Times* (Brooks, 2005). Perhaps due to my hip hop commonality with the rioters, I did not see the absence of future planning in their acts. Despite the internal contradictions – sexist code, thug culture – that I could imagine as being a characteristic of the revolts, it was clear that the acts of setting fire to schools could not be overlooked. From a distance I

felt that the third- and in some cases fourth-generation offspring of immigrants in France were not destroying the place to which the state had relegated them, their parents and grandparents, but rather changing it, transforming it, starting from where their bodies and minds had been disciplined as 'foreigners in their own country'. They were rather engaged in making that place their 'home'. What wider European public opinion did not consider, in my view, was that the rioters' violence was already part of a constructive process in which attacking the schools they attended meant at the same time blaming the apparatuses of the state for their social marginalisation and taking responsibility for change. The change I felt they were looking for (but which they have probably not been able to implement so far) was not different from what I was looking for while turning toward the manager: I was driven by the need to find a new way of feeling Italian, by the desire to make it become a collective exigency. This article is an attempt to transform my 'residual' into a collective strategy.

### **Security/Integration, Rejection/Acceptance of the Other**

The Sarubbi-Granata bill, aimed at modifying the current Italian citizenship law, authored by Deputies Andrea Sarubbi of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) and Fabio Granata, of the PdL, was put before the Italian Parliament on 30 July 2009. The bill was immediately welcomed by Rete G2, the association founded in 2005 by the sons and daughters of immigrants with the goal of lobbying for a change to law no. 91 of 1992. Law no. 91 was passed at a time when Italy had recently become an immigration country, having been for over a century a country of emigration. However, the provisions did not move radically beyond the previous legislation (law no. 555 of 1912), apart from the ratification, already provided for in law no 123 of 1983, of a couple's equal right to transmit citizenship to their child.<sup>4</sup>

Children of immigrants are not automatically considered Italian citizens under this law, even if they were born in Italy or arrived in the country when very young. Furthermore the law has created '*Italiani con permesso di soggiorno*' (Italians with residence permits), as Rete G2 has been claiming since 2005, to focus public attention on the discrimination which children of immigrants face. Rete G2 demanded that the *ius sanguinis* principle of citizenship be replaced with *ius soli* as the main criterion. They also demanded that all children who, even if born outside Italy, went to school there for the first time be automatically eligible for Italian citizenship. Their argument is that school is where the socialisation process making a person part of a country's culture, takes place.

Both of these points were addressed in the Sarubbi-Granata bill; it proposed that the child of a foreign couple, if one member had been living legally in Italy for five years, receive the right to Italian citizenship. One of

the parents would have to declare this officially when recording the child's birth at the registry office. The child would then have the right to refuse citizenship when eighteen years old, or to apply for it if the parent chose not to make the official declaration. The bill also introduced provisions to enable Italian citizenship to be obtained by minors going through the Italian school system. The bill shares Rete G2's concern not to deprive the children of foreigners of the rights their schoolmates already have. It strengthens the role of the state in their process of becoming Italian citizens by making the citizenship declaration at birth compulsory, obliging the authorities to compensate for parents' lack of knowledge of the law. This is in fact another point which Rete G2 emphasises: some children of immigrants continue to apply for residence permits or for citizenship through the same channels as other foreigners because their parents are unaware that under law no. 91 they can request citizenship when they reach the age of eighteen, if they were born in Italy.

The Sarubbi-Granata bill counterbalances these provisions for minors through new rules for the acquisition of citizenship by adult migrants. It states that law no. 91 gave citizenship only through a "concessionary and quantitative" logic, while their proposal would turn it into an "active and qualitative" one:

For the adult foreigner, citizenship must become a certain, desired and formative process; the point of arrival on a path of social, civil and cultural integration, and the final point for its continual development [sic]. The fundamental idea is, on the one hand, to provide *those demonstrating the desire to be integrated into the social and civil fabric of the nation giving them hospitality* with all the appropriate tools to facilitate a process that leads to the full recognition of citizenship; on the other, not to trigger automatic provisions where such a desire is not explicitly expressed.

For those "demonstrating the desire to be integrated into the social and civil fabric of the nation giving them hospitality", Sarubbi-Granata reduced from ten to five years the period of legal residence required for eligibility for Italian citizenship. However, in addition to proof of residence and fluency in Italian, the bill gives great importance to a ceremony through which applicants swear allegiance to the Italian Constitution, thereby demonstrating that they genuinely want to be integrated into the Nation. It is important to emphasise that, in this bill, taking such an oath is not merely a formal act, but is indispensable to completing the procedure leading to the acquisition of citizenship, so that, if one is unjustifiably absent from the oath-taking ceremony, the procedure will be suspended, and if one declines to take the oath, the procedure will be nullified.

This is nothing that is not already provided for by law no. 91. But what is interesting is the reason now given for requiring the oath. The final sentences of Sarubbi-Granata, following from the previous quotation, state:

“It is argued that in this way [by requiring the oath], it is possible to merge and harmonise the *different but intimately linked requirements of security and integration* in managing the processes of integration”. ‘Security’ and ‘integration’ have been the key terms used in the Italian public debate on immigration in the last fifteen to twenty years, that is, from when Albanians fleeing the political crisis in their country generated a ‘syndrome of invasion’ in Italian media discussion (Dal Lago, 2004). This syndrome has been present in the older immigration countries of Europe, such as France, the UK and Germany, for the last thirty to forty years and has now spread to the more recent immigration countries of Italy, Spain, and Greece. Since immigration started to be seen as a ‘problem’ in the older immigration countries, security and integration have become the two modalities through which most conservative and progressive parties or government coalitions have dealt with it: the repression of illegality and criminality on the one hand, and the introduction of regulations which are believed to ‘integrate’ migrants who work legally, have a family and have lived in the country for long time, on the other. These two modalities have since informed the political agenda of the new immigration countries as the syndrome of invasion has spread.

In the Sarubbi-Granata bill these two key terms – the “different but intimately linked requirements of security and integration” – are articulated simultaneously by politicians on opposite sides of the political spectrum; while Sarubbi belongs to the centre-left PD, Granata is a supporter of Gianfranco Fini, one of the two founders of the PdL, who has recently been openly critical of the leadership, politics, and institutional behaviour of the party’s co-founder, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Fini appears to be working to establish a role for himself as the representative of an innovative and ‘modern right wing’ in opposition to Berlusconi on many social issues. His perspective on the issue of citizenship became clear as early as 2003 when, shortly after having co-sponsored Italy’s current immigration law, the so-called Bossi-Fini law, he declared the need to reduce the period of residence required for immigrants to be eligible for citizenship. At that time his words provoked the indignant reaction of the LN, just as, as we shall see, Sarubbi-Granata did this time.

The LN’s reaction was caused by the conviction that Fini was somehow betraying the philosophy inspiring the Bossi-Fini Law, that of strenuously combating illegal immigration. Bossi-Fini in fact strictly linked migrants’ eligibility for a residence permit to the possession of an employment contract, thus preventing them from staying not only without employment but also without an employment *contract*.<sup>5</sup> But given that his citizenship proposal applied to legal migrants, Fini was not acting contrary to the spirit of his own law. Rather, his ability to articulate the language first of security and then of integration demonstrates that security and integration are the two sides of the same coin, that is, of the same



paradigm: the paradigm of rejection (security)/acceptance (integration) of the Other. My point is that security and the political measures associated with rejection of the Other, such as forced repatriations, need to be viewed in exactly the same light as integration and the political discourses aimed at accepting the Other into the social fabric, such as those in the Sarubbi-Granata bill. Radical Italian authors, like Dal Lago, by pointing out that Bossi-Fini is the radicalisation of the Turco-Napolitano law (delivered by the centre-left Prodi government in 1998) see this inter-changeability among progressives and conservatives in using security and integrationist language simultaneously. However, they do not seem to be equally able to draw conclusions from that because, I would argue, they are misled about the notion of racism. While accusing the LN of racism (because of its election campaigns and local policies against migrants and mosques in Northern Italy as well as the national provisions it has promoted such as the recent criminalisation of illegal migrants), these radical commentators keep asking for more integration. But the problem lies in the way this request is articulated. The argument that migrants must be treated with respect and not criminalised because they do jobs Italians no longer want to do, is frequently made by politicians and institutional representatives, such as former President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi.<sup>6</sup> It has also been used as an argument by the radical left against the right and even in opposing the security measures against migrants introduced by various centre-left local administrations in recent years. This way of talking on behalf of migrants, however, leaves no alternative means open for them to be incorporated in the Nation. A migrant here does not see his or her skills and abilities recognised in their own right but is just portrayed as a person willing to do the more humble work which Italians no longer feel like doing. Equally, the desires and aspirations that an immigrant had before moving to Italy are not viewed as the main reason for his/her presence in Italy. In this 'pro' migrant discourse, only one way, a *unilateral* way, is conceived for their integration. It is to this unilateralism that, in the absence of a deconstructing discourse of the Nation, the Italian citizenship seeker is required to submit in the Sarubbi-Granata bill.

In trying to show how 'cultural intimacy' and cultural nationalism interpenetrate each other, Michael Herzfeld (2005: 5) finds it useful to ask the question: "Why do the people continually reify the State?" Etienne Balibar (1996), while defining "racism as the internal supplement of nationalism", suggests to us that we see the field of the relationship with the Other as one of the spheres in which this continual reification takes place. By developing Fichte's notion of the "internal border" to understand the kind of exclusion to which the Other is subject within European societies, Balibar (1994, 2002) provides us with the analytical tools to understand how the unilateralism of the integration paradigm works at a micro level. I attempt to ground the personal experience recounted earlier

within this framework. What I describe as the supermarket manager's faint smile and severe look can be read as a manifestation of the "intimately linked exigencies of security and integration". On the one hand, he probably asked me what I had put in my pocket because my appearance of Otherness reminded him of the mass media's reference to migrants in Italy as criminals. On the other hand, my appearance of Otherness likely excluded me, in his mind, from being a resident of that middle-class neighbourhood, simply buying breakfast. I was thus unilaterally *placed* by his faint smile and severe look: I could not be considered a regular customer and fellow citizen. The materialisation of the "internal border" prevented him from recognising me as such.

### **Playing with Symbols of Italian-ness**

Seeing the unilateralism of the integration paradigm in this way highlights the importance of opening a discussion aimed at redefining the terms of incorporation of the Other into the Nation. The anthropologist Pietro Vereni (2009) seemed to make this point when he suggested, through his blog, that Rete G2 change its name, arguing that it was misleading and contradicted their aims.

Rete G2 does not resolve the issue of what the term 'second' refers to, leading people naturally to think of 'immigrants', producing as the final result, 'second-generation immigrants'. This is wrong (in that we are not talking about immigrants but about people born here or who arrived at an age at which they could not possibly be an immigrant) and harmful politically (given that it confirms in the mind of people who read or hear the term 'second generation' the conviction that they are migrants anyway, others, not Italians to deal with). The risk of this nomenclature, in my opinion, is it neutralises from the start the scandal of the conditions the G2 are forced to put up with, so that [the issue] is reduced to the nth request of the nth complaining minority speaking humbly to the majority to claim a few crumbs in terms of rights. No, I believe that the issue should be faced on a terminological level too through the adoption of an expression such as First-generation Italians (FGI), as a means of conveying the idea that the FGI are members of the first generation of their families to be part of the Italian culture and therefore that they are Italians full stop. While I, let us say, am an Italian of several generations, the FGI are so of one generation (their own).

While I agree with Vereni's invitation to Rete G2 explicitly to play the symbolism game using their name, I would argue that his suggestion remains infused with the lexicon of the acceptance/rejection of the Other paradigm. Rete G2 should change its name to First-generation Italians, in his view, so that those who have been Italian for several generations can be persuaded not to identify them with migrants, and so not to reject them

but, possibly, see them as Italians and accept them. The conclusion of his reasoning emerges in another extract:

Rete G2 is asking for a fundamental right for its own members and for all those who have Italian culture [...] but do not have the right to be recognised as Italians. We must take into account, however, that their request involves all of us, even those who think that their access to citizenship can be taken for granted. Asking to become an Italian citizen even if one has dark skin or oriental eyes, is Muslim or believes in re-incarnation, means unhooking once and for all Italian identity from skin colour or religion. It means that we-who-have-Italian-citizenship-as-taken-for-granted have to admit that it is time to cease conceiving Italian-ness as inevitably associated with a physical stereotype (Cucinotta's?) or with a cultural one (Padre Pio's) in order to recognise that Italian-ness is something we all construct together by discussing it. It means that being Italian is an identity process, an *in fieri* process, and that our 'strangely' coloured fellow-nationals are interrogating us on this. Are we willing to accept that you become Italian and that national membership is neither a genetically inherited good, nor culturally derived from your parents? Are we ready to accept the fact that one can be fully Italian without being born to Italian parents, because one has been exposed to Italian culture while the process of socialisation took place? Look, this point is crucial: are we willing to accept the fact that Italian identity is not mainly based on the family who generated us? I am enthusiastic about this dynamic perspective, but I do not know how many fellow-nationals are ready to share it at the moment. I think it is important to remind Rete G2 that, speaking of their (most sacred) rights, they are also speaking of the identity of all Italians and that it is therefore likely that they will meet resistance from all those Italians [...] who want to be represented by explicitly racist and intolerant politicians who articulate a very different ideology of membership, attributing to the original family the right/duty to inculcate national identity. The work to be done is, in this sense, highly complicated, in that people, somatically and culturally eccentric in relation to the stereotypical model of Italian national identity, have to be recognised as legitimate interlocutors with whom to talk about Italian-ness and to contribute to its construction.

On the one hand, Vereni recognises a very important challenge presented by Rete G2 concerning the definition of what it means to be Italian in the twenty-first century. On the other hand, he is saying that because a very small number of fellow-nationals would embrace such a challenge while the majority would probably resist it, it would be tactically advisable for Rete G2 to change name. While Vereni seems to evoke the category of racism only to label the explicitly intolerant elected politicians, I would argue, by virtue of the 'internal border' mentioned above, that racism lies exactly in this popular resistance to conceiving Italian-ness in a different way. In this sense, why should Rete G2 adopt a tactic to deal with this kind of racism? I think that simply changing name would fail to address the very points at stake: why is it important to play with the symbolism of the

Nation? What are the identification processes involved in making oneself Italian? How could (and should) a movement of the sons and daughters of immigrants intervene in this? Vereni's invitation to play with the symbolism of Italian-ness in order to unhook it from 'whiteness' and Catholicism is lost because it continues to be articulated through the language of acceptance/rejection. It remains, however, an important step toward overcoming such a paradigm and, furthermore, it underlines how Rete G2 is embedded within it. I agree with Vereni's implicit suggestion that Rete G2's strategy is not very effective, thanks to the absence, in their official documents and individual public statements, of any discussion about playing with the symbolism of Italian-ness. Let us examine, for example, a statement by one of its members to a journalist on a programme entitled *Reality*, broadcast on the television channel La7, about the birth and the demands of the association:

Rete G2 was born in 2005. It was born as an informal group. We realised that we were all asking ourselves the same questions, more or less. Some had the same difficulties related to the fact that they didn't have Italian citizenship but also related to the issue of identity... [arising from] the usual questions: How come you speak Italian so well? How long have you been living here? So we decided to move in two directions: one is the reform of the 1992 Italian law on citizenship; the other is the issue of identity, to sensitise the Italian population to the fact... that it should be normal nowadays to recognise that an Italian can have black skin, a south-American or Asian, or Middle-Eastern face. It shouldn't be a taboo anymore.

I claim that this sensitisation of the population – which has been expressed through workshops in schools, conferences, and a CD of hip hop and reggae artists<sup>7</sup> – is no more than a sensitisation of the population to the need to accept their Otherness. This campaign fails to propose a re-narration of the national imagery. With this absence the link between being black, or Asian or South-American and Italian will continue to be viewed as problematic in public perceptions despite the organisation's desire to change it. Although this spokesperson for Rete G2 recognises the importance of changing popular perceptions, no clear route is proposed for making this happen. Thus, the need for change is invoked but the organisation does not appear to be involved in bringing it about in a concrete way.

**“Don't you see that they/we are already assimilated?”**

Vereni's blog was written after a conference organised by the authors of the Sarubbi-Granata bill and by Rete G2, which took place at the Chamber of Deputies in November 2009. In addition to his suggestion discussed above, Vereni also warned the association about the implications of entering into

dialogue with institutional interlocutors. While some politicians are “potential interlocutors”, Vereni says, others are not, but are rather “enemies who should be treated as such”. “Who will vote for the law”, he asks, “if the governing majority is under the influence of the Northern League which would never support such a bill?”

His prediction was confirmed when, some weeks later, Isabella Bertolini, a Deputy for the PdL, presented an alternative bill. Bertolini’s proposal reintroduced the ten-year residence criterion adult migrants have to fulfil to be eligible to apply for citizenship, and it re-affirmed the non-recognition of Italian citizenship for the children of migrants born in Italy. Bertolini’s bill confirmed the spirit of law no. 91 and made two substantial additions: firstly, that an adult migrant who wishes to apply for Italian citizenship must take a course in Italian history and culture by the beginning of his/her eighth year of legal residence in the country; secondly, in addition to a former minor having to be eighteen years old and having to have lived uninterruptedly for eighteen years in the country, s/he must demonstrate that s/he has passed through the Italian school system with “profit”. This condition is both ambiguous and discriminatory given that if the condition of scholastic “profit” were applied to students with Italian citizenship, some of them would see their citizenship withdrawn merely for having poor results in various academic subjects.

In practice, the Bertolini bill aimed to promote the position of the PdL and LN on the issue of citizenship against that of Fini and the PD. As many PdL and LN politicians declared during the parliamentary debate on 22 December 2009, they do not consider citizenship the principal tool for integrating migrants in society, as members of the opposition and some individuals in the majority coalition do; rather they see it as the point of arrival along a path, as a ‘reward’ to those foreigners who succeed in demonstrating a willingness to be integrated into the Italian culture. They argue that many migrants living in Italy are here just to work for a period of time before returning to their countries. Only a tiny minority genuinely want to remain in Italy for the rest of their lives. It is this tiny minority that can become Italian, but only after having been taught Italian history and culture and having proved that they have accepted the principles of the Italian Constitution.

During the debate, the speeches by representatives of the LN and by members of the PdL who support Berlusconi (as opposed to Fini) exemplified their inflexible view of integration. Roberto Cota of the LN, for example, framed the issue in terms of the danger of attracting more immigrants to Italy, stating, “To concede citizenship easily would mean to fail properly to verify integration, understood as *respect for our laws, practices, customs, traditions and culture.*” In support of the ten-year residence requirement and the course on Italian culture and history, Fabrizio Cicchitto (PdL), stated “I do not at all believe that it is possible in five years,

*except for geniuses, to accomplish the process of cultural, linguistic, and historical assimilation that is required of a person who wants to become an Italian citizen.*" His position, Cicchitto continued, was supported by his high regard and the high regard of his colleagues, for "the quality of [their] own civilization". For this reason he provocatively asked his fellow Deputies: "Can we allow there to be Italian citizens who do not share the average Italian's view of the relationship between men and women?"

While one might comment that the lack of condemnation generated by Berlusconi's recent sexual scandals suggests that gender relations in Italy are far from ideal, it is clear here that Cicchitto was referring to Muslim men. In doing so, he reiterated similar concerns expressed two days earlier in *Il Corriere della Sera* by political scientist Giovanni Sartori (2009) who, in discussing the proposed changes to the law on citizenship, argued that assimilation between Islam and Western Culture was impossible. Another member of the PdL, Fabio Garagnani, took the same approach: applicants for citizenship, he stated, must be part of the Judaic-Christian tradition of our "glorious" civilization:

I feel that the centre-left approach lacks a serious in-depth analysis about what is happening in places such as the Netherlands, Denmark, and the Anglo-Saxon countries, which were at the forefront of the integration process and which are now rapidly reversing their policies because they have realised that it is not possible to be too accommodating to people who, irrespective of their willingness, are *not able sufficiently to reflect on a whole range of issues.*

Garagnani sees the inability of these people to reflect on "a whole range of issues" as being the cause of xenophobia and racism in the countries mentioned, and which the government officially seeks to avoid generating in Italy. He thus views the Bertolini bill as a positive one. The opposition Deputies, particularly those in the PD, made their statements with the opposite aim of showing how such a proposal is instead very regressive. Their main argument was that the Bertolini bill denies the fact that acquiring Italian identity is a never-ending, fluid process. The children of immigrants were used as evidence of this *in fieri* process. Livia Turco, PD, began her speech by stating:

While this discussion is taking place, there are many boys and girls standing [in the square] outside Parliament. Many of them belong to a new movement called G2, the second generations. They are the sons and daughters of immigrants, individuals who are becoming protagonists of their integration into Italian society. I believe we should consider this new phenomenon very seriously. To understand and assess the significance of the reform we are discussing we need to start from them, from the second generation boys and girls who are *de facto* Italians and many of whom wish to become so *de jure*.

In reality it was not Rete G2 that was demonstrating outside Parliament but an organisation called Anolf Giovani (Associazione Nazionale Oltre le Frontiere - National Association Beyond Borders), the youth section of an organisation supported by the CISL trade union (Confederazione Italiana Sindacato dei Lavoratori - The Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions). This other group was formed recently and is in some ways antagonistic to Rete G2,<sup>8</sup> it too calls for a new citizenship law. The distinction between Anolf and Rete G2 has not escaped Andrea Sarubbi, the PD co-author of the Sarubbi-Granata bill. Arguing against a claim by Bianconi (PdL) that many minors who obtained Italian citizenship and then rejected it at age eighteen risked becoming stateless, Sarubbi declared:

When listening to Bianconi one wonders whether even giving cough medicine to babies is a violent act. What are we talking about? Is giving citizenship to people who want nothing else but cannot request it because they are under eighteen an imposition? Did you go out there while we were here in the Chamber? Did you go and listen to the second-generation youngsters? To ask them whether they are Italian or not? How they spent their childhood and adolescence? *And how, once they were eighteen years old, they found that the bus which used to take them to school then took them straight to prison?* Do you think this is normal?

He then aimed to prove his familiarity with the issue by stating that he had worked on the bill through listening to these people and their requests:

Have you ever met a second generation youth - someone whose name, perhaps, is Xian Ping but who wants to be called Valentino here in Italy and feels nothing but Italian? Have you ever spoken to him? When I mention G2 and Anolf, my colleagues, constitutional engineers, look at me wide-eyed, as if I was talking about crazy things. I wanted to tell you that these organisations do exist, these people do exist...

It is unclear whether Sarubbi was referring to a specific case when he mentioned the example of the bus highlighted above and, without providing a context, the statement may seem exaggerated. However, this does not weaken the effectiveness of his rhetoric; on the contrary, it strengthens it by depicting the children of immigrants as victims of unjust legislation. Federica Mogherini Rebesani's (PD) speech aimed at a similar effect by quoting the words of members of the second generation themselves (specifically members of Rete G2) to express her disapproval of the Bertolini bill:

I would like to use these few minutes at my disposal to read to you some of the messages we received from the people we are talking about here, the second generations. Anna writes: "When I am asked 'Where are you from?', I have neither doubts nor problems. I answer 'from Rome'. Even though I was

not born in Rome, I am from Rome without a doubt. The problem arises when they ask me 'are you Italian?'. I stare back blankly. I look like an imbecile faced with a very easy question. Generally I mumble something like 'it is complicated'. Actually saying 'yes I am Italian' is a problem because I do not feel so. Saying 'yes I am Italian' means overlooking what affects me most everyday: the problems of the '*permesso di soggiorno*', of mobility, of very limited choices, of restrictions. And in any case, I couldn't say 'yes I am Italian' when I don't have Italian citizenship, I don't vote and I can't have a role in the choice of the current government. Do you understand? How would you answer?"

Mogherini Rebesani continued, stating: "She is asking us: How do we, as members of Parliament, respond? They have very clear ideas." By "they", she was referring to the Rete G2, whose appeal written for the November conference she then started reading.<sup>9</sup> The parts of this document in which Rete G2 calls for a change in the citizenship law highlight how the organisation inadvertently supports the PD's rhetoric. Rete G2 argues that, in addition to those born in Italy, people who arrive in the country when very young should also become Italian citizens before turning eighteen.

It is in fact during childhood, while playing with your school-mates, that which many call 'integration' takes place. We call it socialisation because we refer to subjects who have always, or almost always, been in Italy. It is when you are a child that an awareness of belonging to a certain country is born. It is when you are a child that you start putting down roots in what you should perceive as your home. Is it not this, honourable members of Parliament, that makes a country one's own? We are like trees growing roots in a land which is then denied to us. We will not allow ourselves to be trees without roots. [...] The time has come to allow all of us to be Italian and proud of it. Not only in spirit, as we already are, but finally on paper.

The alarmist tone used by Sarubbi - "Have you ever met a second generation youth [...who...] feels nothing but Italian?" - could, we can imagine, be implicitly followed by another question: "Why do you keep talking about the assimilation of Italian and Western values? Don't you see that these youths are already assimilated?" This is in fact the same strategy used by Rete G2 when it declares that the sons and daughters of immigrants want nothing more than to be accepted for what they already are in spirit: Italians. In doing so, in using the metaphor of uprooted trees, in giving an idyllic vision of childhood interaction among Italians and foreign children, its members agree to play the role of victim. My point is that as long as the second-generation issue is presented within the parameters of acceptance and rejection, both by progressive parties and by the organisations of the sons and daughters of immigrants themselves, the structural factors underpinning the ethnocentrism evident in the arguments and suggestions of right-wing politicians (such as requiring courses on



Italian history and culture) will remain unquestioned. To throw light on that structural level, it is necessary to adopt a different perspective: instead of accepting or rejecting the Other, it is necessary to recognise the 'Other that is in Us' and the 'Self in the Other' so as to blur the border between the Other and the Self. A speech by former PD leader, Dario Franceschini, was the only one in the debate which articulated this perspective:

At the port of Genoa there is a wonderful exhibition on Italian emigration, because it was from there that millions of Italians left the country. In only a century, 27 million Italians went to the other side of the Atlantic to seek their fortune, to find a way to escape poverty. They left everything, their land, their homes, their families. They *too* crossed the sea, the ocean, they travelled for weeks. They were looking for a new world. They *too* dreamed of a better future, without poverty, for themselves and their children. The third-class boats, full of men, women, children and suitcases, were headed for La Merica, as this wonderful exhibition is called. They were headed for New York, but they stopped some miles before, at Ellis Island, the frontier-island: it was a place of waiting but also of hoping. And of humiliation too, though: interrogations, questions, suspicions, medical examinations. I think every contemporary Italian should go there, to Ellis Island, to see our reflection in the eyes of our grandparents. [...] There is not one stereotype which has been used in recent years against immigrants to our country that was not used against our grandparents, those Italians: they steal jobs from our youngsters; they are all criminals; they are invading us. [...] We should remember what it was like to see, not many years ago, signs in bars and restaurants stating "no dogs or Italians allowed" [...] It is remarkable how superficially and with what nonchalance too large a part of this country forgets its history and how the most elementary principles of humanity and hospitality are trampled on. No one more than we Italians, a people of migrants, should react against the violation of these principles. Now it is Italy's turn to receive outsiders.

The "they *too*" is used to underline a commonality between Italian emigration of the past and immigration to Italy in the present.<sup>10</sup> It is a "they *too*" that is, however, infused with the rhetoric of victimisation of the migrants and thus obstructs full identification with the objects of the speech. Nevertheless, the ethical imperative of this perspective allows us to embrace a de-essentialist vision of identity.

Our own current identity, which we of course want to defend, is the result of thousands of years of encounters between different cultures and languages. Let us think of the cities of Northern Italy: I say this to the representatives of the Northern League. Let us think of Genoa, the crossroads of sailors and traders, where, over the course of centuries, our language has been enriched by Arabic, Spanish, French and many other influences. Or think of Venice, a crossroads, a miracle built by Italians but also by Byzantine mosaic artists, by Arabic carvers and Turkish decorators. Let us think of our dialects: of the Greek cadence of Barese; of the Arabic tones in Sicilian and Calabrian; of the

communities which, after thousands of years, still speak ancient Albanian today; of the French influences on Piemontese; of the Spanish influences in Lombardy; of Slavic ones in the North-East. To this unique heritage, we must give a future.

The 'uniqueness' Franceschini invokes suggests that the perspective of the 'Other in Us' and the 'Self in the Other' is not being fully and convincingly embraced, because otherwise he would recognise that any identity is made and re-made through these encounters and that therefore Italy's alleged uniqueness should at least be better argued. This limited perspective is confirmed when he calls the future our heritage should be headed toward, a "new patriotism marked by openness and respect for rules." This future should be built with the "new Italians [...] not by rejecting diversity but through the values of hospitality and integration". It is here that his use of the key notions of security - "respect for rules" - and integration leads him to lose the positive perspective adopted earlier. This new patriotism is not in fact a new synthesis of the Nation but the re-proposition of the old one to which the "new Italians" are merely added. New Italians are not seen as an opportunity for rethinking the Nation itself. Turco, for instance stated:

Becoming a new citizen means choosing to be involved in the myths, rites and sentiments of the receiving country as well as wanting to know it and respect its rules. Being engaged in the myths, rites and sentiments of the receiving country is to not to forget who one is but to enrich oneself and to build together, Italians and new Italians, a new stage of human development and growth of the new society.

To build together such a new stage it is necessary that those myths and rites *change* substantially.

### **Conclusion: Remaking Home**

How should these myths and rites change? In order to answer this, it is useful to refer to another 'second-generation' voice, that of Sabrina, with which Mogherini Rebesani concluded her speech:

A person's Italian-ness is not visible on their face, on their hands or hair, or by the colour of their skin. How can you identify this Italian-ness? Being Italian, I never thought I had to explain my national feeling to anybody. Did you ever ask yourself about your Italian-ness when you were seven? I don't think you did. I did, and not out of curiosity but due to *external causes*. "Where are you from? From Rome? Really? You don't look Italian". "My mother is from Brazil". "So you are Brazilian?" "No I am Italian". "Were you born in Italy?" "No, in Brazil but I have been living in Rome since I was two". "Can you dance samba?" This is one of the external causes which made me examine myself and my Italian-ness for a long time. My answer is easy: Italian-ness is a

whole collection of memories, sensations, smells, colours and tastes. Italian-ness is feeling at home in Italy. It is this that Italy represents for me: home. If I call my mother and I tell her “I am coming home, come and pick me up at the airport”, she goes to Fiumicino, not to Brazil. Logical, isn’t it? No it isn’t, of course. What my soul tells me is wrong. Italy is a slow and unjust bureaucratic machine. Italy is an empty world in many people’s mouths, one that seems to take shape only when it is time to define what otherness is, what is different and therefore less precious. Italy is a mass of people who see me as the rest: whatever I do, I remain a foreigner. That is the Italy that the people out there want me to believe it is. But I am cleverer than that and my own Italy I cling fast to.

“We have the duty to show Sabrina that her Italy is also our Italy!”, Morgherini Rebesani concluded. I would argue that to do so, rather than approving proposals on citizenship such as ones in the Sarubbi-Granata bill, it is necessary to work on eliminating the “external causes” Sabrina referred to. My experiences entirely support those of Sabrina: even though I have been an Italian citizen since I was born, earlier in this article I showed the intimate difficulties I had in dealing with these external causes. Unlike her, my own reaction has been to challenge Italian-ness.<sup>11</sup> I have never again felt or described myself as Italian since I experienced hostile feelings against my person and my family. I believe this not feeling part of the national community as a reaction to hostility is also shared by many of the sons and daughters of migrants in the older immigration countries of Europe, be they national citizens or not. This is reflected in the French *banlieues* riots and in Black and Asian youths in the UK whose anger has in some cases been catalyzed by Al-Qaeda. Flirting too much with the role of victim in order to retain supporters in the political establishment, Rete G2 is unable to appreciate the importance of this European background. Yet Italian public opinion should draw on the experience of these countries in order to use the debate around a new citizenship law as an opportunity to follow an alternative path.

I suggest that in order to allow people to feel part of the community, whatever their skin colour, without experiencing external resistance, it is necessary to change the ‘myths and rites’ of the Nation, to change the way Italian-ness is officially and popularly thought of, by provoking an ‘epistemological rupture’, to re-use Althusser’s lexicon, within the mechanisms of the ideological apparatuses of the state. Rapper Boika Esteban’s “Piazza dei Cinquecento” (Square of the Five-hundred) song and video-clip provides a practical example for such a strategy; it asks that the name of the Piazza dei Cinquecento in front of Termini Station in Rome, be changed to Piazza Andrea Costa and Ulisse Barbieri.<sup>12</sup> The reason is that the 500 were the 500 Italian royal soldiers defeated in Dogali in 1887 by the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik, while Andrea Costa and Ulisse Barbieri were major politicians and intellectual figures who strongly opposed Prime

Minister Depretis' campaign to make martyrs of the dead soldiers. Costa and Barbieri both argued that, just a quarter of a century after the unification of Italy, achieved in 1861, Italy was being inauthentic, was negating the principle of self-determination for which the so-called patriots had fought by expelling the foreign powers occupying it: Costa, as a Socialist Party deputy, made the famous statement, "neither money nor a man", during a parliamentary debate on the re-funding of the military mission in Abyssinia, arguing that the Government was using rhetoric very similar to that which was used when "selling something putrid" in the market (Del Boca 1992: 247). Barbieri, an anarchist writer, meanwhile wrote a poem entitled "Ribellione" (Rebellion) in which he says, "Don't you understand, you gang of idiots, that the patriots are the Abyssinians?" (quoted in Del Boca 1992: 250), focusing on the fact that they - the Abyssinians - were simply defending their own freedom exactly as the Italian patriots had done.

This way of seeing them - the African Others - as 'us', in the sense of being involved in freeing their country exactly as the Italian patriots had in the Italian Risorgimento, is a productive strategy for approaching the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italian unification (to be celebrated in 2011) in an anti-nationalist and Nation-deconstructing way. Changing the name of the square on the basis of this reflection may mean finally opening a space in which to face up to and fight the unconscious racism within the feeling of national belonging, as it has been articulated in Western modernity. This racism is in fact unconscious because unconsciously we keep articulating the colonialist categories in representations of the Other. Changing the name of the square could take away the material support from this everyday way of colonially thinking of Otherness. To succeed in addressing this question in public debate, equating Garibaldi and Menelik, would mean creating the right environment for unhooking Italian-ness from skin colour and therefore for starting to allow a black, brown, yellow or sky-blue-pink Italian to be freed from coping with "external causes" in defining his/her own national belonging. The consequence of this would be to enter consciously into a post-national and post-racial space in the definition of the nations of the twenty-first century. From there it would be possible to find new perspectives and political strategies to redefine the borders, especially the southern ones, of post-national organisations like the European Union. In order to seek these post-national consequences, the battle to 'remake home' is, I believe, a battle worth fighting.

## Notes

1. This awareness was spurred by the reflexive methodology of ethnography in accordance with which I was expected to become an 'anthropologist of myself'.

2. Actually, as I was coming to discover, our communality of feeling was mainly due to hip hop and rap music and culture. This 'immediate understanding' has been further discussed in a recent conference paper (see Berrocal, 2010).

3. See Quadrelli (2006a, 2006b, 2007) for ethnographical insights into the riots, and an account of the rhetoric used by Italian opinion-makers in discussing them.

4. Law no. 555 of 1912 enabled Italian citizenship to be transmitted to children by the father and only in some cases by the mother. Given that the 1948 Constitution affirmed gender equality, it was necessary to introduce law no. 123 of 1983 to amend the 1912 law in order to allow children born in Italy of an Italian mother and a foreign father to be Italian citizens.

5. The law thus attaches very strict conditions to legal residence and completely subordinates migrants to the needs and demands of their employers. Bossi-Fini also extended the period of detention for illegal migrants in CPTs (Centres for Temporary Detention now CIEs, Centres for Identification and Expulsion), from two to three months. CPTs were introduced by the previous immigration law, the so-called Turco-Napolitano law, passed by the centre-left government in 1998.

6. At the ACLI (Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani, Christian Associations of Italian Workers) meeting on 11 March 2005 the then President of Republic said that Italians should be grateful to immigrants because they contribute to Italy's economy and promote the emancipation of women.

7. This CD was funded by the centre-left government led by Romano Prodi from 2006 to 2008 and was entitled *Straniero a chi?* ('Who are you calling a foreigner?').

8. For an example of their position, see: [www.secondegenerazioni.it/forum/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=2581&sid=44ac125199081b4552de17c083c8c37f](http://www.secondegenerazioni.it/forum/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=2581&sid=44ac125199081b4552de17c083c8c37f) [accessed 15 June 2010].

9. For the full text of the appeal, see: [www.secondegenerazioni.it/2009/11/12/forte-e-chiaro-cittadinanza-ora-conferenza-stampa-g2-alla-camera-dei-deputati-181109/](http://www.secondegenerazioni.it/2009/11/12/forte-e-chiaro-cittadinanza-ora-conferenza-stampa-g2-alla-camera-dei-deputati-181109/) [accessed 15 June 2010].

10. Franceschini also had the opportunity to problematise Italian 'whiteness' since Italians in America were not seen as whites. But he didn't do this. On Italian whiteness, see Romeo (2009).

11. That fact that I am an Italian citizen and she is not probably explains why I reject Italian-ness while she embraces it.

12. The song will be discussed in greater detail in an article which I am finishing writing. The video-clip can be viewed at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYK5v5jLx0E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYK5v5jLx0E) [accessed 15 June 2010].

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