

## Plural Switzerland: Switching Identities in a Multicultural Nation

Christian Giordano

Seminar of Ethnology, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

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**Abstract:** *Though Switzerland has often been considered an exception, in a global context it definitely is not so. As with any other multicultural society, Switzerland in fact is not based on the social construction of a single, indivisible national identity shared by all its citizens. Therefore, this country does not comply with the model of the 'classic' national States conceived as ethnically and culturally homogeneous political and territorial entities. Yet, even those national States modeled on the ideology of the German or French nation can hardly be considered homogeneous, given the presence of significant ethnic, linguistic, religious etc. minorities within their territories.*

*The different communities that make up plural Switzerland develop an allegiance to the confederate State because the latter recognizes the cultural specificities (linguistic and religious) of the country's different collective identities. In this connection, the question is whether Switzerland can be regarded as a nation or rather, as some authors suggested, as a "coalition of resistances" both within the country as well as towards outwards. In fact, by observing the single identity constructions and strategies we can detect an interesting reality, i.e., switching identities. This indicates that affiliations are multiple and situational; in specific circumstances, each individual will stress his Swiss belonging, while in other circumstances he will tend to identify with bordering or culturally close nations (Germany, France, Italy) thus creating different, yet complementary identity narratives.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural diversity, federalism, switching identities, multilingualism, complementary identity narratives.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION. THE SWISS IDENTITY ENIGMA

Unraveling the question of Swiss identity, or more specifically the question of belonging in this country, appears as a puzzling reality to foreigners. If anyone (not an expert) tries to define this country and its people, thinking he understands Switzerland and the Swiss, we often hear statements as, "The Swiss live in a State with four cantons: German, French, Italian, and Romansch." Indeed, we will not verify the enunciation's accuracy, but rather stress that it reveals the speaker's uncertainty. He must sense the difficulty of convincing another person that such a culturally composite country can be stable and its inhabitants live together with no major antagonisms (Rougemont, 1989). At times consciously, and often unconsciously, a foreigner assumes that the *Staatsnation* concept is universally applicable. This German term of French origin (Pierré-Caps, 1995: 56) designates the doctrine by which each nation corresponds to a State with its own territory, which in turn is exclusive heritage of the nation itself. According to common knowledge, although not far from its theoretic representation, a *Staatsnation* usually means a *Kulturnation* as well; i.e. a community whose members share the same cultural characteristics, particularly the same idiom. Apparently, the Herderian idea of Volk, whose main feature is a shared language for all its members, has been able to strike root in everyday representations of a nation. Even the French idea of nation is based upon linguistic criteria. Introduced by the *Académie française* in 1694, the definition is "*tous les habitants d'un même Etat, d'un même pays, qui vivent sous les mêmes lois et usent de la même langue*" (Lochak, 1988: 77). Given such distinguished precedents, it is not surprising that this understanding of the nation is so widespread in Europe. Thus, our speaker has some difficulty presenting the Swiss reality, which is absolutely unlike other European States with a greater cultural homogeneity, at least within ideological representations. Therefore, the problem facing whoever observes Switzerland from the outside is its overt and sometimes decidedly flaunted "difference".

Due to its multireligious and multilingual structure, besides other characteristics we will examine, Switzerland is undoubtedly a very distinctive case in which identity construction and the definition of belonging follow extremely specific modes. Defining Switzerland as a *multination state* par

excellence, Will Kymlicka stresses that its various groups develop a sense of loyalty towards the Confederation only because it acknowledges and respects the cultural specificities which determine the country's different collective identities (Kymlicka, 1995: 13). Therefore, the State's legitimacy is not based upon the nation's actual or presumed homogeneity, but on the certainty of being able to be culturally different. The 1848 constitution, still broadly in force, already established this guaranty. This founding document of the modern Confederation defined Switzerland a multinational and multilingual State constituted by *Völkerschaften* (Altermatt, 1997: 18). Interpreting this reality and comparing it with the rest of Europe, the historian Herbert Lüthy keenly notes that all modern States rose by challenging its constituents' particularisms, while Switzerland has endured over the centuries because of them (Lüthy, 1969). Agreeing with André Reszler, we can state that the Swiss are not only aware of their differences, but that they treasure them as well (Reszler, 1986: 70). Moreover, they love to celebrate them. If not, how could we account for a Swiss member of parliament who began his introductory statement at an international scientific meeting's opening ceremony in Bern with the symptomatic phrase, "*Les Suisses s'entendent bien parce qu'ils se comprennent mal*"?

Though puzzling and bizarre to a foreigner, the Swiss cult of difference suggests that confining ourselves to the construction of a *single and indivisible* national identity, as with most European States, would be problematic and reductive with reference to the Swiss sense of belonging. Probably Will Kymlicka's assertion that "patriotism" as loyalty towards the Confederate State is certainly observable, while "national identity" as a sense of belonging to a united and close ethnic community is hardly detectable in Switzerland, is farfetched (Kymlicka, 1995: 13). Maybe the striking statement of Swiss historian and politician Georges-André Chevallaz is out of proportion as well, when in an interview he says, "*La Suisse est moins une nation qu'une coalition de résistances; ces résistances diverses locales, régionales, traditionnelles, linguistiques, religieuses, s'inscrivent et s'intègrent dans le cadre historique des cantons*" (Chevallaz, 1979: 96).

Contrary to these two authors, I believe there is a national identity in Switzerland, though practically inchoate, fragile, and very recent. It is the outcome of an assembling contrived by the political and intellectual élite, in addition to the long strengthening process of the Confederate State during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bichsel, 1970: 19). Its elements, i.e. symbols and myths, have been remarkably well analyzed by André Reszler (Reszler, 1986). However, as Georges-André Chevallaz aptly hints in the above-mentioned quote, along with national identity there is a multitude of other belongings, often clashing or with an ambivalence-based relation. In short, Swiss identity may be viewed as a dynamic system of overlapping belongings influencing three aspects: federal, cantonal, and comunal, or in other words, national, regional and local. Nevertheless, in this constantly changing stratified system (Altermatt, 1997: 21-26) what counts are not so much the coherence of the various elements, but the reciprocal recognition of their diversity. We shall now look into some aspects of the Ticinese identity construction, which is particularly relevant within such a complex system of belongings and which, from an ethno-anthropological point of view, is remarkably interesting.

## **2. TICINO OR ITALIAN-SPEAKING SWITZERLAND? GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL FEATURES**

Stefano Franscini, the most distinguished 19<sup>th</sup> century personage from Ticino, in his book '*La Svizzera Italiana*', defines this canton as *una piccola repubblica Svizzera che giace propriamente in Italia* (Franscini, 1973: 55). Areawise the fifth Swiss canton, Ticino in fact appears as a triangular wedge that from the Alps stretches into the Po Valley, mainly into present-day Lombardy territory.

Due to its specific location, one might think that this canton, the only one with an Italian-speaking majority, coincides with the Italian-speaking Switzerland. This is misleading since there is a significant Italian-speaking territorial minority in the Grisons. We would not heed this detail if it were a mere geographic issue besides being inherent to identity. The Italian-speaking minority in Grisons has its own construction and perception of the difference. If an outsider, even naively or accidentally, overlooks the distinction between Ticino and Italian-speaking Switzerland, this invariably involves comments highlighting the differences, though the indisputable cultural closeness is admitted. If the failure to adhere to this separation is ascribable to one of the parties involved, the incident can provoke hostility and criticisms. This is why radio and television journalists are very careful when they announce regional news. They follow precise rules determining when to use the term "Ticino" or "Italian-speaking Switzerland" since any improper use of the two expressions would be considered

"politically incorrect". Mass media have institutionally acknowledged the distinction between "Ticino" and "Italian-speaking Switzerland". Therefore, it is not surprising that the regional news of the TSI (Swiss Italian-speaking Television) separates Ticinese news from the Grisons' one.

The mentioned differentiation, which backs the incisive role of cantonal belonging, has historical grounds. In fact, Ticino has experienced a very different past from that of the Italian-speaking Grisons, which for many centuries followed the intricate events of a trilingual and biconfessional canton dominated by a German-speaking majority.

Acknowledged as a canton only in 1803, Ticino has its own specific history linked to Swiss expansionism towards the Po Valley over the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, the Confederates reached the highest peak of their political and military power. They took over the junctions of Alpine routes and spread southwards, dominating even the State of Milan for a short while. Defeated at Marignano (1515), the Swiss had to cede Lombardy to France (which after subsequent wars would have to yield it to Spain) but did not surrender the Alpine passes that were far too important both commercially and strategically. The Swiss were left with eight small regions, south of the Alps, that were given the statute of *baliaggi*. *Baliaggio* derives from the French term *bailliage*, which for the Swiss designates a non-sovereign territory under the political and administrative control of one or more cantons. Thus, the transalpine Confederates imposed their authority in Ticino by means of a governor and magistrate called *Landvogt*. It is important to remember that they respected pre-existent rules and customs guaranteeing the preservation of local belongings. This domination recalls an *ante litteram* form of "indirect rule", notably used by the British at the time of their colonial empire. Through this type of rule, each *baliaggio* constituted an autonomous microcosm with its own statute, assembly, and cultural specificities. The regent cantons merely oversaw the work done by the *Landvogt* annually through a designated council. The Confederate rule, though not forwarding the realization of great public works, provided Ticino with some centuries of stability and security. Thus, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ticino was spared the ruinous war between France and Spain that devastated several areas of the Po Valley and was able to avoid the exorbitant Spanish system of taxation, which instead burdened Lombardy. The Swiss presence gave the Ticinese *baliaggi* commercial leeway, allowing them to export livestock into the neighboring regions in exchange for cereals and salt. For a mostly mountainous region lacking tillable land, these exchanges were a basic guarantee against famine. Over one issue however the Confederates were adamant; they were never willing to negotiate their sovereignty over the *baliaggi*. After more than three hundred years, this arrangement was swept away at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the spread of revolutionary ideas and the coming of Napoleon to Switzerland and Lombardy.

An anthropologist is interested in history only if past events have a specific influence over the present and concern the experience ambit and expectation range of present-day actors (Koselleck, 1979: 349 ff.; Ricoeur, 1985: Vol. 3, 301 ff.). Therefore, from an anthropological viewpoint, history is significant only as "interpreted past" and consequently actualized, re-elaborated, and even somewhat mystified and distorted in the present (Ricoeur, 1985: Vol. 3, 320). The fundamental anthropological issue regards the "presence" (Schaff, 1976: 129) and "efficiency" (Ricoeur, 1985: Vol. 3, 314) of history in the present time.

This era of the Ticinese past has not been mentioned for the sake of historical research. We think that the *baliaggi* period and the colonial-like domination of the Confederation had a significant role in the construction of the Ticinese sense of belonging and identity as expressed at present. Yet, the time of the *baliaggi* was never truly perceived nor expressed collectively or individually as a "dark" age of oppression and exploitation. For example, the Spanish domination instead is still perceived and presented negatively in Milan and neighboring Lombardy. Evidently, the *baliaggi* did not jeopardize the peaceful relations between dominators and dominated, and did not carry any outstanding resentment. Therefore, this period did not stunt the growth of a specific *Swissness* amongst the population and particularly amongst the Ticinese elite. The spread of this sense of belonging is certainly not the expression of a presumed *Volksggeist*, but the outcome of a rational premeditation linked to economic interests as well. In fact, the Confederate domination of Ticino, as already mentioned, ensured stability, security, and a far less demanding administration than others close by, and these facts surely promoted commercial ventures. The *Landvogt*, by never taking into consideration a potential cultural assimilation, not only respected the local autonomies but also the *Italianity* of the Ticinese. By examining this long chapter in history, certainly not so grand but neither

so grim, we can understand how declaring to be Swiss while proclaiming to have an Italian culture can be consistent.

Napoleon was unaware of the crucial dialectic of Ticinese identity. While striving to marshal the region according to Republican principles based on the *Etat-Nation* concept, he was in favor of an aggregation of the *baliaggi* under Confederate charge in the newly born Cisalpine Republic. In the end, the project's failure was the consequence of the first definite political enactment of a dialectic identity between *Swissness* and *Italianity*.

### 3. „LIBERI E SVIZZERI“: FROM FOUNDING MYTH TO LOGO OF THE TICINESE IDENTITY

In 1796, Napoleon invaded northern Italy with the two-fold aim of further weakening Austria and exporting the Revolution beyond the Alps. For this purpose, he created the Cisalpine Republic in the region, a State following the French model, which can be regarded the kernel of a future united Italian State. The Cisalpine Republic, due to the symbols created during its existence is considered an important historical antecedent of the Risorgimento and thus a statement of *Italy*.

In the meantime, in the Italian *baliaggi* a group of admirers of the French Revolution who wanted to annex Ticino to the Cisalpine Republic, converged around the abbé Giuseppe Vianelli. Presuming a shared *Italianity* between citizens of the Cisalpine Republic and the Ticinese, Napoleon was confident that most of the *baliaggi* population would enthusiastically approve this intended aggregation. He endorsed the initiative of a military operation to force the pace of the plan's outcome. Counting upon the local population's support, on February 15, 1798 a small contingent of Cisalpine troops backed by Ticinese followers, with a coup de main tried to seize Lugano, the largest and most important city of the *baliaggi* approaching it from the lake. Contrary to expectations, the Cisalpines were greeted by a volley of firearms and quickly driven back to their boats. Subsequently, the French troops invaded all the Confederation's territory, dismantled the old institutions, and established the Helvetic Republic to which Ticino was affiliated.

The events of February 15, 1798, given what followed, are intrinsically marginal and historically insignificant. However, due to their noteworthy symbolic value, they reveal how the Ticinese to this day define belongings and boundaries. In fact, the Ticinese, better yet the people of Lugano apparently drove away the Cisalpines in the name of the rallying cry „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“. This Byronic detail seems taken from a patriotic eighteenth century oleography; however, it is appropriate albeit not proven. The motto „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“, with its distinct trace of Swissness, became the emblem of Ticinese independence and everything it concerns. In Lugano, for example, the name of one of the city's most important squares, which recalls the February 15, 1798 events, is *Piazza dell'Indipendenza*. On this spot, one of town's most significant "lieux de mémoire" where specific patriotic celebrations concerning the role of its people in the canton's history are regularly held, is a monument dedicated to the events mentioned. On the monument, in full view, is an inscription extolling the valiant feat of the people of Lugano and their wish for independence, clearly expressed by the motto „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“.

To avoid the impression we are dealing with barely significant rituals from a dust-laden and nostalgic reality, we must stress that the label „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“ has not lost its efficacy over the past two hundred years. This holds true especially when Ticinese identity characteristics need to be reaffirmed or redefined in the public sphere.

In the 1930's, Benito Mussolini planned to establish a *Greater Italy*, which would have englobed all territories with an Italian people, culture, and language into a single State. The Ticinese opponents of this plan allied into a political movement named „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“. The motto they chose, meant as a watchword, exerted its appeal again. Reputedly a socialist, but actually a populist politician, Guglielmo Canevascini, the most charismatic person at that time, led the small group of activists. They were able to forestall and rout the "possibilists" led by the *ducetti* Alfonso Riva, Alberto Rossi, and Nino Rezzonico. The first two fostered the Ticinese Fascist Federation while the third one was the inspirer of the Ticinese National League (Ghiringhelli, 1998: 45). In 1934, with a clumsy occupation of the grounds in the cantonal capital Bellinzona, the Fascists actually tried to introduce Mussolini's *ordine nuovo* with the intention of joining the *Greater Italy* envisioned by the dictator (Ghiringhelli, 1998: 446). However, their fatuous re-enactment of the march on Rome became a debacle because of the prompt reaction of Canevascini's men backed by most of the Ticinese population.

Towards the end of the 1960's an association named „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“, which is still politically active, brought the motto into use again. This alliance of "disquieting patriots", as its opponents define it, is a reactionary-like association (some have labeled it *McCarthyist*) which rose in the wake of the Cold War and the 1968 student movement. Its main goal at first was to promote the "values" and "Swiss virtues" threatened by communism on the whole and the spread of leftist ideas and opinions in Switzerland and Ticino. Not to mention that neighboring Italy at the time had the largest Communist Party in Western Europe (PCI), in full growth and on the verge of the so-called "outrun" of the Christian Democrats, which was the dominating party. The great enemy however disappeared after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, while a few years later the long-feared PCI turned into a moderate leftist force. One could have expected the Alliance to break up, but it was not so. The „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“ unearthed new threats to Swiss and Ticinese identity. From then on, the Alliance has committed itself mainly to "anti-Europeanist" activities aimed at saving the country's sovereignty, thus preserving the established identities.

What role does the motto „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“ have in building the Ticinese identity? As the examples confirm, the label „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“ is activated, with quite a powerful political impact, each time the canton's integrity or Ticinese identity is apparently threatened by a foreign danger, whether real or not. In most cases, in line with the so to speak classic scenarios, danger looms in neighboring Italy. The Cisalpine Republic, Fascism and Communism, and in the end even Europeanism, are presented and perceived as events that have originated or are deeply rooted in Italy.

We might be tempted to interpret the „*Liberi e Svizzeri*“ motto solely in terms of *Swissness*. This would be a major mistake however, because the word "free" conceals interesting connotations that relativize such an interpretation. In fact, "free" is clearly a polysemic term that within the Ticinese context takes on many meanings, not always compatible with each other. Probably at the time of the Cisalpine Republic, i.e. just before the end of Confederate rule over Ticino, "free" meant above all "independent" and therefore not governed (anymore) by a "foreign" regime. Regarding Fascism and Communism, "free" had an anti-totalitarian meaning, while as far as Europeanism is concerned, we can suppose that "free" is rather a synonym of "sovereign" (as opposed to Brussels, of course). However, the journalist Claudio Mésoniat, in an article published even on Internet, suggests a further meaning of the term "free". Mésoniat wonders why the Ticinese opted to belong to the Confederation on several occasions and why they decided to remain allies of the transalpine "blockheads" (which might seem contrary to reason). He aptly notes that the word "free" implies the vindication of being able to freely express ones cultural and especially linguistic identity. If, as we believe, Mesoniat is right, there is a covert reference to *Italianity* and the right to maintain it in the word "free", though being fully entitled to be part of the Confederation as a canton, and not because of the quasi-colonial statute of *baliaggi*. "Free" is not only in addition to "Swiss", but is also its delimitation. Therefore, the Ticinese consider themselves "Swiss" "upon condition". At this point, the dialectic between *Italianity* and *Swissness* is clearly revealed by what can still be regarded as the Ticinese logo. Paraphrasing the famous motto, we could reword it accordingly into "*Fratelli d'Italia e Svizzeri*".

#### **4. BETWEEN ITALIANITY AND SWISSNESS. TICINESE IDENTITY PARADOXES**

How do the Ticinese make *Italianity* and *Swissness* coexist in building their identity? These two forms of belonging, according to a widespread "puristic" notion that nationalities are not permeable, should be separated by clear-cut boundaries. The German anthropologist Gabriele Baumann, trying to unravel the intricate problem of Ticinese identity, has highlighted how this is the outcome of an ongoing and skilful multiple manipulation of boundaries. Drawing from Fredrik Barth, Baumann shows that the Ticinese are always in the process of delimitating themselves from "someone" and identifying themselves with an "other" (Barth, 1969; Baumann, 1989). In brief, they adopt *Swissness* if they want to differentiate themselves from Italians, while *Italianity* is stressed when they wish to set themselves off from the "dear Confederates". Sociologically speaking, Italy and Transalpine Switzerland must be regarded as *reference societies* to which one turns accordingly, as Reinhard Bendix stresses, both to imitate them and be different from them (Bendix, 1980: Vol. I, 17 ff.; Vol. II, 77). The Ticinese are apparently always on the verge of two extremes without ever identifying themselves totally with one or the other and display *Swissness* or *Italianity* according to circumstances. We shall further illustrate this condition observed by Baumann with cases that can actually seem paradoxical.

## 5. EVERYDAY LIFE "PARADOXES"

Generally, soccer games are venues in which affiliations are enacted by displaying fan support. This is true even in Ticino where odd phenomena can be observed which induce to carefully consider the dialectic aspect of identity in this canton. The Ticinese enthusiastically support the Swiss national team when it plays against the Italian one. However, they display a negative attitude towards this country's team when it is pitched against the national team of a State that is not Switzerland. There is consternation if Italy wins and gloating if it loses. During the 1990 Soccer World Championship, I chanced to witness the following episode. Up to the end of Ireland vs. Italy, all support in the coffeehouses in the center of Lugano had been for Ireland that lost the game by a narrow margin. After the game, some groups of Italian tourists, strolling about or driving their cars, began to celebrate their team's victory with cheers and the usual car honking. At once, an exchange of unflattering comments ensued between the latter and the Ticinese. Comments swelled to insults and insults came to blows. Along the lakefront, considered the city's "bel étage", there was soon such a fracas that the police had to step in.

Nevertheless, the Italian national team, as well as the major-league championship, is extremely popular. Its games are regularly aired live by the Italian-speaking Swiss television and people watch them assiduously. On the other hand, the Swiss national team's feats are considered second-rate and the national league technically wanting and quite dull. In Ticino there is certainly more consideration and interest for Milan's teams *Milan* and *Inter* or Turin's *Juventus* than for the leading Swiss teams such as Basel, Lausanne or Zurich's *Grasshoppers*.

The dialectic between *Swissness* and *Italianity* inherent to Ticinese identity is likewise conspicuous in further everyday aspects. We are referring principally to epithets or slurs by which the "others", particularly the non-Ticinese, can be disparaged or insulted. The derogative term '*taglian*' (Italian) is used to address citizens of the neighboring country. Since the latter are regarded as unreliable braggarts, '*taglian*' is synonymous of boaster as well as a despicable, dishonest or at best a disreputable person. The term '*taglian*' is often used along with the expression *maja ramina*, meaning literally wire fence-eater or barbed wire-eater. This alludes to someone who has been or is familiar with a jailhouse. In short, '*taglian*' also means jailbird. Nevertheless, Italy and Italians are also represented, especially in the presence of transalpine Swiss, as paragons of culture, beauty, elegance, affability, style and, finally, gourmet cuisine. *Züccchin* (tiny pumpkin) instead is a word with a disparaging connotation used to define the northern neighbors, i.e. the German Swiss. *Züccchin* means a dull-witted person (in Italian, *zuccone* means headstrong, stubborn, as well as stupid). Therefore, it highlights the slow-wittedness of the German-speaking "dear confederates" whom the Ticinese consider slow, stubborn, unyielding, noncreative, naive, and gullible. On the other hand, the *züccchin* are also highly esteemed by the Ticinese and, particularly in front of the '*taglian*', they praise some presumed virtues of the German Swiss such as staidness, discipline, order, loyalty, honesty, etc.

Daily paradoxes highlight not only the dialectic but also the situational aspect of Ticinese identity. *Swissness* and *Italianity* are clearly social and symbolic resources, rather than feelings, used as needed for the "minute" daily management of affiliations and distinctions. These usually characterize relations with cultural and/or geographical next-door-neighbors, even if the latter are reckoned "different".

## 6. POLITICAL "PARADOXES"

The *Swissness/Italianity* dialectic is just as conspicuous in the canton's political culture. For example, a liberal wing and a radical wing characterize one of the established political parties: the radical-liberal (PLRT). The bipolarism of Ticino's largest and most relevant party actually mirrors the duality of the Italian liberals. From the Risorgimento on, the latter were split into the Mazzinian radical *Sinistra* and a moderate *Destra* of remote *whig* origin. As a rule, the radical wing, i.e. leftist, predominates in Bellinzona and the Sopraceneri (the canton's northern area) while the liberal and more conservative one prevails with a steadfast traditional majority in Lugano and Sottoceneri (the canton's southern area). The ideological *Italianity* is counterbalanced by the *Swissness* of the specific political platform and actual achievements. In fact, the PLRT is part of a single federal liberal party, linking other cantons' kindred political groups hailing from somewhat different tenets though sharing analogous aims.

The most interesting phenomenon, from the viewpoint of the *Swissness/Italianity* dialectic in terms of politics, is beyond doubt the "Lega dei Ticinesi". This movement, which has been described as the "phenomenon that has shaken the political Ticino" (De Lauretis and Giussani, 1992), arises at the

beginning of 1991. Given the distinctive tendency towards monotony of the Ticinese political scene, this movement underwent a remarkable as well as an exceptional vote increase over the past ten years. This undeniable success is mainly due to the cunning of Giuliano Bignasca, a building entrepreneur, and Flavio Maspoli, a former piano-bar singer, who both turned politicians. We need to analyze the "political formula", using the renowned term coined by the political scientist Gaetano Mosca (Mosca, 1966), concocted by these two undisputed leaders of the movement. The first point is that the name "Lega dei Ticinesi" in itself echoes all the regionalistic movements in northern Italy, the most famous one being the "Lega Lombarda" (now incorporated into the "Lega Nord") of the *senatur* Umberto Bossi. Moreover, the "virile" and coarse prose, with phrases as "ours is stiff" or "we're armed, but with a rod" (N.B.: a prose intentionally chosen by Umberto Bossi to speak like the common people "who call a spade a spade"), has been adopted by the "Lega dei Ticinesi" leaders, though in a milder and veiled version (De Lauretis and Giussani, 1992: 57 ff.). Thus, the April 8, 1990 issue of the movement's paper *Il Mattino della Domenica* had the following front-page headline: "The PST has it", which, being an unfinished sentence, has more than one "virile" double entendre. Meanwhile, the "Lega dei Ticinesi" campaign for the April 14, 1991 cantonal elections was based on the slogan *L'è ora da finila da cüntaa sü ball* (It's time to quit telling balls: last word indicating both lies and testicles).

Further inspirations from nearby Italy, beyond any rhetorical closeness, concern the ideological framework of the "Lega dei Ticinesi". In this ambit, a relevant aspect taken from the "Lega Nord" is an anti-party-dominated, anti-bureaucratic, thus a populist conception of politics. The struggle of the two parties, though separated by a national frontier, is clearly directed, theoretically at least, against the "palace". Take note that leftist writer and intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini created the metaphor "palace" to designate the sanctuaries of party politics power, viewed as the paramount settings of deception and intrigue. Therefore, if Umberto Bossi thunders against *Roma ladrona*, with equal passion Giuliano Bignasca and Flavio Maspoli hurl similar charges against the centralist and authoritarian *Berna dei landfogti*. Nevertheless, issues from nearby Italy are re-elaborated according to a specific Swiss approach; i.e. reconfirming that Ticino belongs to the Confederation though fiercely criticizing work done by federal institutions. "In other words", as De Lauretis and Giussani write, "the Lega intends to further develop the concept of federalism and have Ticino become less Canton and more Republic" (De Lauretis and Giussani, 1992: 58).

Charges are often against Bellinzona's established parties as well: too corrupt by now because of their overlong rule. Again, both the "Lega dei Ticinesi" and Bossi's "Lega Nord" reveal that they envision themselves as political forces with a moralizing effect on the country, by way of their anti-party-dominated and anti-bureaucratic cleansing activity.

Another important ideological aspect linking the two Leghe is their xenophobic inclination. Both movements share a common aversion, which at times takes on an intrinsic racist connotation, to the growing presence of immigrants and refugees. These are depicted as a serious threat to public order, a menace to "native" identities, and an attack on "autochthonous" employment. If Umberto Bossi above all seems to dread the arrival of extra-communitarian immigrants from the world's South, the leaders of the "Lega dei Ticinesi" worry mainly about a possible increase of Italian workers drawn by higher Swiss salaries. Therefore, the targets of hostility are not the African or Albanian *vu' cumprà*, but the *terroni* besieging Ticino. Here is the main reason why the "Lega dei Ticinesi" is so avowedly anti-Europeanist. Note that this movement has adopted a political view developed at first in Italy, have turned it into a Swiss-biased rationalization, and in the end aim it against their neighbors, i.e. the Italians themselves.

## 7. CULTURAL "PARADOXES"

Cultural paradoxes center round the intricate "language issue" in Ticino (Bianconi, 1985: 109 ff.). As already mentioned, this is the only canton with an Italian-speaking majority. In this case, Italian-speaking designates a person or group whose mother tongue is Italian and who recur to dialects from the sphere of *Italianity* for verbal expression.

Such complex linguistic wealth is used according to circumstances, and at different cultural levels, in the social organization of boundaries and thus in the management of one's identity. This course of action with paradoxical aspects is clearly visible in "difficult years": i.e., when the Ticinese, and especially their intellectual elite, believe they must counter an actual or presumed pressure exerted by neighboring Italians and/or Confederates.

With its ups and downs, this historical contingency occurred from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and lasted as far as the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, Ticinese society felt threatened both by "Germanization" from the north, beyond the Alps, and by Italian nationalist irredentism (Gilardoni, 1971: 10 ff.). Perceived as a pernicious effect of the transalpine's growing cultural influence, due to the elimination of natural boundaries (opening of the St Gotthard tunnel and Ticino's consequent shift closer to the rest of Switzerland), the canton's intelligentsia countered "Germanization" with actions aimed at stopping the "degeneration" of Italian (Gilardoni, 1971: 7 ff., 76). Thus in 1908, the most eminent Ticinese intellectuals established the "Dante Alighieri", an association of Swiss citizens only, whose end was to protect and promote Italian language and culture. The latter were considered distinctive traits of the Ticinese people, or the canton's "Italian race", as it was customary to say at the time. Meanwhile, other ambitious programs to support *Italianity* were devised, such as enhancing the cantonal school system and the project -never accomplished- of an Italian-speaking university (Gilardoni, 1971: 19, 32, 44 ff.). Yet, too much emphasis on Italophilia would have inevitably drawn the Ticinese intellectuals towards irredentism and then Fascism. To avoid this risk and curb Italy's aggressive cultural policy towards Ticino, most of the canton's intelligentsia reacted with various Swiss-biased manifestations (Gilardoni, 1971: 47 ff.). A most significant and interesting one was "cantonal nationalism" and the subsequent reconsideration of dialect, which was acknowledged as the expression of the "Ticinese spirit". Then as now, speaking in dialect was a slightly defiant way to signal one's difference (Bianconi, 1985: 110) though being Italian-speaking, both from the Italians citizens and from the other Confederates, especially the German-speaking ones. Consequently, dialect becomes an important instrument to distinguish oneself from two cumbersome neighbors seen as a threat to one's identity.

The crucial "language issue" is a striking representation of how the Ticinese, in this case the intellectuals, have built their identity through a play on multiple distinctions accentuating their *Swissness* and/or *Italianity* in turn.

## 8. THE COEXISTENCE OF TWO PATRIOTISMS

A review of the Ticinese identity paradoxes can give an impression of incongruity and contradiction. A more in-depth study shows that behind the apparent "irrationality" instead there is a "logic of two patriotisms". In fact, a closer analysis of what we have illustrated in the previous chapter reveals two basic pillars of Ticinese identity: i.e., civic patriotism or constitutional patriotism, as Jürgen Habermas defined it (Habermas, 1993: 178), and cultural patriotism. Furthermore, Ticinese society's civic patriotism is essentially Swiss, while the cultural one is Italian. Thus, there are two coexisting and interrelated types of loyalty; i.e., a political one definitely set towards the north, namely Switzerland, and a cultural one tending south, towards Italy.

Such a "double-binded patriotism" is clearly visible when we observe the Ticinese *pantheon*. There is a clear-cut demarcation between a Swiss-oriented *political pantheon* and an Italian-oriented *cultural* one. In the former, are the founding fathers of the Confederation (Werner Stauffacher, for example); William Tell up front followed by eminent representatives of Ticino's political world such as federal councilors (Stefano Franscini in particular), cantonal members of parliament, mayors, etc., all of whom are avowed *Swiss loyalists*. In the latter instead, are the most relevant Italian poets, such as Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca, Alessandro Manzoni, and even Giosué Carducci, who in Italy is revered as the standard-bearer of Italian Unity and "bard of the nation". To these, we need add the Ticinese "cultural heroes" who became famous in Italy, such as the architects Francesco Borromini, Carlo Maderno, and Domenico Fontana or the sculptor Vincenzo Vela. Finally, there are the "local celebrities" such as writers Giuseppe Zoppi and Francesco Chiesa. Aside from Giuseppe Mazzini and Carlo Cattaneo (who spent most of his life teaching in Ticino, however), it is significant that in the political *pantheon* there is no mention of the "founding fathers" of Italy's Unity, as Giuseppe Garibaldi or Camillo Cavour. After all, the fact that "local celebrities" are relegated to the background of the cultural pantheon is just as significant.

The location of a town's landmarks and the names of its streets and squares can easily demonstrate these inclusions, exclusions, and hierarchies. In Lugano for example, the monument celebrating William Tell and the avenue named after Franscini as well as Piazza Dante, Piazza Manzoni, Via Carducci, and Riva Vincenzo Vela, are located in the central and/or strategically symbolic areas of town. On the other hand, a small side street has been named after Giuseppe Zoppi, while Francesco



Chiesa, whom literary critics have acclaimed as the major 19<sup>th</sup> century Ticinese poet, has yet to receive a similar modest recognition.

### **9. THE NEIGHBOR'S VIEW. REPRESENTATIONS OF TICINO IN ITALY AND BEYOND THE ALPS**

George Herbert Mead has rightly asserted that the identity of an individual or a group cannot be confined within the dimension of belonging, but is also based on the recognition from "others" (Mead, 1973: 196 ff.). To the Ticinese, the "others" are above all the transalpine Confederates and the Italians. At this point, we will quickly review how these "others" picture Ticinese society and, consequently, the relevance they attribute to it.

### **10. TRANSALPINE REPRESENTATIONS: BETWEEN SONNENSTUBE AND TICINOGATE**

The image of Ticino shared by many German Swiss immediately evokes orientalist representations of an elsewhere in which sublime and abject are forever linked in a symbiotic relation. Probably the terms *Sonnenstube* and *Ticinogate* are the best illustration of this attitude. *Sonnenstube*, which literally means "sunlit room", is a metaphor often used even by the press, that characterizes Ticino as a land favored by Mother Nature where the mild climate makes life free and easy. Actually, this is a Swiss version of the German myth concerning Italy and the Mediterranean area at large that was so well popularized by Wolfgang Goethe in his famous book "Italienische Reise" (Goethe, 1982: vol. 11, 334 ff.). According to this exoticist view, since Ticino is a small portion of Italy belonging to Switzerland, it is the idyllic and bucolic land of Plenty. Here wine flows freely and people's pastime is singing merry and light-hearted melodies. Such a representation of Ticino is compatible with the current tourist myth of the *boccalino* (a special vessel for wine-drinking created for foreign guests) or the *trio di Gandria* (the best liked folk music ensemble) which, over the past half century, has produced an intense invention of traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

There is also the other side of the picture: an unreliable and dangerous Ticino, a breeding-ground of corruption, dishonesty, and political-bureaucratic inefficiency. The term *Ticinogate*, echoing the far more notorious *Watergate*, hints at the opinion that the Italian-speaking canton is a place of favoritism, intrigues, and political-Mafioso collusion. Lately, thanks to the prominence given by the German Swiss scandal-mongering press to some episodes implicating high ranking cantonal magistrates along with Italian camorristas, the Ticinese are ever more often seen as Swiss representatives of an Italian habitus. Therefore, according to this stereotype, the Ticinese mentality has an almost biological predisposition for deception and maladministration.

### **11. ITALIAN REPRESENTATIONS: BETWEEN PROVINCIALITY AND FINANCE HAVEN**

The image of Ticino amongst the Italians is quite different and far less shaped by orientalism than the German Swiss one. Italians see Ticino mainly as a culturally marginal, small region. The provincialism of Ticinese society is often stressed. According to this approach, it consists of gullible, honest, and fundamentally boring people, who speak a faulty and unpolished Italian with a distinctive and rather ridiculous accent. The representation of a Ticinese can be characterized as an up-to-date version of a slightly dim-witted, good-willed, rustic simpleton. According to Italians, he is a typical *svizzerotto* who does not conform in the least with the Italian ideal of a clever person who can cunningly by-pass a complication (Giordano, 1992: 467 ff.). This attitude, which up front seems scornful, conceals the high regard for a society that Italians view as rich, efficient, and well administered. Therefore, in contrast with their own country, Italians appreciate Ticino's cleanliness, order, tenacity, and above all its political stability, which is a source of economic prosperity. Thanks to this image, since WW II Ticino has become a true finance haven: in other words, the most coveted place to deposit one's wealth and if possible take up one's residence. It is not surprising that Lugano has become the third Swiss financial market after Zurich and Geneva, and that among the alien's residence permit applicants there are notorious Mafiosi or other criminal organization representatives. Evidently, the *Ticino-finance haven* is the mirror image of *Ticinogate*, just as the *Sonnenstube* is of the *rustic svizzerotto*.

### **12. CONCLUSION. "VARIABLE GEOMETRY" IDENTITIES AS AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL TOPIC**

Without resorting to the outmoded controversy between "primordialism" and "instrumentalism", we can determine that Ticinese identity represents a paradigm of "variable geometry". In fact, Ticinese identity embodies a complex and adaptable system of belongings and recognitions based upon a constant dialectic play between *Swissness* and *Italianity*.

However, the term dialectic often evokes something ambivalent and somewhat inchoate. Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman has aptly stressed that the modernity project has always preferred order and univocal classifications, warding off any type of ambivalence. According to this author, the latter would be the most relevant feature and indicator of post-modernity, or using a more specific and pertinent language, a late or "reflexive" modernity (Bauman, 1995; Beck, Giddens, and Lash, 1996).

Several social sciences researchers, some referring explicitly to Zygmunt Bauman, have recently developed a similar idea by linking multiple identities and migration phenomena, the latter being regarded as a basic feature of our presumed post-modern era. Since the 1970's, the phrases "balanced identities" (Krappmann, 1971; Oriol, 1983; Giordano, 1984) or "bilaterality of references" (Catani, 1984) have been used in reference to immigrants. Today instead, references to the "transnational" dimension of migrations (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton, 1992) or an inappropriate overuse of the term "diaspora" (Cohen, 1997), imply the existence of "variable geometry" forms of identity. Moreover, when other authors as well speak of "cosmopolitanism" or "creolization" in post-modern and/or post-colonial societies (Hannerz, 1992; Appadurai, 1993), they are alluding to the existence of recently established multiple and situational identities.

The example of Ticino instead indicates that "variable geometry" identities are not necessarily linked to migration "reflexive" modernity, but are deeply rooted in the "longue durée" historical conjuncture. They belong both to the so-called "classical" or "industrial" modernity (Beck, Giddens, and Lash, 1996) and even to pre-modernity. However, since multiple and adaptable identities cannot arbitrarily be found everywhere and in every time, we wish to make clear that periphery and borders have much to do with Ticinese identity.

Historically Ticino is clearly a "double periphery": a circumstance perceived by the Ticinese people as well. "An economy in tow" (Rossi, 1975; Rossi, 1985: 38 ff.; Rossi 1988) and culturally a "provincial spot" (Bianconi, 1985: 109 ff.): these are two of the most common remarks emphasizing Ticinese society's feelings of inferiority and awkwardness, especially its intelligentsia, towards the centers - namely, the rest of Switzerland and Italy. At the same time though, as in all peripheries, there is an awareness of one's value, an emphasis on one's moral supremacy. According to these representations, the centers are dominant as *reference societies*, but are also less principled than the peripheries. Therefore, the centers are emulated and imitated to some extent, but concurrently the peripheries strive to be "different". This is how Reinhard Bendix has delineated the logic underlying "peripheral identities" (Bendix, 1980; Giordano, 2001), which, by definition, have a "variable geometry". The US sociologist's outline seems to unravel the complex dialectic of identification and delimitation strategies concerning Ticinese identity.

For centuries Ticino's society has been living and acting on the Swiss outskirts and along the Italian border. Actually, national State boundaries are fixed and inaccessible only in the ideology or, in a broader sense, the imagery of these same political communities. The actual life of "border societies" such as Ticino instead, is interwoven with incessant "crossings" and "transits" that have shaped the construction of a *borderline* identity. This term of American origin, in this case with no negative implication, indicates the possibility to cross apparently fixed boundaries, constantly redefining and reorganizing one's belongings.

In conclusion, although Ticino lies within the opulent and stable Switzerland, its identity, due to its inhabitants' "variable geometry" identity, is an excellent metaphor of late or "reflexive" modernity. Above all, it is a paradigm of all the border peripheral societies, which in Europe, for geographic and historical reasons, stretch from Eire to the Rhodope, passing across Alsace, Upper Adige, Istria, Transylvania, and several other regions. We must acknowledge that although "variable geometry" identities have been "discovered" not long ago, we should not assume they are a recent phenomenon. Actually, social sciences researchers for a long time had disregarded "variable geometry" identities until they became far more conspicuous in the centers and until the discourse regarding "fixed identities", strenuously endorsed by national States, was not challenged.

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#### **AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY**



Christian Giordano, Full Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Doctor Honoris Causa from the University of Timisoara, Permanent Guest Professor: Universities of Bucharest, Murcia, Bydgoszcz, University Sains Malaysia at Penang. Research fields in political and urban anthropology: Southeast Europe, Mediterranean societies and Southeast Asia. Recent books *Diaspora as a Resource: Comparative Studies in Strategies, Networks and Urban Space* (with W. Kokot and M. Gandelsman-Trier; Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2013); *Informality in Eastern Europe: Structures, Political Cultures and Social Practices*, (with N. Hayoz; Bern, New York 2013: Peter Lang), *Power, Legitimacy, Historical Legacies: A Disenchanted Political Anthropology* (Berlin, Münster, Zurich 2015: Lit-Verlag)