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*'Fu proverbejo stascianato de la maglia antica, che chi cerca chello
che non deve, trova chello che non vole [...]*

Giambattista Basile *Lo cunto de li cunti*. Napoli 1730

*'According to an old-fashioned proverb he who seeks what he
should not, finds what he does not want [...]*

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Part 1

Italian Language and Culture Diffusion Abroad: Its Place and Status in Italian International Policies

Historians estimate that between 1870, the year Italy's political unification was completed, and 1970 when its mass emigration ended, about 26 million Italians uprooted themselves and went to live in other countries.

Physical distance from the homeland is implicit in the emigrant's status, and detachment from raw emotions connected with the society left behind can also be seen – to some extent – as a corollary to this condition. Poggi (1993), commenting on Simmel, writes:

[...] It is [the] ability to establish a *distance* between themselves and the rest of reality that allows humans to differentiate reality into conditions within which they must act, goals toward which they opt to act, and means via which they choose to act. In fact they must distance themselves also from the raw sensations and the utterly spontaneous emotions that aspects of reality awaken in them if they are on the one hand to acquire selfhood and on the other to apprehend the significance of those aspects.

It could thus be inferred that emigration, with its forced separation from one's native land, may be useful in the investigation of social phenomena: on the one hand the apprehension of reality is enhanced by physical detachment from the facts/events under scrutiny, while on the other hand the factor of distance is not so great as to anaesthetise the emigrant and transform him/her into a mere bystander.

A subliminal bond with the fatherland is likely to remain as a component of the attitude of the observer, who will look at things from afar yet without being an outsider.

This study then, though mainly prompted by the desire to examine historically and functionally the theme of Italian foreign linguistic policies within the area of cultural relations, is also meant to seize the

opportunity, given the expatriate status of the author, to gain some specific insights into the phenomena investigated.

How has Italy conveyed its language and culture to the outside world? Where does the Italian experience fit into the wider context and changed reality of Europe after unification? And finally, what can be learned from the answers to such questions in relation to the Italian experience in Australia?

This book aims to find answers to these questions and to formulate a hypothesis about the specificity (if any) of the Italian experience in the domain of language and culture policies abroad.

Chapter 1

Culture, Cultural Relations and Cultural Policies

Will future world conflicts mostly consist of clashes of cultures? Huntington's intriguing hypothesis (1993) seems to be supported by never-ending examples of violent events around us, including wars. The notion of culture is elusive and complex, as proved by the lack of general agreement on a unanimous definition, and the concept of cultural relations seems to suffer a parallel fate. In this chapter, after identifying cultural relations as a domain of international relations yet to be explored in any depth, we will suggest a working definition of the concept for purposes of our research and seek to establish why cultural relations are important in today's international society. Of the several facets of cultural relations, the focus of the present investigation is defined as foreign policies on language and culture. The reason Italy is the country under investigation will become clear in the context of this and the following chapters.

Understanding the Present to Anticipate the Challenges of the Future

Following the events of 1989, changes of scenery on the world stage have been so unpredictable and frantic that not even the boldest member of Futurism would have dared show such happenings to his audience, even simply to provoke and shock.¹ The fall of the Iron Curtain has offered people the opportunity to witness – live – the effects and consequences of the exit from the stage of a major protagonist, the USSR. The relentless dismantling of the Berlin Wall is an event still being evaluated over a decade later for its symbolic and practical consequences. The European Union conglomerate on the one hand, fragmentation and bloody conflicts in eastern Europe on the other. New actors entering the stage (e.g. the revived nation states of Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia) and new roles being played. Old enemies – Ireland and Great Britain, black and white South Africans, Indonesia and East Timor – are finding ground for reconciliation, while other stars of the global show, nation states once willing to live together, have moved to even

more extreme forms of conflict (e.g. the former Yugoslavia, some parts of the former USSR).

There is no institutional director to keep violence and turbulence under control on the world's stage, and no available mechanical device like the *deus ex machina* used by playwrights in ancient Greece to unravel the complexities of the plot. Human history follows patterns and cycles, as it always has. Perhaps the only relevant difference is the existence and proliferation of modern technologies making the global show readily available to all (or almost all). Nowadays television and the Internet allow the spectators to see in real time events taking place anywhere in the world, regardless of the hemisphere they live in. But while we witness the ongoing process of history, has our ability to decode and understand current happenings been improved by their artificial closeness in space and time? Does progress in technology in any way affect the public's participation or its understanding of events, beyond a crystallised theatrical tradition wherein what happens on stage is just part of a show where no interference is possible?

In his 1995 speech accepting the international Giovanni Agnelli prize, the Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio remarked on the impending end of the millennium:

While scientific and technical advances constantly arouse our amazement and enthusiasm – albeit mixed with anguish – we continue to be puzzled by evil and its outcomes, just as we were one thousand or two thousand years ago, and so we go on endlessly asking the same questions. [Yet] there is a growing gap between our knowledge as 'cosmic investigators' and our illiteracy on moral issues.

The search for answers and understanding is an undeniable peculiarity of mankind that was particularly noticeable at the end of the 20th century.² With the approaching conclusion of an era, modern 'cosmic investigators' – in other words sociologists, historians, philosophers – perceived the occasion as a deadline requiring careful reflection in the context of the irresistible urge to look into the future.³

Like characters in Umberto Eco's 'inferential strolls' (1994) (when the reader of fiction puts aside his/her book and tries to predict further developments in the plot, using as a reference-point his/her own life experience, or perhaps pre-existing knowledge of other stories previously read), there were some who wished to investigate outcomes,⁴ others keen to discover causes,⁵ some curious to examine and analyse contexts,⁶ and still others looking at potential relationships between

happenings.⁷ All, however, seemed to share a commitment to shedding light on the reality around us and suggesting plausible forecasts about what could be happening on the world's stage in the years to come.⁸

Huntington's Hypothesis

Our epoch is apparently distinguished by the lack of a hierarchical concept of culture [...] though our times are indeed saturated with partly universal, partly competitive hierarchical cultural ideals to an extent perhaps unknown to our ancestors, we reject emphatically the objective (to wit, pre-human) existence of cultural standards.

While contentions such as Bauman's (1973: 15) are hardly controversial, the different traits attributed to the concept of culture are widely used to explain differences between communities of people. Indeed the distinctions between other people's habits and our own are a topic of everyday conversation, as well as the focus of erudite studies in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and so on. When the director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, Samuel P. Huntington, wrote an article predicting a new phase on the world political stage, his hypothesis sparked immediate and widespread debate. He had suggested that while clashes between opposite political and economic systems are fading away, conflicts will involve different civilisations, with their distinct cultures, coming into contact with each other:

Nation states will remain the most powerful players in world affairs, but the principal conflicts in global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilisations. The clash of civilisations will dominate global politics. The fault-lines between civilisations will be the battle lines of the future.

Huntington's argument is fairly consistent with the analysis of the relationship between the West and Islam offered by another American scholar, Bernard Lewis. He argued that Western unwillingness to grasp the inescapable and significant role played by religion in the Islamic world could be regarded as a blatant and meaningful example of cultural conflict. Others, such as Panebianco (1992), have highlighted the potential for conflict between Islam and Western countries and identified as a cause – in addition to sociocultural differences – the imbalance created by the geographical location of the world's energy sources, found mainly in the Middle East.

What needs to be clarified is what Huntington means by a revival of cultural unrest. What will constitute the apple of discord? Primarily, it must be remembered, the term civilisation with the connotations used by Huntington reflects a specific worldview.

A civilisation is a cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity. A culture of a village in Southern Italy may be different from that of a village in Northern Italy, but both will share in a common Italian culture that distinguishes them from German villages. European communities, in turn, will share cultural features that distinguish them from Arab or Chinese communities. Arabs, Chinese and Westerners, however, are not part of any other broader cultural entity. They constitute civilisations.

If history, traditions, language, culture and religion are to be seen as the distinctive features of one civilisation in relation to another, it is the way cultural differences are perceived that in the future will be the cause of conflicts, especially in an historical era when, with the downfall of the USSR, other factors of cultural conflict and potential tensions have disappeared. The furthest line separating one's own identity from the identity of the other will symbolise a political and cultural boundary, and any attempt to trespass it will represent a potential occasion for conflict. Ironically, given that the strength and originality of European civilisation is its pluralism, variety and multiplicity of ideologies (as Karl Popper has pointed out), its approach to other nations should equally be marked by openness in appreciating other civilisations' cultural traits. Interestingly, the historian Sergio Romano (1982a: 11) said, in relation to the issue of the European Union:

A book recently published in Paris reminds us that during World War II Hitler's Germany pursued cultural policies aiming at the establishment of the 'cultural' boundaries of Europe, thus creating a rampart between civilisation and barbarism [...] and a cultural pretext was used [by Germany] to defend its political strategy.

Without entering into an argument about the correctness of Huntington's polarisation of world clashes as chiefly involving Western against non-Western civilisations, or disputing the notion that 'promoting the coherence of the West means both preserving Western culture within the West and defining the limits of the West, I believe the conclusion of his argument is relevant for its wide range of implications.⁹ For instance, the need for the West to more closely examine the life principles (e.g.

philosophical, religious) characterising other civilisations is regarded as a preliminary step towards understanding how individuals within those civilisations see their personal and/or collective welfare.

It will require an effort to identify elements of commonality between Western and other civilisations. For the relevant future, there will be no universal civilisation, but instead a world of different civilisations, each of which *will have to learn to coexist with the others*. (Huntington, 1993: 49, emphasis is mine)¹⁰

Peaceful coexistence of diverse civilisations, we are told, will mainly depend upon their skill in getting to know each other, coming to reciprocal understanding, finding common denominators. Knowledge and understanding of each other's culture – the acceptance of distinctive contrasting traits – will be of paramount importance for the future.

But how are we to interpret the term 'culture' in this context?

Polysemy and Elusiveness of the Term 'Culture'

It is of course hardly feasible to identify a universally endorsed definition of the term 'culture'. While recognising that there are as many fascinating definitions as there are scholars, in various fields, who have taken on the task of defining this concept, it would be presumptuous even to review all the suggested interpretations. We will simply highlight here the polysemous connotation of the term 'culture', whose meanings can be broadly divided into three major categories. First the broad anthropological definition (Kluckholm, 1964):

The term designates those aspects of the total human environment, tangible and intangible, which have been created by men.

This vision includes any material artefacts and mental constructs, as long as they are generated by human action.

Second there is the slightly narrower application of the concept, where culture is defined as a range of mental constructs, in particular 'beliefs and values', norms, laws and customs. As an example, Australian culture attaches great importance to 'mateship',¹¹ with expectations of total loyalty and mutual support among individual mates. Italian culture on the other hand emphasises a sense of kin and attributes major relevance to family bonds as a source of support within society.

Thirdly there is a restrictive meaning of the term culture, when identifying it with a set of consciously produced symbolic objects of acknowledged intellectual and artistic significance embodying the

higher achievements of mankind. In this case culture is seen as embracing mainly the arts, philosophical speculation, the achievements of science and so on.

A closer look may identify at least some common denominators in the above definitions. We understand culture as a human phenomenon; it is passed on from one generation to the next and tends to condition further action by imposing constraints, giving directives etc. Culture varies in space and time. Mankind produces culture, however its material artefacts and/or mental constructs differ between cultures. For example, human beings have religions, not one religion, languages, not language. In addition cultural outcomes are not universally and uniformly valued, in fact their plurality can cause disagreement when what is valued by one is devalued by the other (e.g. women's independence in most Western countries versus Eastern countries). The variety of cultures is no obstacle to contacts between them, nor does it hinder cross-fertilisation, which may take place spontaneously via integration or forcibly through imposition. In both cases, however, the consequent relations and/or results cannot be generalised. If we think of Latin and its derivatives, the Romance languages, and of the worldwide diffusion of English, we see examples of conquered cultures and superimposition, albeit via diverse processes. Although the Romans did not formally impose Latin on conquered peoples, its contact with languages of the subordinate countries determined their long-term evolution. English, apart from its diffusion through the British Empire and the victory of English-speaking nations in WWII, is increasingly gaining ground through globalisation and the spread of new technologies.

Notwithstanding the necessary simplification of the notion of culture adopted so far, the implications of Huntington's theory – our starting point – are neither plain nor simple. If, on the basis of experience around us, we accept the hypothesis that clashes and strife among diverse civilisations will be a feature of the world of the future and that the antidote to cultural conflict may be the promotion of reciprocal knowledge and understanding, how do nation states approach issues of a cultural nature, in terms of both acquiring information about other nations and making their own available to others? What part does language play within cultural relations? And, most importantly, how can the notion of cultural relations be defined?

Cultural Relations as a Domain of International Relations

International relations, a relatively recent field of study, was first recognised in 1919 as a university subject in Great Britain, though it was the impact of WWI that made public opinion sensitive to the issue. For it as well as for the concepts of 'foreign policy' and 'diplomacy', accurate descriptions can be found in political dictionaries. But the notion of 'cultural relations' still has no clear agreed definition. Broadly speaking what can be found on the topic is a relatively small body of literature: some essays and a few books, mostly from the disciplines of politics and history, in which rather than attempting to generate agreement on a single, non-controversial notion of cultural relations, the various authors are concerned to argue that they exist as an autonomous form of interaction between nations. The situation is likely to change in the future, with an increasing number of disparate works concentrating on the area of cultural communication from a range of disciplines, and also because the area of civilisation is becoming very strong in language studies.

James M. Mitchell (1986), author of an in-depth study on international cultural relations, insists on the distinction between cultural diplomacy and cultural relations. The former he describes as firmly linked to conventional diplomacy whose aim is the promotion of the interest of the state, the latter as a wider, looser and freer network of contacts, activities and exchanges among countries for purposes not necessarily coinciding with the aims of the state. In the initial pages of his book cultural relations are boldly introduced as 'a little understood branch of international relations'.

This opinion receives forceful backing from another American scholar, C. Coombs (1964), who maintains that US cultural relations are an 'underdeveloped area' of foreign policy. Meanwhile the Italian scholar M. Zagari (1970), in order to support the relevance of the 'cultural dimension of international relations', highlights the existence within the United Nations of an Organisation for Education, Science and Culture. To the three traditional fields of foreign policy – political, economic and military – he adds a fourth, cultural relations, arguing that it should be given equal importance. Others illustrate the difficulty of giving a meaningful definition of cultural relations because the presence of the word 'culture' leads to confusion due to the wide range of its meanings. In some cases the issue is approached by asking rhetorically: is there a need for a nation to have foreign cultural policies?

In this instance any implicit affirmative answer serves to highlight the innumerable difficulties and the conclusion is inevitably that cultural relations should indeed be an independent domain within foreign policies (Baistrocchi, 1985).

Despite this uncertainty surrounding the very notion of cultural relations, in a younger nation like Canada, Tovell (1985) acknowledges that: '[...] it was not until the early sixties that the first semblance of a coherent policy emerged in that area'. But he also says: 'Western Europe provides a fertile source for models: its cultures are part of our heritage and no two countries have developed their policies in the same way'.

Thus the existence of relations of a cultural nature among nations is implicitly recognised, which seems to confirm Arnold's assumption that international cultural relations are an established aspect of interaction between nations. Their integration into foreign policy, however, has become more apparent in more recent circumstances such as the development of the nation state in Europe. Arnold's conjecture is supported by earlier commentators. Giuseppe Prezzolini (1930), an Italian writer and journalist who enjoyed a certain popularity in his time, stated: 'A paramount problem for Italian culture is its relationships with other cultures'. Prezzolini's opinion is relevant because not only was he deeply involved in the cultural life of early 20th century, but his initiatives also proved to be highly successful.

Moving to more recent times, in a book concerned with Italian foreign policy between 1947 and 1993, former Italian ambassador and academic L.V. Ferraris (1996) includes an appendix titled 'Culture as an instrument of foreign policy'. The initial paragraph reads:

For a country like Italy culture, with its legacy of the past, and its current wealth, represents and must represent an instrument of foreign policy, both for promoting matters of intellectual achievement and for the diffusion of language. This needs to be stated regardless of potential easy comparisons with other countries, which have managed to exploit culture as an instrument of political achievement.

What we see here is a significant acknowledgment of the existence and value of cultural policies, at the same time linked apparently inextricably to the political objectives of foreign policy. In this case a specific but not independent function is advocated for the development of cultural relations. They appear to be deprived here of the self-sufficiency which according to others¹² represents their very essence: spreading knowledge to foster understanding and communication among diverse nations.

Adopting a rather pragmatic approach, Sergio Romano, former Italian Ambassador in Moscow and Director of Cultural Relations in the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, suggests cultural relations are simply a 'necessity' if cultural action of any kind is to take place abroad. Whatever aim is to be achieved in another country – e.g. creating a school, sending a teacher to cooperate with a university etc. – implies a request to be complied with by the foreign country in question and an agreement to be reached among the two parties involved. Hence the need for an international instrument, an agreement, to conclude a deal of give and take. Institutions such as the *Direzione Generale delle Relazioni Culturali*, Romano added, were established to monitor this type of international relations, which represent a special kind of diplomatic relations. As for the issue of how to draw the line between cultural relations as a neutral instrument for promoting knowledge and understanding and cultural relations as a tool of propaganda, he said: 'It is just a matter of semantics' (Romano, 1995).

The existence of cultural policy, and the need for it, seem to be recognised with some degree of agreement by both scholars in international law and diplomats. However opinions on their specific scope, content and modalities of implementation vary.

The expression 'cultural relations' will be used in the present context to signify the institutional framework within which a wide range of actions take place. They all aim at facilitating and promoting a better understanding of a nation's culture abroad. The notion adopted is broad in order to embrace government intervention as well as the initiatives of a large variety of agents. Such agents tend to be increasingly heterogeneous and numerous as a consequence of new technologies available facilitating and accelerating communication worldwide. For a number of countries programmes of a cultural nature tend to include any type of interaction and exchange with other nations, and for the majority their initiatives in the field of cultural relations are similar in scope and content.

Language Spread Abroad, a Domain of Cultural Relations

As Berberoglou (1987) remarked, 'No attempt to provide a rigorous definition of 'nation' was made by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg [...]'. Yet this complex phenomenon undeniably exists, as the history of its development proves beyond doubt. The main elements traditionally included in the concept of 'nation' are: a community of people, an identified geographical territory where such a group lives, shared

religion, customs, ancestry (or the myth of it), historical memories, language. Definitions of the term found in modern dictionaries, however, highlight an additional element: the conviction among the members of these 'imagined communities' that they belong to the same social unit, the nation (Anderson, 1991). It is in the end this psychological factor which determines the behaviour of the individuals, and which in turn becomes the symbol of people's national identity. Bobbio (1996: 676) says:

The semantic content of the word nation, despite its immense emotional power, remains one of the most vague and uncertain in the political lexicon [...]. Its indeterminate nature, and the consequent impossibility of using it in political discourse to identify in reality the boundaries of the various national groups, has resulted in the negative role played by the idea of nation in modern history within the field of international relations [...].

Having acknowledged these reflections, let us briefly consider as an example one of the most ingrained components of national identity: language. The national language is in itself a dividing line between people. E.J. Hobsbawm (1990: 54–55) pointed out that:

[...] in the era before general primary education there was not and could not be a spoken 'national language' [...] In other words the actual mother-tongue, i.e. the idiom children learned from illiterate mothers and used for everyday situations, was certainly not in any sense a national language.

Italy is a fitting example. There is a standard Italian, now appropriately defined as the 'national language', and yet it was through political action and pressure that the variety of the language spoken in Tuscany was imposed on the rest of the country, at that time extremely fragmented linguistically. In fact linguistic unity proved very hard to achieve, as we will see in the following chapters. On the other hand, Italian-speaking Swiss, to give an example, remain citizens of their own nation and do not claim to be Italian just because of the language they speak.

Even if language is not an adequate criterion for unravelling the mysteries of national identity, as Salvemini (1961: 485) remarked, 'the language shared by the inhabitants of a geographical area is the means by which common identity manifests itself most frequently'.

Yet it is the language spoken by individuals that people automatically associate with membership of a certain nation. Nationality in turn suggests well identified cultural traits. In Italian *parlare la stessa lingua*,

'speaking the same language', metaphorically suggests mental alignment, shared ideals and convictions. A language thus continues to represent a special bond between its speakers, not merely because communication is easily established through words, but also because of the subliminal, inextricable ties existing between a nation's culture and its language.

Not surprisingly then, if cultural relations aim (in the definition adopted here) to facilitate a better understanding among nations of each other's culture, language policies are the embodiment of an indirect form of encouragement to participate in and appreciate more deeply the specific values of the culture in question. Arnold (1979: 45) suggests that 'The protection of the country's language abroad is a traditional component of every foreign cultural policy'.

Against the background of this notion of cultural relations, the focus as we have said will be on the diffusion of language abroad, which is an integral aspect of cultural policies, that is to say on government's actions and planning in this field.

The importance of language promotion abroad can be easily gathered from the detailed analysis and evaluation carried out by French linguist Claude Hagège. Hagège (1992) discusses the plurality of European languages within a relatively small geographical space and the possibilities of a common language for united Europe in the third millennium. We have seen how the approach of the year 2000 provided an incentive for a wide range of scholars to anticipate developments in societies. Using accurate historical analysis Hagège rejects old and new candidates through a process of gradual elimination. Italian, whose European credits are listed as its diffusion in Constantinople in the 12th century and its role and usage in two former colonies, Ethiopia and Somalia, is discarded in the space of two pages on the basis of its limited diffusion abroad. French, German and English languages are given one chapter each; these three emerge as strong contenders for their *fédératif* connotation, in other words an already notable spread beyond the boundaries of their respective nations. In the end, however, all three fall victim to the same verdict. Hagège predicts multilingualism for the linguistic future of Europe consistent with its extraordinary linguistic variety. According to him the European population of the future will consist of polyglots; the strong role played by English, French and German, however, is in his view unlikely to change. His hypothesis does not coincide with that of Umberto Eco (1993) who believes one language may in the future become the international *lingua franca*.

The approach to language diffusion abroad, however, varies from one country to another. It is a well-known fact that Great Britain rates education very highly, not surprisingly given that the spread of English is linked to its colonialist origin and thus to a commitment to provide education to the people whose countries are part of the British Commonwealth. Possibly this attitude was not the direct product of altruistic concerns but had a practical objective: educating a class of people able to act as interpreters between British colonial powers and the populations in their colonies (see Phillipson, 1992). France on the other hand attaches weight to language as a unique and significant element of the French culture (Tamassia, 1969¹³) and as such irreplaceable in conveying its models and values. Mitchell describes France's approach to language and culture spread as a 'sacred mission', a synonym for the well known French expressions *mission civilisatrice* and *messianism français*. The examples of two empires illustrate how crucial differences are revealed in language policies.

This study will look at Italy, whose language was not and is not a contender for international primacy in Europe, but which is nevertheless one of the six original countries promoting the idea of European unity.

Italy: A Worthy Case Study

Distinctive elements contribute to stimulating interest in Italy as a case study possibly in many fields of inquiry, but they are more conspicuous in relation to matters dealing with the broad concept of culture and unique with regard to language. Let us look briefly at the first element, culture. According to UNESCO Italy has the highest concentration of archaeological and artistic treasures in the world. It would be fair to say that even visually in everyday life Italians cannot escape their ties with the past: their environment, with its innumerable historic landmarks, acts endlessly as a reminder of it.

Historian Jacques Le Goff (1974) has remarked that the hegelian 'burden of history' weighs on Italians' collective consciousness in a tridimensional and yet contradictory way: firstly through the realisation that they are ancient as a people, assuming an imaginary thread across the centuries linking the Roman Empire to the present Italian nation. Secondly, he explains, Italians perceive the splendour of the past as conflicting with their contemporary situation, considering it a comparatively decadent phase. Thirdly they are aware of their immaturity as a nation state. These observations made over two decades ago appear to some extent still pertinent in the new millennium. In 1996, Italian

historian Galli della Loggia argued for instance that at the end of World WarII many Italians attributed their defeat to the 'moral and ethical weakness' of Italy's population as a whole, the Resistance having failed to nurture Italians' love for their fatherland. Like his fellow historian Renzo De Felice, he claims that the sense of national identity is weak among his fellow countrymen.

In the late 19th century the kind of awareness described by Le Goff had yet to be achieved, at least by the majority of Italy's population. The circumstances of political unification and the widespread illiteracy – 78% according to the 1861 census, as De Mauro reports (1963) – make it hard even to imagine such sophisticated historical awareness.

If we focus for a moment on the term 'nation' as it pertains to Italy, specific factors need to be taken into account. In a wide range of studies on the period of the Risorgimento – from the late 19th century to the present – one recurring point emerges: when Italy became a nation state the process failed to foster effective amalgamation between geographically, ethnically and socio-politically distant areas of the country. Liberal leaders of the Risorgimento were a small minority, in fact an elite of patriots and intellectuals. Their ideals, thoughts and convictions remained somehow separate and remote from those of the working classes and the peasants of the time, who generally did not share in the vicissitudes leading to the birth of the nation: Gramsci's 'passive revolution', as Raimondi (1998: 222) calls it, was a revolution coming from above.

Historically Italy is a myth created by men of letters, starting with Dante and continuing over the centuries, but outside the boundaries of historical phenomena.

The assumption of cultural unity in the peninsula was thus more of an ideal goal, an intellectual aspiration, than a reality. During a phase of reflection on politics and morality Alessandro Manzoni, in the poem 'Marzo 1821', gave his definition of a modern nation: *una d'arme, di lingua, d'altare/di memorie, di sangue e di cor*. However political unity could hardly compensate for socio-economic differences and education gaps within the newly formed Italian State. The existence of a so-called *paese reale*, an actual country, as distinct from the *paese legale*, a country in the judicial sense, has continued to represent a distinctive and puzzling feature of Italy. Galli della Loggia highlights the existence of a wide variety of identities within the same geographical space resulting from the inconsistency of the political unification.

Even Gramsci (1979: 79) pointed out how the historiography of the Risorgimento bears signs of '[...] a lack of inner strength in the sources

which appear to have produced it', and of 'the inconsistency and shapelessness of the phenomenon'.

He also suggested that a revival of interest in the subject of the Risorgimento and the modalities of the original political unification was likely to occur at any time when socio-political crises emerged, thus tangibly highlighting the alienation between government and people and anticipating some catastrophic consequences for the nation. Gramsci's hypothesis proved correct during the stormy political events of the early 1990s, when the debate about national identity was sparked again. To give a more recent example, the separatist *Lega Nord* and the degradation of the political system have again attracted attention to the issue of the consistency of Italian national identity in space and time. Romano (1995) develops three arguments to highlight the lack of a sense of nationhood among Italians. First, Italy's political unification was so premature that it compromised all initial attempts even at decentralising its administration; second, the catastrophe of WW II crushed the illusions of all those who believed in building a national consciousness with the power of 'fire and arms'; third, in 1945 the majority of Italians accepted government by antifascists 'providing those in power did not ask questions about their actions in the last twenty years'. Romano thus passes a negative judgement on Italians' ability to take responsibility for their own actions, that is to behave as one people when socio-political events require them to do so.

The very fact that the issue is still at stake in the 21st century confirms that assuming there was a strong sense of nationhood in Italians as a people in the late 19th century can only be interpreted as wishful thinking, or as a device to persuade the Italians to behave as if it did exist. As Eric Hobsbawm (1977) argued, nationalism had a sensible and relevant function in 19th century Europe, in the sense that nation states served the cause of rising world capitalism. Italy, it seems, fits quite well into one of the two forms of the process of nation building Hobsbawm hypothesises. Its inhabitants were depicted as a monolithic entity of loyal and patriotic citizens, regardless of any socio-cultural differences or divisions. The Italian Risorgimento, however, has traditionally been described as an example of unifying, deeply felt nationalism by those seeking to create a national state.

This theme of course is vast and intellectually exciting, but it is only indirectly part of our sphere of investigation. The point stressed here is that in analysing Italy's socio-cultural reality one cannot disregard either the anomalies in the process of its political unification, as reflected in the still-controversial notion of national identity¹⁴ or, in manifest

contradiction, the undisputed extraordinary cultural heritage which the whole world identifies without hesitation as truly Italian, regardless of the undeniable internal anomalies in the texture of Italian society. Questions such as: is cultural heritage an acknowledged and cherished common denominator, a valid substitute for other missing components in national cohesion? Is there a strong sense of national culture? may generate very different answers. Alberto Asor Rosa (1996: 228–229) has argued with both common sense and remarkable vision:

Italy is the only European country where national identity is not a fixed set of values, but rather an incomplete achievement in continual motion. This imperfect state, weighing on us and frustrating us, bears rewards which we should now begin to cherish. [...] When [national cohesion] is a too recent acquisition – as in nations born after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia – it tends to reveal the barbaric traces which once characterised the birth of modern nations. [...] In my view the Italian national identity in fact lies in the skill of pursuing interaction among a thousand regional realities, and a unified direction on fundamental issues: it is indeed a constantly moving circle rather than a single exclusive target.

Sergio Romano (1982: 16–17) on the other hand, commenting on events following the end of World War II, suggested that unlike other European countries whose national cultures had consolidated and expanded, becoming increasingly autonomous, Italian national culture was '[...] missing self-confidence and autonomy, constantly seeking outside approval and comforting reassurances. [...] Italy is a unique case. For historical reasons, her cultural institutions are inadequate and fragile, less capable of creating and supporting autonomous models.'

Consistent with this belief, and in our view reinforcing it, was David Forgacs' 1992 in-depth study of Italy's cultural industry, which highlighted among its specific characteristics a conspicuous trend over more than 100 years towards massive imports of foreign cultural products, for instance from the USA. The tendency towards 'passive cosmopolitanism', especially during the immediate post-war years, is acknowledged quite bluntly also by Norberto Bobbio (1990).

Is there room for reconciling such a disparity of views and perceptions? It would be unwise to attempt an answer to this question, however Italian governments' cultural policies should also be examined in the light of the contradictions and complexities outlined so far.

The second element making Italy a baffling subject of inquiry is its linguistic history. In the 19th century it was assumed that a common

religion, language and history were the characteristics of the nation state. At the time of Italy's political unification though, many different dialects were spoken along the peninsula, and their range and variety represented a real communication barrier among its people. Knowledge and active use of the Italian language was the privilege of a minority, indeed of an insignificant proportion of the total population: 2.5% according to Tullio De Mauro's estimate in his seminal 1963 study of the interaction between language evolution and socio-political phenomena in Italy. While in the light of more recent studies an increase in this percentage to 9.5% – or even 12% (Castellani, 1982) – seems appropriate, the situation scarcely changes in practical terms.

At a time when other countries were starting to feel the need to enhance their image beyond the national boundaries by promoting the diffusion of their languages, Italy was still looking for ways to spread its language at home. An Italian language of course did exist, but mainly in literary forms. The extraordinarily rich literary tradition spanning the period from the Middle Ages to unification is evidence of the potential and sophistication of Italian as a linguistic system. But it was not a shared system, not a bonding common denominator.

In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that by defining Italy as an *interesting* case to investigate, the etymology of this adjective has been stretched to embrace an additional meaning: not just the Latin *inter-esse* as in 'to be in a prominent position' but rather and more literally the state of being *in between* conflicting forces, which in my view is crucial.

Notes

1. This is not to say recent events are more dramatic or worse than in past centuries, but rather that the collective perception of them is different. Umberto Eco, answering the question: 'Is there a real fear of the year 2000?' in an interview in *Entretiens sur la fin des temps* (1998, Fayard, Pair), said that with the anxiety created by the end of the first millennium the Catholic Church, as custodian of ideology and memory, managed not to have the subject discussed, but the contemporary custodians of ideology and memory, the media, did whatever they could to achieve the opposite result, in other words they spread the feeling that there was apprehension about the third millennium.
2. In a series of interviews by Italian journalist A. Cavallari with European intellectuals on the future of Europe, historian Eric J. Hobsbawm pointed out that the very effort to create a united Europe is a symptom of its state of decline. However, he added, with or without Eurocentricity Europeans still have a position of leadership in the future. Hans M. Enzenberger stressed the need for a more flexible coexistence in the face of current migration waves, and pointed out that while the economy seems to produce new alliances, it is

unlikely that non-European cultures will drastically change or disappear. In France, René Remond said that the formation of a new community in Europe indicates that the predicted European decline could turn into a resurrection. The interviews quoted appeared in the article 'Un'Europa da inventare' (*La Repubblica* 28 November 1996), part of a series entitled 'Il Duemila nel mondo'.

3. The scientist Stephen Gould, intrigued by the millennium craze, began by questioning the basic concept. When does the millennium begin? Why are people so enthralled by it? The answers, given in his book *Questioning the Millennium*, offer mathematically based and highly thought-provoking material on the theme.
4. Even Germaine Greer in her ferocious but daring investigation of women's issues (1999, *The Whole Woman*), amid a rather gloomy panorama, made a prediction to gladden the hearts of her female readers: by the third millennium housework, described as kind of obsessive compulsive disorder, will be abolished.
5. The philosopher Karl Popper, in an interview published in Italian (1994), pointed to the value of peace and freedom within the *Stato di diritto*, and warned against current illusions relying on the idea of total freedom of the market as an aim of globalisation.
6. Still on the theme of West versus East, Claude Levi-Strauss highlighted the artificial nature of this separation on the basis of the connections in the past between Greek and Roman cultures and the Middle East. See interview in *La Repubblica* 11 December 1996.
7. Umberto Eco, participating in the Conference *Challenges of the Third Millennium*, organised by UNESCO in Valencia (January 1997), used the argument that even the date of the new millennium is controversial: 2000 for the Christians, but not for the Muslims, the Chinese or the Australian Aborigines... It is time, he suggested, that Europeans got used to comparative chronology.
8. Bonanate (1991), analysing the major changes affecting international society in recent years, refers to 'the end of the century syndrome' to illustrate why so many scholars in different disciplines have engaged in reflecting upon the next millennium.
9. While opponents of Huntington's theory agree that religion and language are very important factors in worldwide competition, they strongly deny the possibility that the West is about to lose its leading role. The historian W.H. McNeill, in his *The Rise of the West* (Univ. of Chicago Press 1970), argues that in the long term, the growing interconnections among civilisations will result in a universal kind of cosmopolitanism.
10. Three years later, with the publication of *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, Huntington strengthened his hypothesis both graphically and metaphorically by eliminating the question mark in the title of his 1993 article. The clashes among cultures, he argued, cannot be denied, especially as they occur not only between but within diverse civilisations: for example Muslims and Orthodox in Islam cultures, Muslims and Hindus in India, Christian and Muslims in Nigeria and so on.
11. The Macquarie Dictionary defines 'mateship' as 'a code of conduct among men stressing equality and fellowship', the Australian Oxford Dictionary as

'a bond between equal partners or close friends, comradeship as an ideal'. The inclusion of this word in a draft preamble for the Australian Constitution in March 1999 aroused controversy on two counts: the masculine connotation in everyday language, and the link of the concept with a distant 'Bush' past of Australia rather than its modern spirit.

12. Arnold (1979) argues that while there is no doubt the culture of powerful states may be exploited for the politics of power, culture in itself doesn't increase political power; for instance the cultural heritage of the Netherlands has played no role in supporting its foreign interests and aims. He also suggests that there are times when planning, implementation and control of all cultural relations fostered by a government are mainly in its care, and times when control of cultural policies is delegated to other bodies.
13. In a minute examination of French cultural policies, presented as a case study, the author mentions the 'clever balance' achieved by this country by teaching the French language while teaching French culture, '*enseigner le français et enseigner la France*'.
14. (Raimondi, 1998) In an appendix to his *Conversazioni sulle virtù degli italiani* there is an interesting notion put forward as a substitute for the idea of nationalism, 'constitutional patriotism', as a uniquely unifying moment of political agreement and commitment represented by the birth of the Italian Constitution.

Chapter 2

The Italian Constitution and the Development of Italian Society

This chapter establishes reasons for the time frame of the present research, which covers the period 1947–1997. With the Italian Republic's Constitution approved on 27 December 1947 Italy officially started its journey as a democratic state, having gained a new political asset in the constitutional charter, after 20 years of dictatorship and a tragic war. The Italian Constitution, a document of unquestionable historical and ideological relevance, signals a turning point in the country's history. In particular it sanctions the end of language discrimination, in antithesis to fascism, by undertaking precise commitments towards Italian citizens and linguistic minorities within the nation and in regard to Italians abroad.

Time Frame: 1947–1997

Let me begin with a brief preliminary description of Italy's situation at the end of World War II.

Following the liberation of our country, all institutions of the State shall be selected by the Italian people, who will elect through universal, direct, secret suffrage a Constitutional Assembly to draw up a new constitution for the State.¹

With this first decree-law of the Bonomi Government, the immediate successor to Badoglio's second Cabinet, a glimmer of light was shed on Italy's immediate future: following two decades of fascist rule and a war which had ravaged the country, democracy was to be returned. After the Liberation (25 April 1945) the Italian peninsula was still occupied by the British and American Allied Forces, its territory dramatically scarred, high inflation and widespread unemployment running hand in hand. The political situation seemed to highlight even more the endemic separation between centre-north and south, with the latter largely anchored to monarchist and fascist ideology; Amendola (1946) argued that in the south there had been no significant changes in relation to the past: the social structure reflected a timeless control of the powerful over