

Sardinian Identity, Media and Social Representations

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I.1.0 Sardinian identity and the media: Statement of Aims

Sardinian Identity and the Media: identity building and rebuilding in a ‘post-national’ era

This study examines the negotiations and reshaping of Sardinian identity in the Sardinian print and web media in an age when the traditional concept of citizenship is rapidly changing.

The relation between self-identity, group-identity and institutions and their representations in the media are the two poles of this work.

The nation state is still the prime focus of citizens’ relationship with authority but the identities and commitments towards the contemporary Italian centralising nation state have been slowly transforming over the last few decades as, like other states, Italy has relinquished some sovereignty to be part of the European Union.

However, Italy, from the years 1946-1948, has also relinquished some degree of autonomy to its regions, five of which were named autonomous in the years following the downfall of Fascism. These autonomies, fall under article 116 which regulates the special statutes adopted by constitutional law, and enjoyed by Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicily, Southern Trentino, and the Aosta Valley. The political setting of these autonomies is not the same for each of these regions.

The level of efficacy of autonomy perceived and begotten by formal regulations in the case of the so called “historical” minorities should be correlated to the importance still given to the constant re-mapping of the so called “primary” identity: namely, Italian national identity in an era of multiculturalism and rising level of immigrants from European and non-European countries. Italy has traditionally been a nation state which has had to develop a sense of homogeneous identity between citizens and institutions belonging to peripheral regions and those belonging to the historical centres of power and/or culture. Nowadays, much public debate on identity is more focused on schooling and assimilation of foreigners

or new Italians within the Italian school system or work places or health care. For this reason, Sardinians and the Sardinian media are coping with the process of primary identity or ongoing identification with both Italian and European institutions and, to some extent which may result as significant or irrelevant in the maintenance or spread of regional identity.

Both Italian and Sardinian and European identities are undergoing a process of representation and historicisation encompassing both an imagined and represented past and future. Scholars such as Giddens (1991) calls for modernity as a conveyor of a social order based on two forms of dynamism: one is directed to undercutting traditional habits and customs, whilst the other evaluates their global impact. Giddens does not evaluate the chance that globalisation implies a whole set of different influences some of which aim at keeping or rediscovering ethnic identities. Large scale immigration to Italy may change the identification with the nation state which has been continuous all over Europe especially in the aftermaths of First World War and Second World War and the rise of the European Union. Newspapers to a certain extent, e-journals and magazines, together with commercial capitalism (Hutchinson 2005) are two important factors for mirroring the policies of identification and representations with nation states or territories or with historic groups within the nation states.

My aim is thus two-fold: a discourse analysis of the representations being generated by the Sardinian media and a field research in order to gain insight into the extent to which these representations may help trigger different attitudes in representing and evaluating the relationship between Sardinia and the nation state.

The theoretical approach of Anthony D. Smith will constitute my theoretical background through my analysis of the data deriving from newspapers together with the theory of Serge Moscovici on active minorities and group-consensus as well as Social Representations.

In order to analyse the narratives of the print media I relied on Fairclough's framework as well as Billig (1995) and Rosie's (2004) work on print media analysis. Their case studies helped me to design my own methodology for data collection.

One of the main perspectives on the analysis of the attitudes towards Sardinian identity will be that of Moscovici's theory on the influence of the minorities (Moscovici 1976b; Moscovici 1980; Moscovici, Mugny, Van Avermaet 1985; Moscovici 1985; Moscovici 2000; Contarello, Mazzara 2000) which re-examined the data analysed by Gerard (1964) starting from Ash's experiments on conformity and commitment to the group. Gerard's experiments revealed that if the subject maintained his early independence fromj the majority he would have remained independent also on subsequent trials (Moscovici 1985:177)

Past and future: Grounding Sardinia in a social economic environment: new immigrations; Sardinia keeps its peripheral status.

For this reasons, mainly for the synchronous presence of a process and a public demand or a massive public campaign for the assimilation of new and regular landed immigrants who, at the end of 2005 represented 5.2% of the Italian population¹, the data concerning immigrations should be analysed as possible background for Sardinian “peculiarity”.

The data were published on the official web sites on traditional newspapers and agencies on 25th October 2006 and in all Italian newspapers on the next day². Sardinian print newspapers were quite an exception as only *Il Sardegna* published a small article on this subject and reported only the local figures on new immigration in Cagliari³. It must be remembered that *Il Sardegna* is part of a national network of daily newspapers which have a number of pages in common all over Italy; for this reason *Il Sardegna* in publishing data on the national survey conducted by Caritas respected a given format. As a matter of fact, the most traditional and non-autonomist newspaper, such as *L'Unione Sarda* ignored the results of the Caritas report on immigration and it went totally unobserved both on 25th October and in the next few days. The absence of a wide public debate on new identities and citizenship can represent valuable data in terms of the narratives going on in Sardinian newspapers.

The number of regular immigration has been estimated to be 3,035,000, 1.2 million of whom have been living in the country on a permanent basis for at least five years thus qualifying as long term residents who can be given a “green card” for good. According to the latest projections, in 2015 the number of permanent immigrants in Italy will be more than 6,000,000 people. The current number of non-Italian residents in Italy has almost

¹ Data retrieved from Dossier Immigrazione at <http://www.dossierimmigrazione.it/>, 20:23 p.m; the data from December 2005 were officially presented on 25th October 2006, at 10:30 a.m, on the premises of “Teatro Orione,” via Tortona 7, Rome. The same data were published on the same days by [www.Ansa.it](http://www.ansa.it) and were retrieved from http://www.ansa.it/opencms/export/main/visualizza_fdg.html_2020619863.html at 20:37; and

² *La Repubblica*: 26th October 2006, p.33, Chronicle, Caterina Pasolini’s article: *Rapporto Caritas sugli stranieri: “La popolazione cresce solo grazie a loro.” Uno su dieci ha già comprato la casa. Immigrati sopra quota tre milioni “Tra dieci anni saranno il doppio”*; *Il Messaggero*: 26th October 2006, pp.1 and 11, Chronicle, Corrado Giustiniani’s article, *Oltrepassata la Gran Bretagna per numero di stranieri: metà sono donne. Una culla su dieci è di genitori extracomunitari: <<Cittadinanza sbocco naturale dell’immigrazione>>*

³ *Il Sardegna*, 26th October 2006, p.26

equalised the number of people with an Italian passport who live abroad (3,150,000) and, if we take into consideration the growing rate of landed immigrants over the first Semester 2006 the number of foreign residents will have overtaken the number of Italians who live abroad.

Immigrants are also consistently younger on average if compared to Italian citizens. As a matter of fact 70% of immigrants are between 15 and 44 years whilst only 47.5% of Italians belong to that age bracket. Moreover they work in higher percentage if compared to Italians. In fact data on employment rate reveals that 727,000 immigrants were employed in 2005 out of a total of 4.5 million employments being made all over the country. If we displayed the data on average age of immigrants we would discover that immigrant citizens who are underage are 586,000, that means 19.3% of the whole permanent immigrants. Out of these 586,000, 328,000 young people were born and grown up in Italy and are still resident in Italy, but they do not have Italian citizenship.

All over 2005, 58,000 babies, which represent 10% of all newborn babies in Italy, had both parents who did not possess an Italian passport and the trend is growing steadily. On the other hand, in the central area of a city like Cagliari, economic and political capital of Sardinia, more than 50% of its residents are retired people (83,000 out of 160,872 residents in 2005)⁴.

The trend is of 1,073 people who leave Cagliari for other cities each year because they are unemployed.

A number of 35,000 people from Cagliari are unemployed which represents 21.8% of Cagliari's population (one citizen every 4.6 citizens). Moreover about 50% of the people are retired; and the majority of them are benefiting from INPS pensions which are on average 539 euros per month for each retired male citizen and 435 for women and a minority get 1.100 euros for as retired public employees (Inpdap). High unemployment rates affect Italian society. Even though the general unemployment rate is very close to other European countries such as France, the incidence of youth unemployment is much higher in Italy if compared to France (Censis data: 1999)

⁴ Data based on Caritas report on Sardinia issued at the end of 2005. The data were retrieved from "L'Unione Sarda," Friday 23rd December 2005, Sardinia's chronicle, p.19, Fabio Manca's article: *Inchiesta. Radiografia della città: uno su cinque è disoccupato, uno su tre è anziano, uno su cento lavora al comune. Un cagliaritano su due è pensionato. La media dell'assegno Inps è 540 euro, dell'Inpdap 1100*

This is sufficient to obtain a gruesome insight into the economic background of the inhabitants of the capital city of Sardinia. Sardinia, in the Caritas report on immigration has been taken into consideration together with Sicily. Sardinia plus Sicily attract less foreign work if compared to Southern, Central and Northern Italy. Sardinia and Sicily account for as little as 3.2% of the whole permanent immigrants but Sardinians (1,600,000 people) plus Sicilians (5,000,000 people) together make 11% of Italians (Toso 2006: 141-152). North Western Italy hosts 34.1% of new immigrants, North Eastern Italy 26.9%, Central Italy 26.8% and Southern Italy 9.0%.

Cagliari alone hosts 45.2% of Sardinian immigrants but the city of Cagliari represents only 10% of the Sardinian population. Cagliari hosts 9,014 foreigners and the number of foreigners who live on the island are 20,031 which means less than 0.7% of whole landed immigrants in Italy whilst if we singled out Sardinians alone represent 2.7% of Italian population. Sicily, on the other hand hosts 2.5% of whole landed immigrants and Sicilians represent 8.3% of Italians.

This means that apart from Cagliari where foreigners represent 5.6% of urban population (in Rome, according to *Il Messaggero*, regular immigrants are 365,000, 12% of whole urban population), the phenomenon is relatively unknown away from the city. Data also show that Sardinia is the place attracting the least number of permanent foreign residents.

The principal national groups as far as the Caritas report is concerned is the following: Romanians (11.9%), Albanians (11.3%), Moroccans (10.3%), Ukrainians (5.2%), Chinese (4.9%). In Sardinia the national groups to which the immigrants belong to are completely different. The lack of massive emigration to the island is counterbalanced by the presence of historical national groups which arrived in the 1980's such as Senegalese people who were the first to "land" on the island at first in the summertime and then on regular basis. The *Il giornale di Sardegna* does not report very precise rates but the most flourishing communities in terms of numbers are Senegalese followed by Chinese, Moroccans, Germans (because of NATO military bases), Philippines, Ukrainians.

All other nationalities count less than 300 people each. Apparently, if we trusted the media, Sardinia is hosting a very tiny number of Romanians who are undergoing a process of disconfirmation and distrust by major European countries as Romania is about to join the European Union (January 2007) but, member states do not want to allow free circulation for Romanians and other communities (Bulgarians) within the European borders.

In 2005, as far as regular immigrants are concerned, the absence of any significant differences by gender as a whole in Italy has been recorded and this is valid for Sardinia also which records more women regular immigrants than men but, immigration from non-European countries to Italy, as far as my research is concerned is a minor issue in the Sardinian media.

This may reflect also the different social condition of immigrants depending on the area they live in. As a matter of fact, only 10% of immigrants in Sardinia possess a green card, which can be obtained in five years (it was six years during the former government) thus putting Italy in line with the other European countries. In Bolzano-Bozen, 46% of immigrants have a green card for permanent residence.

Formal regulations to protect regional languages and ethnicities

According to Mead (1934: 260) *the concept of communication cannot be set up as something that exists by itself, or as a presupposition of the social process. On the contrary the social process is presupposed in order to render thought and communication possible.*

The social processes had already been termed by Mead: “generalized social attitudes” in 1915 (Mead 1915:141)

Mead implies that the way we act on the part of anyone in claiming our rights, for example, language rights, *we are calling for a definite response* because we assert those rights to be universal and we wait for a response in order to adjust our own conduct on it.

Laws such as Regional Law 26/1997 in Sardinia or Regional Law 15/1996 in Friuli or National Law 482/1999 for all 12 ethnic and linguistic minorities were generated by communication and for their application need a formal response in the communities in which the laws should be applied and, according to Mead (1934:261), *the institution represents a common response on the part of all members of the community to a particular situation*

A part of the ethnic community within the state in which they are embedded should therefore replicate somehow a process of nationbuilding in order to make sure the regulations to defend or expand their markers of linguistic or ethnic identity were socially accepted and formally applied even if, in the case of minority language learning, the choice remains in the hands of adults responsible for the education of younger learners who are not given freedom of choice to disagree with the link between identity and language.

The rights and identification of the single to and within a group are being treated as the rights and identification of a group to and within another, usually larger, group.

As a matter of fact, formally, especially after 2001, the single region can also take the initiative after consultation of local administrations (Provinces and Town Council, Municipality) and negotiate other forms of autonomy according to the principle found in Article 119.

These two articles, 116 and 119 emphasise and organise administrative devolution whilst particular forms of autonomy related to distinctive identity are contained in article 6 on Linguistic Minorities. The latter law was object of a strong cultural revival in the nineties

which lead to the issue of a new law, Law 482/99, December 15th, 1999, published in *The Gazzetta Ufficiale* n.297 on December 20th, 1999. By this law the state must protect the following languages and cultures in Italian territory (articles 1 and 2):

Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian and the speakers of: French, Franco-provençal, Friulan, Ladin, Occitan, Sardinian.

According to this law, every Provincial Council will have to delimit the territory where this norm will be applied, if requested by a third of the members of the Council, by at least the 15% of the resident population, or by means of a referendum (article 3). The regulation focuses on education: so in infant schools, as in primary and secondary school, educators are able to choose any of the protected languages as a teaching instrument, if asked by the parents (articles 4, 5 and 6).

Thus, the social, economic and institutional setting, together with the persistent need to maintain and anchor the loyalty of current or future Italian people and institutions to a shared idea of an Italian community, might have been a hindrance to a significant and grass-rooted policy in favour of larger autonomies and/or federalism.

The lack of consistent policy towards decentralisation or autonomies or the lack of consistent relinquishment of a part of sovereignty to some or all regions does not imply the lack of tensions, conflicts, polarisations of opinions (Hutchinson 2005) which may characterise both intra-group discourse on the media or inter-group, occasional attitudes and/or acts of so called low level violence towards the out-groupers even if not in the terms described by Connor (2001: 65).

Not much work has been done on the subject in Italy, but, one of the few works which provided a wide literature review on ethnicity and instances of autonomy, independentism and devolution in Italy, (Toso:2006) showed how the issue of identity was not developed from the same background in all the Italian regions and it analysed the current tendency to leave requests of sovereignty aside and to act towards policies of cultural renaissance. According to Istat 2001 the number of illiterates is about the same of 1951 when illiterate people aged 6 upwards were 14% on average (they were 23% of the Sardinian population). If we take into consideration general rounded figures on the number of illiterate people in Italy according to national censuses carried out between 1861 and 1951 emerges that there

is a relation between illiteracy and unemployment rates and moreover, illiteracy rates are always higher in the rural areas away from the urban centres.

For this reason it is quite interesting to note that the majority of the active and voluntaristic actions aimed to create new literacy in the Sardinian language are in the hands of free-lance activists or scholars and are not always backed up in terms of public or private money or by official publishers, institutions or academies. Even more interestingly, the activists very often succeed in realising their projects in the rural areas rather than in the urban thus creating minority literacy in the written language even if, especially in the Campidanese area, this process does not lead to spread and support a single standard as in the “academy”.

Thus, the issue is a very complex one as it is difficult to evaluate the true effects of Italian policies on identity-building from 1861 on or more recent Sardinian policies of identity maintenance or understand the various requests for more autonomy over the years without a multi-disciplinary approach which will take into consideration many features in order to try and assess some sound or unclear on-going attitudes and representations of Sardinian identity and its relationship(s) with people, land, institutions.

Shared cultural and social knowledge.

The relations and the fusion between individual aims and the aims related to the social context were object of studies since the dawn of Social Psychology. One of the scholars who tried to bridge cognitive-social psychology and sociological-social psychology was G.H. Mead, who wrote in the 1930s and was influenced by the cultural mainstream of his contemporaries.

Mead analysed the relations between individual aims and context-related aims and held that “I” and “Me” could merge together especially in experiencing religion or patriotism thus causing individual and contextual aims to overlap, as reported by Contarello-Mazzara (2002: 14-15).

Mead’s theory was later developed by H. Blumer who developed the concept of symbolic interactionism (Contarello-Mazzara 2002: 15-16)

According to Moscovici (1979, 2000), laws and regulations must be transformed into common sense, or the “known”, in order to be objectified and anchored in the shared knowledge of the single and of the community alike.

For this reason, the means of communication and their social actors become the setting and the human agencies of such “translations” of the *inconnu* into the *connu*.

Thus, in print media, nation states, and the national characters are often represented as a human constant which must be taken for granted. This attitude is shared, according to Smith (1986: 7), by both academics and ordinary people:

Most people took national divisions, national character and nationalism for granted, even when they deplored its harmful effects. They may have yearned for a supra-national entity, even a world government, and pinned their hopes on the League of Nations and the United Nations; but, as this latter term tells us, the permanency of the nation and of a ‘world of nations’, was not seriously doubted. (1986:7)

As written in the introductory paragraph, the second task will be to discover whether there is any significative correlation between the narratives represented by journalists and people’s attitudes towards them. As far as the latter issue is concerned, I wil try to assess possible correlations or area of interests by conducting focus group interviews with a target audience which will be of:

- 1) groups formed by
 - 2) a number which ranges between four-to-twelve
 - 3) adults
 - 4) who were born and grown up in Sardinia
 - 5) with a University degree or a post-grad
 - 6) who know Sardinian newspapers
 - 7), who know the issues at stake in the newspapers
 - 8a) who do not live on the island
- And
- 8b) who live on the island

Each participant will share the above eight characteristics with the others.

My goal will be to gain understanding about what the opinions of the Sardinian participants are on the narratives found on the regional print media I have analysed. This kind of method does not imply statistical projections (Krueger & Casey 2000: 25). Moreover, critical aspects such as the selection of the sample group, question making (in my case excerpts from newspapers will be submitted), and analysis will require much attention especially in working with communities (Krueger and King 1998; Krueger & Casey 2000).

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