

Conference Proceedings

MULTICULTURAL IDENTITIES

Challenging the Sense of Belonging

Edited by Maura Di Mauro & Bettina Gehrke

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Multicultural identities
Challenging the Sense of Belonging

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Finito di stampare nel mese di gennaio 2018

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we are grateful to the contributors. We much appreciated your hard work and energy in writing your chapters – many thanks to all of you!

This book would not have come into being without the organizational committee of the IX SIETAR ITALIA's Annual Conference. Bringing together such an open-minded and naturally inquisitive group of people gave the inspiration to this book. Thanks to all those who gave their vital support organizing this exciting event; first of all, the SIETAR ITALIA Vice-President Paola Motta and the organizational team: Eliza Nash, Elisa Kalaj, Elisabeth Weingraber, Elizabeth Abbott. An additional thanks goes to Gradiola Kalaj who headed the volunteer team. In that regard, many thanks as well to the students who gave us a helping hand: Carlotta Cammarata and the students of Milan's Civica Scuola Interpreti e Traduttori "Altiero Spinelli".

Further, we are grateful to all the institutions who granted their patronage to this conference:

- Comune di Milano and Ufficio Reti e Cooperazione Culturale (Municipality of Milan, Culture Office)
- Acquario Civico of Milan
- Città Metropolitana di Milano
- Fondazione Intercultura Onlus

- ASFOR (Italian Association for Management Training)
- Link Campus University, Rome.

We are also grateful to the congress sponsors and their crucial and vital sustenance:

- Diversophy - George Simons International
- Coaching Zone
- Kultur.Elle
- Associazione Milano Interpreti, who offered their exceptional simultaneous interpreting services
- Siriani in Transito, who exhibited their photography reportage during the congress and
- Easy Milano as media partner.

We also like to thank Marco Croci, Ruth Anne Lake, Paola Motta, Lacie Raymond, Grazia Sanna and George Simons who provided the support we needed to proof-read some of the manuscripts.

Our final, deeply felt thanks go to our sponsor Fondazione Intercultura who made this publication possible.

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Preface

*"We are living in an age of both harmonization and of dissonance.
Never have men had so many things in common –
knowledge, points of reference, images, words, instruments and tools of all kinds.
But this only increases their desire to assert their differences".*

(Amin Maalouf, *On Identity*, 1998)

This quote from Amin Maalouf inspired us as we organized on May 5-6th 2017 the IX Annual Conference of SIETAR ITALIA entitled *Multicultural Identities: Understanding the Sense of Belonging*.

The notion of identity – be it personal, religious, ethnic or national – is important to interculturalists. It is through learning about our own identity and about the identities of other individuals and groups that we come to know what makes us similar and or different. At the core of the intercultural dialogue we are constantly adding new layers to identity and often without giving up our own roots.

The title *Multicultural Identities* met considerable interest and curiosity. Unexpectedly the IX SIETAR ITALIA Annual Conference attracted more than a hundred participants from Italy and all across the world. It seemed somehow that all the participants carried multicultural imprints. Undeniably, today we have not only the culture we were born into, but we are all influenced by many different cultures. In a global

and multicultural world, individuals have increasingly multiple identities, asserting different identities in different circumstances and moments in their lives, according to the context and the people they are interacting with.

The idea of the Conference was to learn more about the forces shaping the various contexts and modalities which underpin multicultural identities. By bringing together a very diverse set of presentations of practitioners and academics, the conference has been an exceptional opportunity to explore the complex, ambivalent and fluid picture of multiple identities. Yet, given the limitations of less than two conference days, we felt that this was just the beginning. Indeed, we figured out a need to continue the initiated discussion, and at the same time we became well aware of the enormous intellectual complexity involved. With this publication, we'd like to keep the conversation going.

As you will see in the following chapters, it is difficult to distill a red thread of the many different approaches to identity and cultural identity in particular. Some of our authors present not only diverse, but contradictory approaches. Thus, you are invited to use your critical thinking and to come up with your own deductions. By all this complexity – actually we felt that it would even be more appropriate to substitute the subtitle '*Understanding*' to '*Challenging*' the Sense of Belonging.

With this in mind, our objectives are modest, but necessary: we would like to raise the awareness of the importance of cultural identity, and we would like the reader to appreciate its complexity. This book presents a large variety of stimulating insights of eighteen very diverse authors about how multiculturalism triggers changes in all areas of life, and how identities are in a permanent flux.

Most contributions are written in English, because we wanted to open our SIETAR ITALIA network to the

international community. The non-Italian readers will find English abstracts of all chapters, and of course, everybody is invited to contact the authors directly for further inquiries. Enjoy the reading! Buona lettura!

Maura Di Mauro & Bettina Gehrke