

National identity and professional identity compared

by Francesca Magrini* and Maddalena Carli**

In setting up this Day, we started from a critical reflection on “Italian-ness”¹, the claim that there exists a national character established once and for all that is held responsible due to a mythical belonging, based on the de-historicisation of political and social contexts. What emerges is a concept of identity foreign to any constructive, synthetic attempt that could generate other possibilities, and separated from the relations as they are experienced. It is a natural conception, deriving from ethnicity or bloodline – an example is “Roman-ness”, the vision of the Roman past put forward by the capital’s mayor, Gianni Alemanno (and before him, by the fascism of Benito Mussolini)² – and the difficulty in conceiving of differences, in considering the foreign a part and/or potential interlocutor in constructs of identity.

It seems opportune to recall an image proposed by Andreina Ricci³ in the second *Day on Reporting as a method of intervention in clinical psychology*⁴. Professor Ricci told us about her work in making sense of the archeological remains in contemporary cities to the benefit of the citizens who live alongside them: she used the metaphor of tying up the threads again, the process of recomposing the present and the past and scholars and citizenry. Knitting the fracture of past and present, without taking it for granted that the ruins in themselves are a property with an absolute value (of antiquity) that can be recognised by all; producing the sense of active protection allowing us to be involved in the common good, in knowing about it and preserving it. Starting from these stimuli, we intend today to tie up the threads between present and past and between contexts, relationships and demands. The national identity is not necessarily a myth. It can be seen as a set of systems of living together that change over time. A crucial aspect of this seminar is the sense of time: time in the synchronic and not just diachronic sense; time not so much as a succession of events as a multiplicity and co-presence of different concepts of time which it is important to learn and respect and allow to interact. We are not going to outline a straightforward prospect of evolution of the issues related to living together, but we intend to suggest connections between events that we call periodising, i.e. marking a turning point in a social situation. Discussing time has enabled us to interpret the contexts, demands and their transformations and to work on their variability. We have tried to find answers in the past for present-day questions: what identity do we have in relation to our profession, what demands do we encounter, what emotional and cultural dimensions organise the contexts in which we operate?

Some events have marked and continue to deeply modify Italians’ systems of living together; psychology, which deals with intervention in the representations of these processes of living together, has changed and continues to change with them. Our study focused on the relation between national identity and the professional identity of Italian psychologists, from the Seventies

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¹ Cfr., among the latest works on the topic, Patriarca (2010).

² Cfr., among others, Giardina & Vauchez (2000).

³ Andreina Ricci, archeologist, teacher of Methodology of Archeological Research and Classical Archeology at “Tor Vergata” University of Roma where she also runs the Center for the study of transformations of the local area. As well as being a longstanding field researcher, she has studied the often conflictual relations between archeological remains and the contemporary city.

⁴ Cfr Ricci (2006). Cfr also the contribution by Andreina Ricci to the Days on Reporting as an intervention method in clinical psychology of 31 January 2009 entitled: *Psicologia, antropologia e archeologia si confrontano sul tema della resocontazione*. The transcription of the Days on Reporting can be retrieved on the site of the Rivista di Psicologia Clinica at: http://www.rivistadipsicologiaclinica.it/italiano/sez_riservate/Giornate.htm

up to today. In this time span we looked at some symbols of contemporary life, identified three categories of interpretation (reflecting totally Italian issues) and gave them a bi-polar form so as to render the progress, to depict a tension rather than a categorisation: individual-collective, public-private, conflict-aconflictuality.

The individual-collective polarity looked at belonging, at the capacity to construct shared experiences and at the tendency towards individualistic motives and fragmentation that marked the crisis in political participation and the inability to promote fruitful identity processes. The changes in question were 'periodised' by the Eighties, during which there was a sharp *triumph of the private sphere* – to allude to the title of a book of collected articles published at the beginning of the decade (*Il trionfo del privato* Galli della Loggia, Bianchi, Aspesi, Volli, Di Nola, Simone & Ajello, 1980) – which encouraged the emergence of everyday passivity and a levelling to individualistic motives devoid both of anxiety and of values, as writes the historian Guido Crainz, whose book *Autobiografia di una repubblica* (2009) contributed to our reflections on identity.

Through the public-private polarity we tried to reflect on the crisis in the institutions and on the hegemony currently exerted by the private sphere, in comparison to the past period when the social-health services were established. Also in the case of these transformations, the Eighties proved to be crucial, marked by a gradual loss of faith in change, and the early Nineties, during which the degeneration of party politics reached its peak resulting in the Clean Hands inquiry. This was a critical process which on the international plane took on an even more dramatic, anguishing aspect, insofar as the hopes aroused by the fall of the Berlin Wall and by the end of the Cold War were rudely disappointed by the centralising tones and authoritarian temptations of German reunification and the one-power world: the push for innovation and calls for change on the one hand, and monologic trends and erosion of reciprocity on the other. Starting from such considerations, we examined the changes in the public sphere, the organisational and social variations such as administrative decentralisation, the shift from *public* to *client* and therefore the individual's greater contractual power, both outside and inside the world of work.

The third polarity dealt with the use of conflict in social relations and the devices used in the past to handle the different implications, such as the trade union. We think of conflict – on the basis of Professor Renzo Carli's *Editorial* and R. Carli and Rosa Maria Paniccia's *Cultural and psychological involution*⁵ – as the possibility of encountering otherness, and the spaces and times allowed to diversity. The decade of the turning point, in this sense, is represented by the Seventies, during which a generalised indiscriminate use of conflictuality gradually produced a dialectic towards conformistic tendencies; the years of terrorism, which marked an extreme radicalisation of the conflict, to the point that it was identified and coincided with violence, and the beginning of its negation, in the name of the presumed danger of the political and social *other*.

Let us now look at the seminar and its internal structure.

During the morning, Renzo Carli, Pietro Stampa and Anna Di Ninni will talk on some specific aspects of their work. Professor Carli will examine the notion of identity and the way psychologists have handled it. Professor Stampa will present a survey of the organisation of the profession and the shift from movement to institution, involving the support for power requiring normalisation processes. Lastly, Professor Di Ninni will discuss the demand prior to the entry of psychologists into the social-health services and their contact with other professions.

The afternoon will provide space for reports by the three groups of third and fourth-year students from our School, using the polarities mentioned above to make hypotheses on the relation between national identity and professional identity. The talks we will present are the proposed interventions in issues found in the context we work in and in their omnipresent political-cultural processes which we feel it is difficult to disregard. The intention is to place ourselves in a position that is different from the stances that tend to reify the individual by highlighting his/her invariances and detaching him/her from what he/she shares with the context he/she comes from and/or belongs to.

⁵ Cfr. Carli, (2010) and Carli & Paniccia (2010).

This seminar is the first result of the work on identity – as we will also see from the contributions dealing with cases – construction focuses on the client's demand and not on a self-referential technique. It is not a preamble but a product, the effect of the activity of mediation, the construction of sense.

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