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Print media: research methodology

For this part of my work I have been surveying and analysing regional press for twenty-five months. I did so because I wanted to investigate whether the print media could be a possible conveyor of traits of distinctive cultural group identity and whether this cultural identity may be related to demand for more autonomy or for the maintenance of the *status quo*.

I have thus identified four narratives in which demand for devolution at first seemed to contribute to a climate in which independence or more autonomy moved into the political agenda but sooner, especially at the end of 2005, the climate for autonomy seemed to be directly related to political struggles between the parties.

Those political actors who had been pushing forward devolution all over 2005 split into two main parties: those who wanted to accept the new devolution deal proposed by Bossi and Berlusconi in 2005 and those who, together with centralist parties refused such devolution. According to them, the “new” devolution will diminish the formal importance accorded by the Sardinian Autonomist Charter issued by the Italian Republic which formally grants to Sardinia large powers of self-governing since 1948. As a matter of fact, the president of Sardinia, Soru and all the Sardinian labour trade unionists and politicians rejected the new devolution and guided the campaign against that which succeeded in collecting more than 720.000 signatures (500.000 at minimum) which will be used to call for a popular abrogative referendum to save the former constitution.

As soon as the signatures were collected National newspapers put much relevance on the fact that were the Sardinian Regional Counsellor themselves to lead the campaign for the anti-devolution referendum (Corriere della Sera 14th march 2006, and “Coordinamento Costituzionale delle iniziative per la difesa della Costituzione”).

Sardinian newspapers too reported the news (“Unione Sarda” and “Giornale di Sardegna” 22nd February 2006) but not as widely and massively as in the days of the centre-periphery tensions over taxations and territorial defence against nuclear bases and massive building. In fact, as for vast majority of the articles I have found, the interest of the journalist rapidly moved from the tension between centre-periphery to the struggle within the social forces which shape Sardinian political environment. The news that the historical Sardinian autonomist party Psd’Az has made allegiance with Bossi’s Lega Nord which has always been depicted as a racist and xenophobic party shocked internal debates for more than one week in the second week of March.

What journalists made clear in March and tried to communicate it to a large audience, exactly one month before Italian election, is that Prodi’s government did not accept and is not willing to accept democratic autonomist parties such as Psd’Az and Bossi’s party was the only force in the Italian parliament to have offered a position to Sardinian nationalist forces despite the differences in the political visions within the two forces.

As a consequence data will show how in the political arena even Sardinia’s nationalist parties are divided because new forces more linked to an ethnic territorial vision of autonomy have officially entered the political arena thus granting visibility and therefore perceived existence to their political party.

In fact, no later than in January 2006, a new party, which is called IRS (Indipendentzia Repubrica de Sardinia), which was a movement on-line based which had based its campaign on territorial integrity against pollution and American occupation, and which seeks whole independence, entered the arena and suddenly attacked other democratic regionalist parties such as PSd'az which are seeking allegiances with Bossi/Berlusconi's mild federalism.

Their agenda was often reported by the media integrally as they summoned Sardinians to stand for the possession of their land by using terms which referred to the universality of the movement for freedom and to the peculiarity of Sardinian geographical, political and historical situation. I found the same discourse well described by Billig (1995:72-73) as for what British islandic identity was waved by the political elites which found space in the print media.

As a matter of fact, if we leave the referendum anti-devolution apart, the relevant weighting of these four narratives out of the whole corpus showed quite a regular trend for discourse on independence/devolution.

However the most steady and regular trend is represented by the journalists' discourse on a regionalism based on identity and culture rather than physical independence from Italy. The data will show whether language is playing a small or a major role in the re-definition of Sardinian identity.

The narratives of the Print Media: content analysis of the main narratives

Print Media

The whole set of data was collected starting in February 2004 and it finished in March 2006.

My methodology for this part of the work consisted in monitoring the regional print media (The two most widely read Sardinian newspapers) daily and finding the main threads over twenty four months.

Looking at the two newspapers over this time-span I became aware of the massive presence of articles in which journalists communicated to the readers, at any rate, much support to the idea of Sardinia as seeking total independence, or devolution or greater fiscal autonomy.

In my analysis I give a picture which is the general product of a twenty-four month mosaic. I found four themes which continued to be prominent over the two year research.

I will report them by using Anthony Smith's works on nationalism and national identity as my main theoretical framework. The majority of categories I have found could be analysed as the activist construction of a materialistic covenant in which what was once the religious aspect related to the covenant between God and the "Chosen People"(Smith 2003) has become the social and territorial covenant between the land and the "chosen people" of Sardinia.

The divine announcement has become the nationalistic-marxist announcement. As was explained in De Mauro 1993 and in Maiden 1997 after very special moments (such as the earthquake in Friuli back in 1976) nationhood may be strengthened by mutual assistance in the peer group. In the case of Friuli, Maiden reports that many initiatives in favour of Ladin language were taken after the earthquake and it seemed linked to a concept of unity and social contract between the people and their land

In the case of Sardinia, contemporary group of activists seems to push forward the same concept: "Sardinia is under attack by

external forces which exploit the territory therefore the land should be given back to the rightful possessors”

Print media: Summary of the main narratives

1) Territorial resentment: asking free possession over the land

1) Political resentment on territory: 2.645 articles found

This narrative is based on centre-periphery tensions on territorial occupation from external forces (American bases with nuclear submarines) and internal ones (Italian army training sessions using depleted uranium).

It is quite interesting to note how from December 2005 on the newspapers gave more space to the protest by those citizens who asked the American nuclear bases not to be dismantled in order not to lose jobs and the economy generated by the presence of the American soldiers with their families.

Before December the issue of militar occupation were used to show how other groups moved to autonomy (in particular Corsicans and Catalans). The protest flow slowed down from mid-December on and so the issue of independence which in February-March was not present. In fact from Dember 2005 on the political discourse are no longer confined to the tensions between Sardinia and external forces which occupies the land: the conflict moved to the internal political arena and nationhood vanished. Nationhood turned into localisms and struggle between social and economic classes (eg. Cattle breeders) who had their interest at stake.

2)Legal resentment: asking Fiscal Devolution

Resentment. Economic hardship and demand for Fiscal devolution: 2.857 art.

In this case journalists did back up Governor Soru's instances by issuing cubital titles to address the audience and direct attack against a centre which doesn't redistribute money from taxes.

According to the data I have found the growth rates of Sardinia have remained desperately low since the early 1990's. This was apparently due to the deeds of Italian central government which ceased to give Sardinia the percentage of VAT it was entitled to. For this issue journalists report a compact support to Soru's policies by left and right of the political spectrum. For months the newspapers emphasised this issue as the **causal factor** in the underdevelopment of Sardinia. **The journalists made their audience believe that the development of an idea of strong identity is based on Sardinia's autonomous status and the Government is guilty because by keeping the money it fails to apply this status.**

To do so they reported many interviews in which often Soru himself and sometimes others (eg. former president of Italian Republic Sardinian born Cossiga) declared that the capital was being drained out of Sardinia by wrong taxation. An article in which Cossiga himself suggested Sardinian people to avoid paying taxes to Rome was released on the national day of the Republic. This is an issue which in various forms occupies much space in the newspapers and paves the way to **ethnic nation building**. In fact here the concept of historicization of nature as outlined by Smith (Smith 2003:135) works perfectly. Sardinians as part of a single ethnic community are addressed by new activists who made allegiances with the green party, in order to develop their attachment to the land by reification of people's own story with the history of the community. The geographical elements of the community, the rocks, the sea, the

plains, are all together history makers and “our” **identity markers** and therefore the possession of it must belong to the community like it was in a allegedly golden age.

It is also true that before the 10th century, Sardinian system for cattle or sheep breeding hinged on common areas which belonged to the whole community.

What seems very important is the absolute contingency of all the instances of devolution which sooner or later were doomed to disappear or to move to internal Sardinian struggle for power. Any demand for fiscal autonomy disappears from January on but not the articles related to the rediscover of a golden and “homogeneous” past which is the main content of the third narrative.

What seems very important is the absolute contingency of all the instances of devolution which sooner or later were doomed to disappear or to move to internal Sardinian struggle for power. Any demand for fiscal autonomy disappears from January on or it turns into a general uprising against Berlusconi’s devolution pushed forward by Sardinian partitocracy with the help of Italian liberal and labor parties. The peak recorded by the Italian newspapers was when Sardinia was at the head of 14 Regions against federalism and devolution whilst wide description of internal movements was given to explain the audience why should a Sardinian established autonomist party seek allegiance with Bossi’s party which has always been presented as a racist party.

However the articles related to the rediscover of a golden and “homogeneous” past which is the main content of the third narrative.

3)Identity

3)Identity: 2062 art. This narrative although not massively present is steady and not directly related to contingent policies.

In many articles self celebration of the group and the invocation of a golden and independent past is the main frame but also an insight into old and new immigrations from and into Sardinia represent an interesting field to re-define a Sardinian identity which hinges on the past but is projected into the future with the journalists presenting the necessity to assimilate the immigrants from eastern Europe, Asia and Maghreb. On the other hand the articles on Sardinian immigration often concentrate on the period of the 1950's with saw a great migratory wave from Sardinia to central Europe. It comes as no surprise that many representations of Sardinian immigration during the 20th century are represented through art. I found out that what is being represented as the major centre of diffusion of works on language, identity and society is represented by Berlin (eg. *Unione Sarda* 17th March 2006 p.17) and sometimes Paris (especially in 2004 when Paris hosted a major exhibition which depicted Sardinia as the "nouvelle Atlantique" with much space being given by the Sardinian print media.

However I found many allusions to blood and genes and homogeneity by retelling genetic studies on endemic diseases caused by infra marriages.

The Nuragic people from the pre-bronze age are often depicted as the ethnically and culturally original inhabitants of Sardinia and there are efforts being made to insert the Nuragic people in the frame of the indo-european and semitic invasions which involved the mediterranean area during the 13th-12th centuries BC (see the People of the sea). These articles are important in terms of regional nation building since their contents aim to create an idea of

Sardinians as very ancient and to some extent “chosen” people. This is often obtained by the elites who develop the threads which link the ancient cultures of the island (either they be from the interior or from the coastlines) with seafares and battle fought by the league of the “People of the Sea” who had won the spotlight of Mediterranean archaeologic studies over the last few years.

To be honest much of the information regarding the People of the Sea or other Indo-European or Semitic civilization which hit Sardinia were already studied since the first half of the 20th century but it is only during the last few years that media focussed on it as a source of identity distinctive marker and maker and alleged cultural homogeneity maker.

An important and steady news being elaborated is that the writings are an original creation of the Sardinians thus suggesting that inscriptions may have already been present since the Nuragic age rather than being a tool “imported” by external traders and/or rulers such as Phoenicians first then Punic then Roman etc etc. The focus on the written texts is somehow related to the movement towards the creation of a standard for Sardinian. Sardinian language is a Romance language with few Semitic and pre-Indo-European remains and a conservative representation by the elites of Romance studies since the beginning of the 20th century. However the focus on the question whether Semitic-Sardinians were able to write before the Greeks may interest those elites who pushes forward the idea of Sardinia as original and not colonised culture.

ETHNIC NATION BUILDING

The idea stemming from the representation of Sardinia’s golden past is of a homogeneous LAND + PEOPLE which have produced a very important but neglected share of history together with the idea for Sardinians to have played a different role in history which was long hidden and it is time to reveal and repossess in order to replace themselves in the cultural arena.

This operation of cultural ethnic rebuilding is echoed also by economic forces or by research. In fact, it comes as no surprise that Governor Soru himself set a society called ShardDNA (which recalls the Shardana one of the people of the sea which are allegedly the ancient conquerors of Sardinia) in charge to examine the DNA of Sardinians in order to prevent endemic diseases caused by isolation but also to find out who were the first Sardinians. Again, research on DNA excludes those who do not have a 100% Sardinian ancestry thus unconsciously using an ethnic categorization. The results of this research which focus more on the internal areas away from the coastlines and the cities are often published and commented by journalists who seize the unificatory aspect of it.

But the power of the mythic Shardanas has influenced many Sardinians. In fact, the association of Sardinian-Americans of Manhattan is called Shardana, in order to testify the shift from a main cultural interest in the rural traditions to an interest in rebuilding cultural roots and Sardinia's history. The question is whether the re-building or re-definition of the role played by Sardinia in human history may lead to a massive uprising to ask for independence, which I doubt, given the elitarian nature of all Sardinian instances of autonomy.

CIVIC NATION BUILDING

Similarly as in the cases analysed by Smith but not stemming from the belief in God(2003:50-51), the chosen heroes who represent the whole community are decisive in the re-building the importance of past independence. However civic heroes are often treated in relation with the land whether it be their native land whether it be a "promised" land like in the case of those leaders who weren't born in Sardinia but are recognised as Sardinians by their attachment to the LAND + PEOPLE. In fact, the historical character which I found almost daily in the articles is, Elionora of Arborea, who is depicted as an enlightened sovereign who even after so many centuries is playing the major role of conveyor of symbol of ancient independence, resistance against external dominations and infra-

group loyalty. There are two more threads of civic nation building. On the one hand there is the constant reference to Catalan internal politics and Catalans' relationship with the Spanish nation state and on the other hand but not too separately, are the focus on the new immigration towards Sardinia. Often, the foreigners are called "New Sardinians" by newspapers. There are many articles which put in relation in turn the city and the immigrants and the rural areas and the immigrants thus granting to the new citizens full possibility to take part into again the territorial relationship between Sardinians either they be ethnic or not and the land. The land is the main element both in Sardinian ethnic and civic regional nation building.

4)Sardinian Language planning and policies

4)Language: 344 articles.. In the Sardinian print newspapers there is formal commitment to language issue to pay lip service to L.482/99. Now and then appeals in favour of the language are being made by academic professors who lament the lack of interest, fundings and language planning. These complaints are addressed by elites to elites; so scholars address Sardinian politicians who are thought to be responsible for no action being taken at national level. Even president Soru is under attack for not having developed the issue of language as the gist of the new proposal for Sardinian autonomy the project of which was launched in 2005.

Complaints about language planning are never addressed in the Sardinian language.

The Sardinian language finds place in *Unione Sarda* only because the pages written in the language are being sponsored by the Autonomous Region of Sardinia according to Law 482/99. In this case, the articles are issued in Sardinian and the contents of the articles are the needs of standardisation and the necessity to teach

Sardinian at school because the language should cover all domains. The necessity to learn Sardinian is seen as somehow related to a good conception of globalisation and Europeanisation. Globalisation seems the key to put Sardinia into a new trade in the middle of the Mediterranean waterway whilst European Union appears an organon **enabling Sardinians to bypass Italy's centralist economic policies**. In this case Sardinian is presented worth learning as much as English because the positive message which is pushed forward by these activists is that European Union protects Sardinian and that keeping tradition and values and language as well can still help internal Sardinian economy. The truth is that the articles on Sardinian are not being authored by journalists or politics so that as a result there is no serious social engineering on it. Last but not least, language does not seem to be an active part to push forward regionalism as much as the reconstruction of an autonomous historical identity. More detailed analysis is required here in order to understand why the language is not massively present as important issue to be considered in order to define Sardinians as an ethnic community.

The few pages in Sardinia are systematically divided into the two macro varieties of Sardinian: Campidanese and Logudorese. In this case it seems clear that scholars want to reduce the range of varieties and assure at the same time the possibilities to keep two macro varieties in order to avoid "double jeopardy" which is the clash between elites and those native speakers who only know oral micro varieties within the two macro continuums

The necessity to unify the dialect continuum at least in the writing belonged more to the years 2001-2003. However between 2002 and 2004 there had been a period of non-conflict and non-construction. Language issue seemed to have disappeared even on-line as many websites were not updated. Then, as soon as Soru took over the government of the island there had been a formal interest which seemed to grow fast in the first nine months on 2005 when Soru formed a board of expert to define a single writing once and for all.

Only few articles on this were published whilst few books on it were published by Bolognesi and Ferrer. The project for a single writing never became official and the interest faded and today is almost vanished.