Italicity as a cosmopolitan resource

■ GIOVANNI BECHELLONI *

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the concept of Italianity, from phenomenology point and from the theory point. I am trying to deal with this subject so as to demonstrate its heuristic or educative potential to: (a) research the international and intercultural communication; (b) construct educational politics that lean to the formation of a new, responsible and inclusive cosmopolitanism; and (c) develop a wider and longer appreciation of war and peace subjects.

Key words: Italianity, sociology of communication, cultural interaction.

RESUMO

Este artigo trata do conceito de italianidade, tanto do ponto de vista da fenomenologia como do ponto de vista da teoria. Procurarei tratar desse assunto de modo a demonstrar seu potencial heurístico ou educativo para: (a) pesquisar a comunicação intercultural e internacional; (b) construir políticas educativas que tendam para a formação de um novo cosmopolitismo responsável e inclusivo; e (c) desenvolver uma consideração mais ampla e mais prolongada dos temas da guerra e da paz1.

Palavras-chave: italianidade, sociologia da comunicação, interação cultural.

Italicity as a cosmopolitan resource

N ine-tenths of the customs that have given the modern world as cognisance of itself and have contributed to its greatness originate from Italy.... There must be something pleasant and easygoing in a civilisation that resists, spreads and attracts without organisation, without a theoretical plan, without resorting to force ... It is difficult to define precisely the happy, light-hearted and cheerful atmosphere that constitutes Italian life; a mixture of scepticism, good humour and a spirit of live and let live that does not exclude the depth of thought, audacious scepticism and a certain passion that is sensual and at the same time romantic, full of understanding of human nature, tolerant of vices and virtues ...

Italy's greatest, most lasting and universal creation was not the Risorgimento but the Catholic Church ... the response given by the world to the Gospel ...

From the national point of view, Italy's impressive cosmopolitan success has been ... a disaster ...

Italy is famous throughout the world today because of the seductiveness of her lifestyle, which is not been codified in any book ...

The universal Italy – which is what matters most – continues to occupy and cause concern to our minds thanks to certain individual Italians, who are always marvellous at getting out of embarrassment and sorting out the painful and awkward situations that their leaders get them into ...

On the other hand the enigma of Italian history consists in the apparently incredible fact that despite the forces that plot against political unity, the country remains Italian ...

What is to be wondered at is the triumph of Italian civilisation over the divergence of interests, desires, races, language, culture and populations ...'
(Giuseppe Prezzolini 1948, 2003, *passim*)

This article is dedicated to the concept of Italicity, from both the phenomenological and the theoretical point of view. I shall seek to address the subject in such a way as to show its heuristic or educative potential for: (a) research into inter-cultural and international communication; (b) constructing educational policies that tend towards the formation of a new responsible and inclusive cosmopolitanism; and (c) constructing a wider and more prolonged consideration of the themes of war and peace.[1]

ITALICITY: WHERE IT COMES FROM AND WHY

There are the righteous and the saints. In Italy we have never had the righteous, for we know nothing of discipline, restrictions or self-control. We can be saved only by saints, male or female, who spread flowers and smiles around themselves and prolong the pleasant life that we have learnt to lead on earth by raising it towards heaven, opening it up to the love of our neighbour and the thought of God. St Francis of Assisi or St Catherine of Siena could never have been French. Typical Italians, they reflect the gentleness of their province's climate, the good-natured national temperament and the lightness of heart that is engendered by the ease of being in the world and the relaxed nature of social relationships. (Dominique Fernandez, 1991:33).

It is very probable that most of you, or indeed all of you who are reading this, will never have come across the word 'Italicity'. Well, you are in exactly the same situation as I found myself when I came up against this word for the first time. This happened before my third, and longest, visit to Brazil, looking for people of Italian origin (August-September 2003), and after publishing the second edition of *Svolta comunicativa* (December 2002) and *Diventare italiani* (March 2003). This second book, with the subtitle *Coltivare e comunicare la memoria collettiva*, had two introductions: one to the first edition (2001), *Diventare italiani moderni*, and one to the second, *Diventare italiani cosmopolitani*.

I came across the word 'Italicity' in an article by Piero Bassetti *(Italicity: Global and Social,* Washington 2002) which referred back to an interview of 2001 in book form: *Globali e locali! Timori e speranze della seconda modernità* (Bassetti 2001 and Bassetti and Janni 2004).

Shortly afterwards the second edition was published of an impassioned miscellany called *Equivoci giochi.* The cognitive style of a master of words was accompanied by two introductions significantly entitled *Il gioco degli equivoci* (2001) and *Fantasmi, paure, speranze* (2003). This last book was presented as a constituent part (together with the other three parts, including the first edition of 2003, of the book *Diventare cittadini del mondo* that had preceded it) of a 'Florentine quartet', in memory of the famous *Alexandria Quartet* by Lawrence Durrell. Durrell's book aroused my interest and concern with the hybridisations of human civilisation (*humana civilitas*) arising from the encounters and clashes that had taken place in the Mediterranean (and elsewhere) throughout history: between East and West, between North and South, between the great religions of antiquity and those of the modern world. These encounters and clashes had also marked my childhood and adolescence.

The Florentine quartet consisted of four books that I then called 'epoch-making books', because they contained both the pages that I had written in the months and years that marked the entry into the third millennium and some of those that I had written in the previous five-year

D

period. The latter pages were more appropriate, in my opinion, to the change of epoch that was in preparation and was then about to unfold. This epoch-making change seemed evident to me in the 'facts' and the 'processes' that helped to delineate the outlines of that 'clash of civilisations', recalled or repressed, that without doubt occupied both newspaper reporting and our minds.

Furthermore, those books of the quartet were also epoch-making in another more intimate and personal sense. They expressed my wish to deploy, through writing, the sort of reflection and thinking that might be able to open my mind (and also the minds of my 25 readers) to a different and more profound and holistic capacity of present-day writing in our troubled world. In the silence and concentration that is appropriate for reading and writing, I sought to recover that capacity for 'commenting on' and 'contemplating' the last (or first) things that I had read about in the books of Elémire Zolla (1995, 1998, 2004) and that went back to the far-off years of my childhood and adolescence when I got to know literature and philosophy, the Catholic faith and its liturgy, cultural traditions handed down through the gentle rhythm of words and gestures, rites and myths, that pass unobserved from one generation to another as life flows on. Far from the noise and discordances of the lecture halls (of school and university) and town squares (the 'real' discordances of the restless crowds and the media, just as 'real', as sociology teaches us from Thomas Aquinas onwards; and not only that, if we remember Plato, but also the ancient philosophies of India, China and Japan.

Thus I happened to come across the reflections of Piero Bassetti, in connection with 'Italicity' as a reality and a global concept, in a transitory period of change that seemed to me to be personal and global, theoretical and real. It struck me while I was drawing up a new theory of communication that had its roots in the long history of Italy: a theory that could pit itself against the radical change that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Soviet Communism was proclaiming in the new multi-faceted world (apparently globalised) that was appearing on the horizon and that 9/11 brought into view.

ITALICITY: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

Italicity is not Italocentric ...To define it in the best way possible ... one must regard it as a manifestation that is global (the ensemble of Italian communities at global level) and at the same time local (the numerous ramifications or sub-ensembles of Italian Italics, Italian Swiss, those of Dalmatian origin, Italo-Americans, Italo-Argentines etc., to whom must be added all those who appreciate the Italic way of life, a very typical and recognisable life-style and culture) and that is present throughout the world and linked by strong shared chains. Italics are identified by their way of being Italic, with culture, economy, amusements, fashion and cuisine of Italic origin ...

(Piero Bassetti, 2005)

A second possible way of internationalising Italian history is a 'transnational' history of the Italian diaspora itself, in which Italy and Italian life remain at the centre of a worldwide network. In accordance with this approach, Italian history could be interpreted as being always responsive, and at the same time an important influence in relation to the developments of Italian communities in the world.

(Donna Rae Gabaccia, 1997)

We should then try to overcome not only the geographical and cultural but also the chronological barriers that characterise the discipline [history of international relations], given that it is difficult to imagine a transnational approach to history that is not long-term, that does not link contemporary and modern history and that therefore does not put the specialisms of each of us severely to the test.

(Federico Romero, 2005: 79)

Migrations from Italy took place long before the existence of an Italian people or an Italian national state ... The fatherland that migrants glorified and turned into a legend was thus never a national fatherland ... The migrants made a legend of a native land that was a single village or a small locality. Bearing this clearly in mind, I have written widely, here and elsewhere, 'migrants from Italy' rather than 'Italian migrants.

(Donna R. Gabaccia, 2005: 155)

I do not know whether the word 'Italicity' was invented by Piero Bassetti. We can certainly ascribe to him, in his activity as promoter and inspirer of 'Globus et Locus', the initiative of having put the word into circulation (in English as well as Italian), of having become its theorist and enriched its meaning by introducing it into the Italian and international debate that was under way in several centres (Washington, Milan, Vilnius and elsewhere). Your present writer and speaker was also invited to contribute to this debate.

When I was preparing for my aforementioned third visit to Brazil in search of traces, clues and testimonies relating to both the hybrid Brazilian identity and the contribution of massive Italian emigration to that identity (it is calculated that there are about 25 million Brazilians of Italian origin, most of them – but not all – concentrated in the state and city of São Paulo, the throbbing heart of Brazil's modern economy), I happened to do a lot of reading on Italian emigration in the world and writings by other important authors. I record here some of the passages that I read because they were of significance to me in linking the new research subject to a thematic and methodological plan that I had tried to construct with the four epoch-making books. The passages also helped to give me a better focus of my sensitivity and imagination during my stay in Brazil; to capture and understand more fully the purpose of my research; and to get a clearer focus on the concept of 'Italicity', to enrich its content and to conceptualise it. I shall seek to explain this in the pages that follow.

D

In particular I deepened my acquaintance with the work of the great sociologist Gilberto Freyre, regarded as the 'Tocqueville' of Brazil (2001), and of other sociologists or anthropologists such as Da Matta (1985) or Ribeiro (2004), who described Brazil as a 'tropical Rome'. I read attentively three books by important authors whom I already knew and who helped me to achieve a first attempt at a communicative approach to a long-term history: Tzvetan Todorov (1992), René Girard (2003) and Ernst Nolte (2003). Among the books about Italian emigration the ones that interested me the most, apart from the works that I already knew and that originated from the project carried out over several years by the Agnelli Foundation (see the thought-provoking book edited by Maddalena Tirabassi, 2005) and those of Emilio Franzina (1995), are those by Donna R. Gabaccia (2003) and Ludovico Incisa di Camerana (2003).

My third visit to Brazil was very important in giving an impetus to the 'change of direction' in which I had been engaged for some time; and there emerged from this visit a second 'miscellany', written partly in Brazil and partly in Rome during the subsequent months: *Il Silenzio e il Rumore: Destino e fortuna degli italici nel mondo* (2004). It is in this book that the idea of Italicity takes shape and starts to be a concept, a source that opens up further developments.

The four books of the 'Florentine quartet' and the fifth book on

sound and silence were both put to the test by teaching and by the research of students (of the courses in 'Sociology of Cultural Processes' that I teach at the Faculty of Political Science at Florence University, and 'Sociology of Communication' that I teach at the Sociology Faculty at Rome-La Sapienza) and other students (for a degree thesis, specialisation and the Doctorate that I am supervising at Florence, also in the Master's degree course in Communication and Media–Comundus and in the Doctorate in Sociology of Communication).

A fourth visit to Brazil (October-November 2004) and, on my return, intensive reading of a philosophical, sociological and political nature, helped me to strengthen that communicative approach to the long-term history of human civilisations and civilisation which are now firmly at the centre of my research interests – and which must now be put to the test of being written up.

I have recalled by means of these long and allusive passages the general plan of my current research work, because it will now be simpler for me (and I hope clearer for you, my readers) to discuss the concept of Italicity.

Our starting-point, then, is the work of Piero Bassetti, who created the idea of Italicity from not only from his interests and reading as an academic and a researcher but also his long experience of life and work as a Catholic intellectual, scion of a famous entrepreneurial Italian dynasty, engaged in politics (he was the first president of the Lombardy region) and in the management of important entrepreneurial institutions: he was President of the Milan Chamber of Commerce, of the Union of Italian Chambers of Commerce and of the Union of

Italian Chambers of Commerce in the world. And, as I myself was able to verify in Brazil and elsewhere, it was precisely in this last role that he worked out his ideas on the manifold virtues of the Italians and Italics who are active in so many places and roles, drawn by their enterprise and by other qualities and cultural attributes that derive from the legacy of thousands of years of Italic civilisation. Qualities and attributes that are, so to speak, 'contagious', in that they are acquired in whole or in part by other people in the world who are not ethnically Italian or who are not descended from Italians.

Hence the idea that the word 'Italic', of ancient Roman origin, can and must be used to identify three different types of individual: (a) *true Italians,* those who live in Italy or abroad and are Italian to all intents and purposes (including by law); (b) *Italians by origin,* and thus descendants through the paternal or maternal line of Italians who in their turn emigrated elsewhere and settled there permanently, acquiring the nationality and language of other countries but keeping, in whole or in part, the imprint of their original cultural traits; and (c) *other persons*, scattered in various parts of the world, who although they do not have ties of kinship with or descent from either of the other two categories have adopted, in whole or in part, Italian cultural traits. These range from language to lifestyle, from a deep-rooted affection for one or another aspect of Italian living (from the opera to the cuisine, from a style of dressing to holidays or periodic stays in Italy, from a passion for art to Italian literature or history ...to an entirely Italian way of maintaining a relationship with the Roman Catholic faith).

Italics, then, the three sizeable groups of men and women who are in various ways linked with things that are present and alive in the world even today – such as visible traces, historical as well as individual and collective memory, practices, rituals, lifestyles, traditions handed down through the generations and through communication, new inventions, all of them traceable back in various ways to the origins of Italian civilisation – the Italics are the social creators of Italicity. 350 million of them are probably in existence, scattered throughout the five continents.

Italicity certainly has something to do with the Italian character, but is not confused with it because it does not carry nationalistic connotations: it is not identified with the Italian state or with the Italian nation. It has a wider range, a more universal significance, because it has its roots in the ancient world – above all in the original juridical and humanistic civilisation created by Rome (Crifò 2005 and Magli 2005). It also had its roots in that melting-pot of culture, religions and peoples that gave life to the great Graeco-Roman civilisation in which Rome, the Rome of republican virtue and of the empire that led to the foundation of Constantinople and the birth of the Catholic Church, blended with Athens and Jerusalem (and with their Asian and African ancestors).

Italicity as a cosmopolitan resource

Italicity certainly has something to do with Europe and *the* West, but is not identified either with one or with the other. This is because it is connected to the propelling thrust that the maritime republics and the cities, republics and Italian courts were able to give, between the year 1000 and the eighteenth century, to the numerous Italians who crossed seas and frontiers, carrying with them everywhere a certain 'something' that could be traced back to a recognisable cultural source. This 'something' was infused not with the desire for power, but rather with universal values connected to sthe concept of the human individual, values of Roman and Catholic origin, transcending any kind of ethnic connotation or hegemonic objective. As Giorgio Ruffolo wrote in his intriguing book (2004), Italians turned gold into beauty.

Likewise the Risorgimento, with all its limitations, had universal meanings that were imitated and adopted by other peoples and nations: universal meanings that were shared by thinkers and politicians such as Mazzini and Rosmini, Garibaldi and Pope Pius IX, Gioberti and Cavour), whose intellectual and moral stature transcends events in Italian history.

Italicity, furthermore, has something to do with the great wave of migration that was a feature of Italy's demography (but in many ways went beyond it) from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1960s. This has been documented, with ever-increasing efficiency, by the numerous sophisticated studies (theoretical and methodological) that are being dedicated to the specific characteristics of the diaspora 'from Italy' (or 'Italic'). No other European country has contributed over a long historical period to a population movement of such magnitude (by comparison with the original inhabitants) whether as immigrants or emigrants, and with such a variety of destinations – even though the main destinations have been in Europe and the so-called 'hub' countries for the diaspora, typically those that were once defined as the New World: Canada, the US, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay and Australia). These movements, ever since the foundation of Rome (the only one of the ancient cities to have been founded on a plurality of ethnic groups), have generated a multiethnic population in Italy, as is again becoming evident today.

Italicity has a connection with the mantra 'Made in Italy', which finds and has found in that Italicity its origin and *raison d'être*. But 'Made in Italy' has in turn become an 'activator' of Italicity.

Italicity also derives from the new migrations into Italy in the past decades. Thus today we can encounter Italics in Italy who are now Italian citizens or illegal or semi-illegal immigrants but who hail from China, Japan, Africa or Eastern Europe. This is no more or less than what happened at the time of republican and imperial Rome, or in the cities and republics of medieval and Renaissance Italy.

It is calculated that all these Italics, scattered throughout the world and thus including the Italophiles and Italian speakers (who are not Italian nationals, nor descended from Italian emigrés of the various diasporas) amount to about 350 million persons.

To conclude this discussion, Italicity accordingly originates from a plurality of sources and is a typical product of the interaction and communication that is built up through movements of population (the numerous groups of migrants who enter and leave Italy), of goods and money, of ideas and works of the human mind. Seen from my perspective as a sociologist who studies communication, this is a product of the intelligence and communicative skills of Italians, Italics and human beings. It is the most successful product of what I and Piero Trupia have called 'the Italian school of communication' since the summer of 1997, when we presented a report in Santos at the first Italo-Brazilian meeting on the science of communication (the text is reproduced in part in the appendix to the second edition of *Svolta comunicativa*).

ITALICITY: THE POTENTIAL FOR RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY

What has changed in our world is obviously the technology of transport, communication and the media; and with it the possibility for people on the move to remain connected with more than one place on the earth. But from the theoretical point of view, these technological changes can facilitate the expansion of nations and the reproduction of national awareness as easily as it can favour the creation of transnational social networks or non-national forms of awareness in the diaspora. If the new technologies have the effect of reinforcing or weakening peoples or states by means of 'de-territorialisation', then the problem will not find an answer in theoretical work. We shall know the answer only when time has passed and when new diasporas have emerged – or have not emerged – as an alternative to, or in confirmation of, national awareness. (Gabaccia 2005: 167)

Peace is the aim of philosophical research. In the most appalling destruction we should like to be certain that something remains eternal. In times of anxiety we reflect upon our origin. When faced with the threat of death we wish to think of what makes us incorruptible. Philosophy can procure for us, even today, what Parmenides already acknowledged when he built an altar to God to thank him for the peace that philosophy had given. But today we are too often victims of a false peace ...

Philosophical faith is inseparable from the unconditional receptiveness towards communication ...

The idea of communication is a faith. Each one of us can wonder whether we aspire towards and believe in communication, not as a reality of another world, but as something that is actually present; whether we believe that the possibility exists for men to live and talk together, to find together the path to truth, indeed to reach the stage, on this road, of being truly themselves.
(Karl Jaspers, 2005: 214 et seq.).

Italicity as a cosmopolitan resource

It is the rarest of occurences to find a youngster whi has been infused by this education with a longing to know all about China or the Romans or the Jews. All to the contrary. There is an indifference to such things, for relativisim has estinguished the real motive of educationm the search of a good life…No longer is there a hope that there are great wise men in other places and times who can reveal the truth about life – except for the few remaining young people who look for a quick fix from a guru. Gone is the real historical sense of a Machiavelli who rested wrested a few hours from each busy day in which "to don regal and courtly garnments enter the courts of the ancients and speak with them".
(Allan Bloom, 1987, pp. 34-5).

What is meant by an established religion is a social edifice founded on a collective interior reverence towards an object that cannot be exhausted by means of dialectical discourse, that is called diabolical if its worship generates anxiety and rage, or divine if it generates deep peace and teaches the acceptance and transformation of suffering and the adaptation to harmonious ways.

The modern world has its religion, to which every other religion is obliged to adapt: it is the veneration of science, the object of silent deference.

... Man adores science, but is it permissible to say that he lives by it? That he derives nourishment from it? That his entire being is moulded by it? Man still goes about, insofar as he is alive, in the world of his forefathers, he still sees in the ways that took their appropriate shape in Euclidean geometry and classical physics, and on this foundation he builds a series of hypotheses that deny and contradict these ancient systems, but nevertheless take them for granted ... The same thing happens in civilian life: man has ceased to be honest in accordance with custom or unwritten laws, but it is on this natural base that his denial, the Babel of modern law, has been raised; if the last trace of the base, a certain intuition of what is right that finds a minimal correspondence in positive law, were to be extinguished, then not even the Tower of Babel would remain standing.....
(Elémire Zolla, 1998: 55 and 66-67)

In 1967 we were still able to celebrate 150 years of the Catholic Theology Faculty magnificently, but it was also the last academic celebration in the old style. The cultural paradigm changed almost like a flash of lightning , from the moment when students and some tutors started thinking ... In a short time, almost overnight, the existential scheme collapsed and was replaced by the Marxist scheme ...

A few years earlier we might have expected that the Theology Faculties would be a bulwark against Marxist temptation. Today, instead, the opposite has happened: they have become the true ideological centre of it ... It is an unavoidable challenge for theologians, when ideology is carried forward in the name of faith and the Church is used as its tool ...

We are living at a time of great dangers and great opportunities for mankind and the world: a time of great responsibility for all of us. During the last century the possibilities for mankind and man's dominion over matter have increased in truly unthinkable measure. But man's power to rule the world has also had the effect that his power to destroy has reached dimensions that at times can be horrifying ...

It is true that there exists today a new moralism whose key words are justice, peace, conservation of the universe: words that recall the essential moral values that we truly need. But this moralism remains hazy and thus, almost inevitably, slips into the party-political sphere ... The political moralism of the 1970s, whose roots are not dead ... was a moralism that went the wrong way because it lacked impartial rationality... even showing that it could get to the point of disregarding mankind in the name of grand objectives. Political moralism, as we have experienced it and experience it still, does not merely fail to open the road to regeneration: it obstructs it...

Christianity must always remember that it is the religion of Logos. It is faith in the Creator Spiritus, the creator Spirit, from whom all true things come. This, precisely, should be its philosophical strength: the problem is whether the world originates from the irrational, and reason is nothing but a by-product, perhaps even a harmful one, of its development, or whether the world originates from reason, which is consequently its criterion and goal. Christian faith favours the second thesis and thus, from the purely philosophical perspective, has some really good cards to play, even though the first thesis is considered by so many to be the only one that is 'rational' and modern.

(Joseph Ratzinger, 2005: 103-104 and 131-133)

FOR OUR RESEARCH ACTIVITY

I shall now try to show the potential for research and discovery – for our speculative activity of research and political reflection – that can be derived from the introduction of the terms 'Italic' and 'Italicity' contained into our vocabulary, together with the phenomenological, theoretical and empirical implications that must be linked to them. This will enable us to speak about and discuss memory and identity, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, the public and the private sphere, peace and war. I shall do this in a concise and allusive fashion, as a first move to start off the discussion.

D

AGAINST WHAT IS POLITICALLY CORRECT

Five quotations precede this paragraph; to these many others, drawn from a very rich store of writings,[2] might be added. The cautious methodological warning that ends Donna Gabaccia's excellent essay is followed by four quotations from very different authors – Karl Jaspers, Allan Bloom, Elémire Zolla and Joseph Ratzinger – who agree with one another in identifying, in the ideologised relativism that emerged in American and European universities around 1968, one of the main obstacles to the introduction of cognitive and interpretative procedures that are capable of exploring the human condition with some hope of attaining the truth.

We are talking about an ideologised relativism that at the beginning of the 1990s acquired the title, first in the United States and then elsewhere including Italy, of 'political correctness': 'a strange radical ideology that decries the United States and the West as hopelessly oppressive and that focuses on the reactionary prejudices of Western culture', as Paul Berman put it. 'The new ideology,' continues Berman, 'tends towards nihilism, erasing any distinction between truth and falsity and between quality and lack of quality in art. Guided by these ideas, the postmodern professors have set out to undermine the traditional study of literature and the humanities… They fan the flames of ethnic and sexual discontent among the students'. (Berman 1992: 2.)

REDISCOVERING THE CIVILITY OF COMMENT

The first important thing that came into my head when I began to think about the proposal to use the terms 'Italic' and 'Italicity', in the meanings set out above, was that through these terms we were able to find a way of going beyond, and trying to overcome, the dangerous conflicts that had come into being in the 1960s between humanistic, classical and transcendent traditions (which Elémire Zolla (1988) traced back to the 'civility of comment') and the new post-modernist and nihilistic 'traditions' of political correctness (which Zolla traces back to the 'civility of criticism').

These conflicts have not ceased in recent years to produce perverse effects, taking an extreme form in the universities and migrating into public debate through newspapers, party-political discourse and electoral propaganda – to the extent of creating, both in Europe and in America, an unprecedented type of ideological clash (concealed by a generalised backdrop of the 'end of ideology' that has spread through liberal discourse and become dominant in the media) which sees in opposition on the one side, technical and scientific discourse (passed off as 'common sense' or, worse, as 'good sense') and on the other side, humanistic discourse of a philosophical and religious nature (passed off as 'retrograde', 'traditionalist' or 'neo-fundamentalist').

We have here an ideological clash that risks becoming a 'religious war' or a 'clash of civilisations' in the heart of Western civilisation, which has become oblivious of its own roots and of the profound assonances that can be found

[2] What follows here and supplements material in my book, cited earlier, Il Silenzio e il Rumore and in the article cited in footnote 1, can be found in a new text that is about to be published in the documents of the Florence Convention promoted by the Regional Council of Tuscany and the 'Cesare Alfieri' Faculty of Political Science: La nuova missione della civiltà occidentale (Florence 28-29 November 2005). .

with Oriental cultures.

These assonances manifest themselves not only in shared human, natural and divine origins but also in the ancient philosophies that were elaborated, in the West and the East, between the eighth and fifth centuries B.C. or in that Graeco-Roman *koine* or cultural community that was so deeply infused with Oriental influence – as can be read between the lines of two important books, among others, by Pierre Hadot (2005) and Sun-Tzu (1993). Or as one can find in the common origins of the three great monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and their connections with the Asiatic religions of Persia and India, China, Korea and Japan (these connections were given considerable attention by Elémire Zolla in the second and extremely productive part of his life, through numerous studies; for example, one can read his *Aure,* 1995 and *Verità segrete esposte in evidenza,*2004).

UNMASKING THE TRUTHS IMPOSED BY THE CONQUERORS

How can we have a dialogue, a discussion? How can we overcome such dangerous conflicts? Above all by trying to overcome the uninspired empiricism of the positivist matrix in which the so-called 'information society', daughter of the disguised technical-scientific ideology, has trapped us - as we may well infer from the quotation taken from Gabaccia, which rejects the technological determinism that imprisons many academics and communication professionals. In fact if we are to establish, as our working group is doing, whether the terms 'Italics' and 'Italicity' have some empirical reference in the reality of things and some foundation in long-term history, it will be necessary to go beyond superficial appearances – beyond the 'visibility' that Thompson spoke about in his report to our meeting, and beyond the prescribed categories drawn up by historians and other social scientists.

A pertinent example of such a deeper interrogation of the 'nature of things' emerges from just that text of Gabaccia's that I have cited above, in that rejecting the use of the term 'Italians' to describe emigrants from Italy recalls an expression that crops up frequently in the stories of such emigrants when they refer to the world of their origin: 'country'. And they often add: 'The whole world is a country'. This is an expression that cannot be taken literally: it goes back to an idea of 'fatherland' that is not the same as the artefact constructed by ideologues of the national state of Italy after Italian political unification. Similarly it is not the same as the idea, another artefact, constructed for our times by post-modernist theoreticians that proclaim as a fact the end of nation states and the irresistible emergence of a new cosmopolitanism. It seems rather that the expression 'the whole world is a country' must be understood as a half-unintentional allusion to the ancient roots of an idea, once prevalent throughout the world, of the common natural and divine origin of the human species: a common origin that precedes and, so to speak, stands above the actual historical assessments that are prompted by wars and conquests, by human history and by national (more or less ideological) historiography. Or, in other words, by the truths imposed by the conquerors.

D

Italicity as a cosmopolitan resource

This last reference to conquerors permits me to introduce a second example of a different way of observing the world that the adoption of the terms 'Italic' and 'Italicity' could inspire in us. It has something to do with the questions connected with identity and memory. It also has something to do with the advantages that the invention of a new vocabulary can bring to our capacity to carry out research and construct theories. Even if such a new vocabulary may at first seem artificial or banal to us, we shall gradually notice that it enables us to glimpse 'things', and the connections between 'things', in a new way that is more relevant to the purpose of discovering 'their truth'.

This can happen with the 'outrageous' rediscovery of the word and the concept of 'civilisation' (in both singular and plural). The word 'civilisation', in fact, is far more laden with meaning than 'culture', by now done to death by careless usage.

There is never enough reflection on the fact that in our work as researchers and theorisers (whether as historians, sociologists, anthropologists or anything else) we often find ourselves trapped in the vocabulary, narrations or pictures that we come across. These are nearly always an offshoot of the logic or power of the 'conquerors'. And the 'conquerors' are not merely those who wield 'hard power'. They are also often, in a subtler and more hidden way (as the example of 'political correctness' cited above illustrates well), those who wield 'soft power'. Much has been said and written about this in recent years as a 'politically correct' way of imposing one's own will on others (bestowing a new name on a concept that some of us had learnt to call 'hegemony', under the guidance of the still-remembered works of Antonio Gramsci that we read in our youth).

There are in fact in real life – and always have been – collective identities and memories that are fashioned and transmitted within, so to speak, a 'private' sphere and by means of vocabulary, attitudes and behaviour that are relatively protected and relatively untranslatable outside our families and the communities in which such identities and memories were built up, experienced and handed down through intergenerational links. The forms of communication in which such identities and memories are built up, experienced and handed down are often difficult to transfer outside these links. Because of social constraint or, to put it better, 'political correctness', they remain hidden from the eyes and ears of the intellectual researcher. We need only think of the huge outcry caused by the 'dissonances' uncovered in myriad pieces of empirical micro-research carried out by the ethnologists and anthropologists who studied the so-called 'simple' or 'primitive' cultures (the 'dissonances' to which Allan Bloom refers in the long quotation that I have included at the beginning of this section).

In using terms such as 'Italic' and 'Italicity', the researcher is prompted to go more deeply into his researches in order to grasp, if they are present, those assonances on which there too often reigns a silence; this silence seems to me to be more the product of a pre-established theory than the result of sympathetic goodwill or a philosophically and historically discerning sociological imagination.

LEARNING TO READ ITALIC CIVILISATION THROUGHOUT ITS EXISTENCE

Finally, two considerations.

Above all, speaking of 'Italics' and 'Italicity' can serve to bring into better focus what has characterised, and characterises, Italic civilisation throughout its existence, thus overcoming two powerful obstacles to research.

The first obstacle consists of the paradigm of the nation state, which dominated the nineteenth century. This produced, as opposing reactions, both the nationalistic myths of 'Great Italy' and of the Fascism in power (which have been amply documented in a wide range of writings) and the miserabilist myths of a 'Little Italy' deprived of cultural range and greatness, who sent her sons to certain defeat (as is demonstrated by the extraordinary success of the books and plays of Antonio Stella, from *L'Orda* onwards).

The second obstacle consists of the new multicultural paradigm that has been making headway in recent years: watering down specificities – whether human in general or historical and cultural – into a vague new cosmopolitanism that purports to be the offspring of globalisation and the 'information society'.

In the second place, speaking of 'Italics' and 'Italicity' can serve as an example of a modality of approach to present-day globality. It can serve to emphasise that every great human civilisation (by 'great' is meant a civilisation that has had and still has the capacity to institute common traits – assonances, in fact – among a wide number of humans over a long period and in an ample space) was, and still is, established through a complex network of relationships that permeate human nature and the many institutions and social configurations that mankind incessantly tends to create and re-create, thus building up its historical existence. This network must be perceived and analysed in its effectual reality and its deep roots.

This means that if we want to help to construct a better and more peaceful world, we must avoid remaining on the surface of things, in the restricted visual range of a bogus multiculturalism that is constructed more from the New Ignorance that is making headway in our schools, universities and media, rather than from real life.

This means that we must take note of the persistent and macroscopic reality of nation states – which have never been more numerous or braver – made up of so many ethnic groups and nationalities who continue to regard themselves as exclusive and who experience globalisation less as an opportunity and more as a disguised form of neo-colonialism. Civilisations – just like the Italic one – are and can be intermediate associations, transnational communities, which can support an acceptable level of peaceful coexistence in a world that should see itself as multi-faceted.

D

Italicity as a cosmopolitan resource

Finally, this means that it is necessary to work hard on the *contents* of the communication that circulate in the world, so as to construct an international and an intercultural form of communication that is less stereotyped, less ideologised, less simplistic. Otherwise the stereotyped and clandestinely ideologised communication that the new and old media, technologically sophisticated, put into circulation, and the political correctness and the new ignorance that emanates from them, will strangle at birth any effort that 'the cultural will' is making to construct and maintain the peace that can be achieved.

REFERENCES

BASSETTI, P. (2005). *Italici: chi e perché*. NIP – News Italia Press, n° 175, XII, 9 de setembro09/09/05.

_____ (2001). *Globali e locali! Timori e speranze della seconda modernità*. Lugano: Casagrande.

BASSETTI, P. & JANNI, P. (eds.) (2004). *Italy Identity in Pluralistic Contexts*. Washington: The Council in Values and Philosophy, C.U.A.

BECHELLONI, G. (2004). *Il Silenzio e il Rumore*. Roma-Florença: Mediascape.

_____ (2003a). *Diventare italiani*. Nápoles: Ipermedium.

_____ (2003b). *Diventare cittadini del mondo*. Roma-Florença: Mediascape.

_____ (2003c). *Equivoci giochi*. Roma-Florença: Mediascape.

_____ (2002). *Svolta comunicativa*. Nápoles: Ipermedium.

BERMAN, P. (ed.) (1992). *Debating P.C. The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*. Nova York: Laurel.

BLOOM, A. (1988). *La chiusura della mente Americana*. Milão: Frassinelli.

CRIFÒ, G. (2005). Civis. *La cittadinanza tra antico e moderno*. Bari-Roma: Laterza.

DA MATTA, R. (1985). *A casa e a rua*. São Paulo: Brasiliense.

FERNANDEZ, D. (1991). *L'école du sud*. Paris: Grasset.

FRANZINA, E. (1995). *Gli italiani al nuovo mondo*. Milão: Mondadori.

FREYRE, G. (2001). *Interpretação do Brasil*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

GABACCIA, D.R. (2005). *Diaspore, discipline e migrazioni*. TIRABASSI 2005/11/23.

_____ (2003). *Emigranti. Le diaspore degli italiani dal Medioevo a oggi*. Turim: Einaudi.

_____ (1997). Per una storia italiana dell'emigrazione. In *Altre Italie*, n° 16, julhodezembro.

GIRARD, R. (2003). *Origine della cultura e fine della storia*. Milão: Cortina.

HADOT, P. (2005). *Esercizi spirituali e filosofia ântica*. Turim: Einaudi. 116

INCISA DI CAMERANA, L. (2003). *Il grande esodo. Storia delle migrazioni italiane nel mondo*. Milão: Corbaccio.

JASPERS, K. (2005). *La fede filosófica*. Milão: Cortina.

MAGLI, J. (2005). *Omaggio agli italiani. Una storia per tradimenti*. Milão: BUR, Rizzoli.

NOLTE, E. (2003). *Esistenza storica. Tra inizio e fine della storia*. Florença: Le Lettere.

PREZZOLINI, G. (2003). *L'Italia finisce, ecco quello che resta*. Milão: BUR, Rizzoli.

RATZINGER, J. (2005). *La mia vita*. Milão: São Paulo.

RIBEIRO, D. (2004). *O povo brasileiro. A formação e o sentido do povo do Brasil.* São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

ROMARO, F. (2005). *Relazioni internazionali e storia transnazionale.* In TIRABASSI, 2005.

RUFFOLO, G. (2004). *Quando l'Italia era una superpotenza*. Turim: Einaudi.

SUN-TZU (1993). *The Art of War*. Nova York: Ballantine.

TIRABASSI, M. (2005) (ed.). *Itinera. Paradigmi delle migrazioni italiane*, Turim: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli.

TODOROV, T. (1992). *La conquista dell'America. Il problema dell' "altro".* Turim: Einaudi.

ZOLLA, E. (2004). *Verità segrete esposte in evidenza*. Veneza: Marsilio.

_____ (1998). *Che cos'è la tradizione*. Turim: ADELPHA.

_____ 1995). *Aure*. Veneza: Marsilio.